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# Liquor Nerd: sparkling wine

by Mike Usinger on March 4, 2023

## With spring upon us, now is the time to freshen up with

## light



Aperol Spritz, with the Testa di moro heads optional.

MIKE USINGER

Even by Vancouver's always-weird standards, the last few months have been strange ones weather-wise, starting with a November that gave us a paltry six days of rain and enough sun to make you feel sorry for those who had already bolted for Mexico. Since then we've had two major snowpocalypses, an unusually gloomy January and February, and a March that, until the past couple of days, has been chilly enough that no one was putting away the winter coats.



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And yet, against seemingly endlessly insurmountable odds, the snowdrops are up, the tulips have started to break through the ground, and you're sneezing every 2.3 minutes during the day while pawing through the medicine cabinet for the Reactine that technically expired in 2017.



Welcome to spring: the season where you have to work a little harder to stay seasonally depressed, and where your drinking habits suddenly swing away from the heavy-hitting cocktails—booze-forward Manhattans, Negronis, and olive-splashed Martinis—that got you through the long and cold winter.

The best thing about spring? That would be that everything seems somehow fresh again, this having everything to do with the plants coming alive, the days getting longer and brighter, and your house, apartment, or condo getting its first vacuum since you went into hibernation right around Christmas.

On the cocktail front, *fresh* and *clean* are pretty good starting descriptors for any drink centred around, or finished off with, a good splash of Champagne, sparkling wine, or Prosecco. The added advantage of popping the cork and then having at 'er? Easy: as sure as the Canadian Prairies are best described as "flat", the bubbles in your favourite bottle of bubbly don't last forever, which gives you a good excuse to follow up that first happy-hour cocktail with a second and third.

As a general rule of thumb, a freshly popped bottle of Champagne loses its fizz in three to five days if plugged with a stopper or hand-whittled cork, while Prosecco is usually good for three-days but is best consumed in 24 hours.

It's time to pop it. And since you've got your bubbly, you might as well get down on with cocktails that celebrate the



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The idea of using sparkling wine in drinks has been around a while. One of the earliest champagne cocktails came into being in the mid-1800s, when enterprising bartenders began plunking an Angostura bitters-dashed sugar cube in a chilled glass and then topping with champagne, a lemon twist adding the final touch. In 1861—to mark the death of Queen Victoria’s husband (aka Prince Albert, who reportedly suffocated in a can)—the Black Velvet was created using Guinness and champagne.

Right around that time Champagne drinks with brandy and orange liqueurs started popping up in cookbook recipe collections like *Mrs. Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, a one-stop guide to running an abode in Victorian Britain. (For the curious, detailed instructions were provided for "Cooking, Cleaning, Childrearing, Entertaining, and More".)

Flash forward a few years, and bartenders started seriously turbocharging their champagne with hard liquor. In 1869 Mark Twain name-checked champagne cocktails in *Innocents Abroad*. Charles Dickens predicted the French 75 with his self-created Tom Gin and Champagne Cups. Perfect for Sunday mornings and afternoon brunches when there was no need to reach for the nuclear option, the Mimosa was created in '20s Paris by mixing Champagne and fresh orange juice.

And for nights when getting things started with a bang and possibly a carton of Chesterfields seemed the chic things to do, God (or, more accurately '50s Las Vegas) gave us the Atomic Cocktail featuring a three-ounce combo of vodka and brandy, a teaspoon of sherry, and a two-ounce topping of champagne.

Looking to truly celebrate the arrival of spring? Put down the vacuum cleaner and duster and get busy. The following cocktails are seasonally appropriate for no other reason that your resident Liquor Nerd made use of various bottles kicking around the house. Yes, spring cleaning comes in many forms.



## FRENCH 75

Named after a heavy artillery gun used in World War I, the classic French 75 calls for champagne. Here we swap in Hester Creek's Charmet-style Ti Amo with its hints of crisp pear, delicate peach blossom, and key-lime peel, and then add citrus-whispered small-batch No. 005 gin from North Van's Copperpenny Distillery.

- 1 oz Copperpenny Gin No. 005
- 1/2 oz fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 oz simple syrup
- 3 oz Hester Creek Ti Amo

*Add gin, lemon juice and simple syrup to a shaker with ice and shake until chilled. Strain into a champagne flute, top with the champagne, and garnish with a lemon twist.*

## JUAN HO ROYALE

Tiki drinks and champagne? Yes, while rare, it's a thing. We've tweaked with Jackson-Triggs and Sons of Vancouver curaçao, but the spirit of this cocktail, which can be found in the essential *Smuggler's Cover: Exotic Cocktails, Rum, and the Cult of Tiki* by Martin Cate with Rebecca Cate, remains pure. (Seriously, you need to own this book!).

- 2 oz Jackson-Triggs Entourage Grand Reserve
- 3/4 oz fresh lime
- 1/2 oz orgeat
- 1/2 oz Sons of Vancouver blue curaçao

straight

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*Pour the champagne into a chilled coupe glass. Add the other ingredients to a cocktail shaker and shake with ice. Strain into the chilled coupe.*

## How 1950s Las Vegas Sold Atomic Bomb Tests as Tourism



### ATOMIC COCKTAIL

Bizarre as this sounds, tourists used to flock to Nevada in the '50s to watch nuclear bombs being detonated, many packing “atomic box lunches” while securing prime spots near ground zero at Mount Charleston, or enjoying panoramic views from the Sky Room at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. The Atomic Cocktail was a natural go-to at Dawn Bomb Parties, where the drinking started at midnight and continued until the sky turned Day-Glo orange and fireball yellow. Ingredients here include Dragon Mist Distillery’s crystalline glacier-water vodka and Jackson-Triggs Entourage Grand Reserve Sparkling Brut, where pink grapefruit zest, sliced Honeycrisp apple, and creamy marzipan perfectly compliment the St-Rémy. Now pass the Chesterfields.

- 1.5 oz Dragon Mist vodka
- 1 1/2 oz St-Rémy Signature brandy
- 1 tsp sherry
- 1 1/2 oz Jackson-Triggs Entourage Grand Reserve

*Stir vodka, brandy, and sherry with cracked ice, then strain into a chilled cocktail glass and add the Jackson-Triggs.*



## APEROL SPRITZ

Blame *The White Lotus: Season 2*. Or more specifically it's definitely on Aubrey Plaza, F. Murray Abraham, Jennifer Coolidge, Haley Lu Richardson, and the two most adorable call girls this side of Julie Roberts in *Pretty Woman* (hello Simona Tabasco and Beatrice Granno!). *The White Lotus: Season 2* cast is the sole reason that, instead of heading to exotic Hope, Bellingham, or Bamff this summer it's all about Sicily, and, more specifically, Taormina. Who cares if the sea-view rooms at the San Domenico Palace are \$5,668.84 a night? You only live once. Maybe next year? Well then take yourself there with an Aperol Spritz, which is the drink of choice at every Italian bar and cafe in Italy. The recipe is pretty much impossible to mess up: herbal Aperol, which we're using here with sparkling water (forget the Perrier—work that DrinkMate because tap water is free!), and Bottega Gold prosecco, which announces itself with tart green apples, fresh bruised sage, and deliciously sweet honeydew. Bellissimo! Enjoy Hope, and don't forget to take a photo with the chainsaw carving of Rambo.

- 1.5 oz Aperol
- 3 oz Bottega Gold prosecco
- .75 oz sparkling water
- orange slice for garnish

*Fill a white wine glass halfway with ice. Add Aperol, Bottega Gold, and sparkling water, and stir with a spoon. Serve with an orange slice and a Testa di moro head filled with Sicilian olives, roasted peanuts, or the loonies you're saving for just one night at the San*

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## Mike Usinger

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Gord Downie of the Tragically Hip once suggested that he would like to fight Mike Usinger. For which Mike Usinger didn't blame him one bit.

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### Exhausted from trying

Almost falling asleep tired all day, wide awake all night. Major Depressive Disorder is such fun.

### JJ Bean Babe

I come in for my morning London Fog and Umami Wrap. You're usually working and even if you don't...



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