

TOWN&COUNTRY

Should We Prepare for a Champagne Shortage?

As we head into celebration season, are our flutes in danger of running dry?



There are few things more festive than a **bottle of champagne**. Even just the sound of a cork popping can enliven a room. It's only natural then, that champagne flows most prominently during the holiday season, and serves as an integral part of our celebratory fetes, toasts to friends and family, and of course, **sips at the stroke of midnight** on New Years Eve. Consequently, many were understandably nervous when rumors began to circulate (**once again**) that we could be looking at a shortage of the bubbly stuff as the year is coming to a close. So how worried do we need to be about our champagne flutes running dry?

Not to burst any bubbles, but when it comes to supply and demand, champagne does find itself in a tricky position.

"We do expect a decline in volume for champagne," says Cyril Delarue, a 6th generation Bollinger family member. While the 2020 and 2021 harvests yielded approximately 240 million and 290 million bottles respectively, Delarue explains, the demand for the last 12 months has been closer to 340 million bottles. Given the fact that champagne, by its nature, takes several years to mature, that shortfall isn't obvious yet, but it could be coming if the public appetite for bubbly remains high—as all signs suggest it could.



"After Covid, I think that people rediscovered the power of positivity of champagne," says Vitalie Taittinger, the President of Champagne Taittinger. "I think that when you are starving to get out, starving to party, starving to see people you love, champagne is an option ... to make a simple moment extraordinary. So, it's true that after Covid we observed that people want to drink champagne. "

"During Covid, we sold 30% less volume," she continues. "We were expecting to recover very slowly, but [in 2021], we sold the quantity that we sold in 2019 plus the 30% that we didn't sell in 2020. In 2022, we continued on this progression. But champagne is very limited in terms of model because to produce champagne, you need four years. So you cannot just decide that you will increase your quantity [next year]." She adds, "A good bottle of champagne has to stay about three years in the cellars. For us, this is the most important; to wait and provide you the best champagne."



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It's not only the **sparkling wine** houses of the Champagne region that are feeling the surge, either. "Historically, sparkling wine sales would surge during the months leading up to the winter holidays, but we have seen a significant shift to year-round enjoyment," says Remi Cohen CEO of Napa's **Domaine Carneros**. "More and more people are opening a bottle at the beginning of the week, or they'll enjoy a glass nightly...little luxuries every day."

The rise in demand happens to have come at a time when droughts have hit California particularly hard, leading to "high quality but low yielding vintages," Cohen says. All of that has led the brand to slightly increase prices to counteract scarcity, as well as rising labor and supply costs. "We are approaching this conservatively in the context of economic uncertainty and to maintain brand loyalty."

But while that news of limited supply and rising costs might sound panic-inducing for lovers of the sparkling stuff, our experts assure us that the situation is under control for now.

"This is normal, that we have no stock anymore," Taittinger laughs, explaining that the brand has been carefully determining when to release bottles so that supply remains steady. "We could have sent everything in July, because everything could have been sold before, but we really tried to ensure that at the end of the year people could find champagne."

Delarue agrees, "This is not a new situation for Bollinger: we have been under strict allocation on all our cuvées and formats since March 2021, and now our partners and network are fully organized to manage allocations to make sure Champagne Bollinger will be available throughout the year in all our 120 markets."

So while the temptation to stock up may be potent, Taittinger cautions against the impulse to hoard. "January it will start as usual," she assures. "I think that if people are taking some extra stock, some will miss [out on] champagne for the end of the year. ... For me, this is important, that everybody can share."