



Even a Champagne fanatic sometimes wants a great red.

Q. How did you launch your career as a master sommelier?

A. When I was 19, I got a job as a cocktail waitress in the cigar lounge at Del Frisco's in Manhattan. The first bottles of wine I sold there were an '89 and a '90 Château d'Yquem, side by side. Legendary wines—not that I knew it—and the customer didn't even finish them. I told my roommate, "Hey, I got these wines to bring home." Nineteen years old, drinking Château d'Yquem!

Q. Sounds like that was a life-changing experience.

A. It was. By 2001, when I was in my early twenties, I was running the wine program for Blue Fin, which is part of the BR Guest restaurant group. The first bottle I ever opened there was a \$900 Burgundy, a 1982 Henri Mayer Cros-Parantoux. The cellar wasn't even finished, so I had to monkey up this half-built shelf and hang there, digging through a case of rare wine to find anything that looked like Cros-Parantoux. Then I opened the bottle tableside and broke the cork. Um, hi! But by the time I was 26, I was running the wine programs for all of BR Guest.

ACRES OF VINEYARD IN
THE CHAMPAGNE REGION:

84,000

ACRES OF VINEYARD IN NAPA VALL

45,000

The Champagne Campaigner

LAURA MANIEC OF THE GROWING CORKBUZZ WINE STUDIO EMPIRE IN NEW YORK CITY IS ON A MISSION TO GET PEOPLE TO DRINK MORE CHAMPAGNE. HERE'S HOW.

INTERVIEW BY RAY ISLE

7 favorite sparkling wines

NV DOMAINE COLLIN CUVÉE TRADITION BRUT CREMANT DE LIMOUX (\$16)

"The Loire Valley's Philippe Collin—a relative of the great Champagne producer Ulysse Collin—uses Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and a bit of Chenin Blanc. This is one of the best sparkling wines for under \$20 I've had in a long time."

NV VINCENT CAILLÉ X BULLES MUSCADET (\$18)

"A lot of people pair sparkling wine and oysters, and a lot pair Muscadet and oysters. So a bubbly Muscadet? Obviously the best of both worlds. It's briny, intense and lovely."

NV LOUIS ROEDERER PREMIER BRUT (\$54)

"This creamy cuvée comes from a family-run estate that's both historic and innovative. For the level of quality you get, it's remarkably affordable."

NV RENÉ GEOFFROY CUVÉE EXPRESSION PREMIER CRU BRUT (\$55)

"Geoffroy's wines are sort of a rediscovery for me. I've been finding a lot of Champagnes that are too austere these days, whereas this one's right in the middle. I think it goes with everything."

NV MARIE-COURTIN CONCORDANCE EXTRA BRUT (\$110)

"Dominique Moreau named this wine after her grandma, and I'm very close to my grandma, so I love that. Sometimes Moreau's wines need aging, but this incredibly fresh blend is really approachable right now."

2004 DOM RUINART BLANC DE BLANCS BRUT (\$129)

"Winemaker Frédéric Panaiotis's style can be very austere, but this wine has so many layers of flavor. It isn't cheap, but for what you get—an amazing *tête de cuvée* [top wine] from one of the most historic Champagne houses—it's a bargain."

2007 PIERRE PÉTER: BLANC DE BLANCS CHÉTILLONS (\$134)

"I think this is a great wine for a collector, or someone who really loves Champagne. Even the bottle is beautiful. It is also one of the most elegant Côtes des Blancs Chardonnay expressions I've had."

Q. When you opened your own place, Corkbuzz, you decided to sell every Champagne on your list for half price after 10 p.m.—the "Champagne Campaign." What prompted you to do this?

A. Somebody had to do something to make people drink more Champagne! But really, if you come into a restaurant at 10 p.m., and there's great music playing, and everyone's drinking Champagne, you're going to think, "Hey, life is good. I'd like some of that." We've even got single diners at the bar with bottles of Champagne. That's pretty badass, right?

MOST PERSISTENT CHAMPAGNE MYTH:

Dom Pérignon said,
**"Come quickly,
 I am drinking
 the stars!"**

(The phrase actually comes from a 19th-century advertisement.)

Q. Definitely. Don't you lose money, though?

A. Champagne is unquestionably my favorite wine, but, served by the glass, it can be challenging to a restaurant's bottom line. It goes flat, and you end up pouring a lot down the drain. And that's expensive. But if bottles are half price, people get really excited and will go for a bottle rather than a glass. Someone can come to Corkbuzz and say, "I want to open two really cool artisan Champagnes side by side," and do that without breaking the bank. Of course, if I sold every wine on my list this way, I'd go out of business instantly.

 Name your favorite women winemakers @FoodandWine
 #FOODWINEWOMEN

Q. You traveled to France to work harvest in the Champagne region. What was that like?

A. It's backbreaking! I worked a traditional Coquard press, which holds about 10,000 pounds of grapes—you have to dig out all the crushed grapes with a pitchfork. That was also the year I ran the New York City marathon, so whenever I had free time I was running in the vineyards to train. I'd definitely recommend working harvest for anyone who wants to get in shape.

Q. What's your favorite Champagne?

A. I have a love affair with Dom Ruinart. I had a Dom Pérignon versus Dom Ruinart tasting at my beach house last summer—a monk-off. It was on a random Sunday, over eggs. Dom Ruinart won. The '02 is just genius.

Q. Would you serve that in a flute?

A. Actually, I'm a huge fan of the white wine glass for Champagne—I almost feel as though pretty soon the flute is going to be obsolete. I even like drinking Champagne out of huge Burgundy bowls. Those are fun for richer Champagne styles, like Krug. The larger bowl has extra surface area, which helps you experience all the nuances of flavor.

Q. Let's suppose you don't finish a bottle of Champagne in one night. How long will it last?

A. In the fridge, two or three days max. But flat Champagne is still good wine—think of it as being like white Burgundy, but from a little farther north.

Q. Every sommelier says Champagne is the perfect pairing wine. Is there anything it doesn't go with?

A. Wedding cake and Champagne—that's disgusting! Why do people serve them together? I'm going to get married at some point, let's hope, and I'll have a Champagne bar at the reception. And a raw bar! Canapés! But I'm not serving Champagne with dessert. Come on. Have something civilized, like a bourbon.