



Kelly's Corner

By Jan Kelly

"I have been asked so many questions this week about that salmanazar of champagne—and about champagne in general—so here goes lecture number 42.

Champagne is an area of northeastern France. The vineyards of this region supply the Pinot Noir grapes and the Chardonnay grapes which are blended to make unique champagne. Any sparkling white wine not from the Champagne region is just that, sparkling white wine. It may be called sec, secco, sekt, or still wine, but it is not true champagne unless it originated in that small section of the Champagne vineyards. It's rather like Havana cigars. Cuban seed, filler, or wrapper grown outside that small area of Cuba does not constitute a Havana cigar.

Champagne was perfected by Dom Perignon, the 17th century monk who was cellarer and manager of finance at the Benedictine Abbey of Hautvillers near Epernay in champagne country. There is still controversy as to whether this dedicated monk "invented" champagne or the cork. Let us just rest with the fact that he raised the wines of Champagne to the present-day quality we all enjoy so much.

The Pinot Noir grape is black outside and red inside, but the juice is white. The Chardonnay is a white grape and its juice is either blended with Pinot Noir or made into *blanc de blancs*—white of whites. The first flow pressed from these grapes is the *cuvee*; that produces the best champagnes.

There are vintage and nonvintage champagnes. In vintage bottles all the grapes come from the same Champagne vineyard in the same year. They bear the date on their labels and on the corks. Lesser years and poorer *cuvees* may be artfully blended with better, more

robust years. These are not vintage and will have no date. A vintage wine is considered superior—to have more personality—and is called a "self-wine."

After the pressing of the *cuvee*, the wine is kept in casks through the winter and bottled in the spring. Champagne is corked twice. When first bottled, it is placed in a "*pupitre*" so that the necks slope down. Each day it is given a sharp twist in order that the sediment may slide down the neck of the bottle. The daily twist, the *remnage*, turns the bottle until it has gone full circle. Now all the sediment is resting on the cork. The neck of the bottle is frozen quickly, and, with great skill, the first cork is removed with the sediment. This process, called *degorgement*, assures a clear sparkling wine. Then the *doseur* adds a small amount of a mixture of sugar, still champagne, and brandy to sweeten the wine and to stop fermentation. This mixture is called *liqueur d'expedition*. There are five degrees of sweetness achieved in this step: ½ per cent brut, 1 per cent extra sec, 3 per cent sec, 5 per cent demisec, and 10 per cent doux. The demisec is the preferred degree of dry-sweet blending.

Then a "mushroom" cork, the *bouchon d'expedition*, is forced—at one half its normal size—into the neck of the bottle. The bottle is thicker than an ordinary wine bottle, an insurance against breakage from the pressure of lively gas-propelled bubbles. The wire keeps the cork firmly in place. Originally it was string, which was covered with pewter to keep the rats from chewing it. After wire was introduced, the pewter gave way to foil, and the foil developed into collarettes, lending a festive look to a showpiece bottle.

Most champagne bottles hold 750 milliliters or 26

ounces. There is also an Imperial pint, holding three-quarters of a champagne bottle (568 ml), because connoisseurs considered one bottle too much for one person, but a half was not nearly enough—a Victorian point of view. The other bottle sizes are:

magnum = 2 bottles
jeroboam = 4 bottles
rehoboam = 6 bottles
methuselah = 8 bottles
salmanazar = 12 bottles
balthazar = 16 bottles

nebuchadnezzar = 20 bottles of bubbles

The last two sizes are rarely seen outside of France. All the larger bottles are for special occasions when several people gather—Howard Mitcham's opening, for instance—and we all thank you, Henry Lewczak, for the privilege and honor of joining in the drinking of a salmanazar.

The warm days of Indian summer bring a new emergence of insects. Slow-moving, even languid, they seem to be barely capable of their functions with none of the snap of the summer bugs. They must know they will be short-lived, so what's the rush? The next day may bring an east wind, and they'll all go with it.

We'll be heading in that direction, too. As the mercury drops, so will our outdoor carefree ways. We'll be living the closed insect life of Silas Marner—a spider at his loom. Winter is when conversations are completed, whereas summer has been a series of salutes with all the rushing and activities. Winter is the time to



talk it all out. I hear much about wood and wood stoves these weeks.

The Veterans Memorial School will be having a guest all of us can enjoy on October 11 at 7 in the evening. J. M. Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, will be discussing his book and the importance of reading. (The book was on the best-seller list for 17 weeks). Jim Trelease considers reading aloud to be a quality time with your children, as, of course, it is with any age group. Jim is a weekly visitor to classrooms in his Massachusetts territory. He is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, an artist, and a writer. From all that I've heard, he is an excellent speaker, has the gift of humor, and gets his message across

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