Champagne adds Spirit of Revelry TO HOLIDAY GATHERINGS

story by
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The clinking of crystal flutes toasting the holidays. The sound of Champagne corks popping and the thought of elegant extravagance. What could be more festive to commence the long holiday season of celebrating with family and friends! Effervescent Champagne is sipped at life's most memorable moments and the beginning of every new year. Whether you enjoy your bubbles sweet or dry, raise your spirits and a glass to honor this élite beverage. It takes one sip to feel frivolous and joyful.

The magic of Champagne begins long before the first sip. As Champagne has launched grand ocean liners for centuries, it begins with the first sight of the cork and bottle. It's been glamorized by movie stars. It is the sparkling wine that international royalty has chosen to recognize the rich and famous. From the vintner to your table, it's a long, intricate process of Champagne-making, which is why it's so cherished. As a gift, luxury labels receive oohs upon acceptance — and when enjoyed in proper measures, it helps your heart to fly.

Why do we feel a sense of delight when we enter a party greeted by a gracefully decorated tray with frosted Champagne glasses? We recognize from the beginning that our host has gone the extra mile to guarantee that we are going to enjoy a cheery time.

Holiday spirit begins with an elegant Champagne and Rose Cocktail, an attractive drink that blends the joie de vivre of Champagne with a quiet floral essence of rose water. It's easy to create a toast that's purely unforgettable!

One of the famous exclamations of Champagne folklore is said to have been spoken by the blind Dom Perignon, when he opened his first successful bottle: "Brothers, come quickly, I am drinking stars!"

CHAMPAGNE & ROSE COCKTAIL

4 oz. Champagne
½ oz. rose water
½ oz. simple syrup
Fresh rose petals — food grade for garnish
1. Chill a Champagne flute in the refrigerator for a few minutes before assembling the cocktail. In the glass, add rose water and simple syrup.
2. Gently pour the Champagne into the glass, letting the ingredients mix naturally.
3. Gently float two food-grade rose petals on top.
4. Serve immediately and celebrate!

LE FROMAGER CANAPE

For an upcoming holiday party, along with your many choices of Champagne cocktails, Kir Royale (with crème de cassis) or a Bellini (ripe peach), serve Le Fromager. It's picture-perfect bread (baked by Le Pain de Paul's Chef Paulo Sebess in Nocatee). Warm it gently and dress it with thinly sliced prosciutto and fig preserves. The aged cheddar, salty prosciutto and sweetness of the fig work beautifully together, especially with chilled Brut Champagne. For a brunch celebration without meat, sweet butter and homemade apple butter is luscious, too. Simply, it's a festive pull-apart bread with a center hole, made with three-year-aged English cheddar that melts into the dough. The soft creamy texture and rich savory flavor make any holiday party merry!

PHOTO CREDIT: LEIGH CORT



SMOKED SALMON & BELGIAN ENDIVE

A flavorful, graceful hors d'oeuvres that's so easy to enjoy — keeping holiday indulging oh, so light!

4 oz. sliced smoked salmon, cut into tiny strips
¼ C. peeled, seeded minced cucumber
2 t. fresh lemon juice
2 T. EVO olive oil
1 small scallion (the white and green stem) minced
Salt and fresh ground pepper
2 Belgian endive (separate the leaves for filling with the salmon)
Chopped chives for garnish

Whisk lemon juice and oil in medium bowl. Add slivers of salmon, cucumber and scallion, mixing gently. Season lightly with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Spoon a small amount of salmon mixture into the wide end of each endive leaf; garnish with chives.

Arrange artfully on a beautiful serving dish and serve chilled!

COCKTAIL HOUR CHEESE COOKIES

Did you know that the better the Champagne the smaller the bubbles, having a longer life than larger ones? Bake these rich little cheesy bites that pair flawlessly with your fine Champagne at any time during the holiday season.

1 ½ C. Asiago cheese, grated finely
2 C. flour
½ pound sweet butter
2 t. milk

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Cream Asiago and butter, beating well. Sift flour, beating half of the flour into butter and Asiago. Add milk and mix well. Add second half of flour into mixture, mixing well. Gently roll dough into small round balls, placing on cookie sheet. Use parchment paper on cookie sheet (optional). Bake 25 minutes until golden brown. Makes 40-45 cookies. Cool and serve. Don't refrigerate.



PHOTO CREDIT: MELISSA INGERSOLL, EMBER + IRON RESTAURANT

CHAMPAGNE REVELRY

Brittany Cooney, co-owner with Chef Mike Cooney of Ember + Iron restaurant, believes that Champagne revelry could happen long

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ACTIVITIES

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Ponte Vedra Beach. gtmnerr.org

BOOS, BREWS AND OCEAN VIEWS

4-10 p.m. Oct. 30

1912 Ocean Bar and Rooftop offers this oceanfront Halloween experience. Sip cocktails, take in oceanfront views and enjoy a costume contest with prizes. Costumes encouraged; specialty cocktails are available. Live music. No RSVP required. Admission: free. 619 Ponte Vedra Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach. 1912oceanviewandrooftop.com

THE GILDED CAGE: AN IMMERSIVE MYSTERY DINNER AT THE VENUE-HASTINGS

6 p.m. Oct. 30

Experience an evening of mystery, fine dining and interactive entertainment at The Venue–Hastings. Each performance includes a cocktail reception with passed hors d'oeuvres, a three-course dinner and a live theatrical production filled with clues, secrets and unexpected twists. Tickets: $125. Advance reservations required. A portion of the proceeds benefits Hastings Main Street. 301 N. Main St., Hastings. hastingsfl.org/events

'THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA' (1925) SILENT FILM WITH LIVE ORCHESTRA

Oct. 30

7:30 to 9:30 p.m. at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St. Organist Brett Miller performs on the Bryan Concert Organ in Jacoby Symphony Hall. Tickets are $37 to $72. Buy tickets at my.jaxsymphony.org/phantom-organ/4302

VAUDEVILLE HALLOWEEN EXTRAVAGANZA AT PROHIBITION KITCHEN

9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Oct. 31

The Halloween night celebration features elaborate décor, circus performers and live music by Dr. Sick and the Etcetera Orchestra. This is a 21-plus event. Admission starts at $75. 119 St. George St., St. Augustine. pkstaug.com

KICKING OFF THE HOLIDAYS

MANNHEIM STEAMROLLER CHRISTMAS BY CHIP DAVIS

Nov. 13

7:30 to 9:30 p.m. at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St. Tickets are $48.75 to $139.15. Available at fscjartistseries.org/tickets/mannheim-steamroller-christmas-by-chip-davis

HOLIDAY SHOPPES

Nov. 14-15

This annual market at First Coast Cultural Center is a community favorite. There will be local and handmade wood carvings, accessories, jewelry, sweets, clothing, shoes, glasswork and more.

The private preview ($45 donation) is 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Nov. 13. Then, the market opens up to all from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 14, and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 15. $5 donation. First Coast Cultural Center is located at 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle, Ponte Vedra Beach. For information or to make a reservation, go to firstcoastculturalcenter.org/programs-events/upcoming-events.

A CELTIC CHRISTMAS

Nov. 14

7:30 to 9:30 p.m. at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St. Featuring Irish dancers and musicians. Tickets are $41.49 to $119.06. Buy tickets at ticketmaster.com.

'HOME ALONE' IN CONCERT

7 p.m. Nov. 20; 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Nov. 21

The Jacksonville Symphony and the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus perform live during the movie at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St. For information and tickets, go to jaxsymphony.org/26-27-season/#movies and click on Home Alone in Concert.

NIGHTS OF LIGHTS — LIGHT-UP! NIGHT

Nov. 21

4-7:30 p.m.

Light-Up! Night starts at 4 p.m. when Showtime USA will present several holiday musical favorites in front of St. Augustine's City Hall, 75 King St. At 5:30 p.m., the All-Star Orchestra performs swing and big band sounds at the Plaza de la Constitución gazebo. The ceremony begins at 6:30 p.m. in the plaza, where the switch is flipped and millions of lights illuminate the city. The concert continues after the ceremony until 7:30 p.m. For information, go to www.nightsoflights.com.

THE CHRISTMAS MARKET ST. AUGUSTINE

Nov. 21 to Dec. 24

The market is open 5-10 p.m. seven days a week (closed Thanksgiving). Admission is $5 for adults, free to kids younger than 14. There will be 14 vendors daily with specialty and handmade gifts. The venue is the Bull & Crown Publick House, 53 St. George St., St. Augustine. For tickets and information, go to thechristmasmarketsta.com.

SURF ILLUMINATION AT ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH

Nov. 22

3:30 to 7 p.m.

This free holiday event takes at the St. Johns County Ocean Pier Park and includes a ceremonial lighting of the holiday tree, music, arts and crafts and children's activities. This year, there will be a Foam Storm experience for kids of all ages. The Art Studio Holiday Showcase at the Pier Park will be open for holiday shopping. The park is at 350 A1A Beach Blvd., St. Augustine Beach. Presented by the St. Augustine Beach Civic Association. For information, go to www.sabca.org.

HOLIDAY BIG BAND

Nov. 22

3-5 p.m. at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St. The Jacksonville Jazz Collective returns to deliver a holiday-inspired concert. Tickets are $36 to $64. Go to my.jaxsymphony.org/big-band-26/4285

Sources include: St. Augustine Ponte Vedra Florida's Historic Coast, St. Johns Cultural Council, Visit Jacksonville, individual venue websites

CHAMPAGNE

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before the holiday season descends.

"Every day is a celebration of something joyful to our guests. Happy wishes don't quite happen until the Champagne bottle appears. It's like a celebration cake that yearns for the candles to make it real. Champagne corks popping represent that official 'moment!'"

1.5 oz. Applejack Brandy
1 oz. Spiced cranberry syrup
0.5 oz. Lemon juice
Top with Champagne

Shake first 3 ingredients then gently top with a splash of Champagne. Garnish with a favorite holiday fruit.

As each holiday merriment begins to wind down, there is something outstanding about serving a velvety-smooth luxurious delight — a chocolate bonbon that might remind you of a French patisserie that crafted the first truffles, once reserved for the elite and served at lavish banquets.

Dana Stallings, owner of Kilwins St. Johns Beachwalk, knows how raspberry truffles create memories, especially when handmade chocolates are the gift that everyone enjoys receiving for a perfect celebration! Today's artisan chocolatiers are captivating our imagination with flavors, focusing on the craftsmanship of small-batch production that boldly heralds a fond farewell at any party!

PHOTO CREDIT: KILWINS CHOCOLATE FRANCHISE

