



Moderne Barn's Sparkling Season.

SPARKLING SEASON

In a Champagne flute, add:
1/2 oz cranberry-orange syrup (recipe below)
1 oz Chambord Liqueur
5 oz sparkling white wine
Garnish with 1-2 cranberries in syrup

CRANBERRY-ORANGE SYRUP

In a sauté pan over medium heat, add 2 cups of fresh cranberries and 3/4 cup of sugar. Add the zest and juice of 1 orange, 1 tablespoon of ground cloves and 1/2 cup Cointreau or Grand Marnier. Heat for 2-3 minutes until the sugar dissolves. Remove from heat and cool. Sauce thickens upon standing.

CLASSIC CHAMPAGNE COCKTAIL

In Champagne flute, add:
1 sugar cube
2 dashes Angostura Bitters
1 oz brandy or Cognac
5 oz Brut Champagne
Garnish with a slice of orange and a maraschino cherry

MODERNE ROYALE

In a Champagne flute, add:
1/2 oz Aperol Liqueur
1/2 oz Red Verjus
1/4 oz Cointreau
5 oz Sparkling white wine
Garnish with an orange twist

GLITTERING COCKTAILS

Moderne Barn's Matthew Christoff on glamming up the bubbly stuff

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREA KENNEDY

NOTHING BEATS THE POP OF A CORK. And when an occasion calls for Champagne, everyone wants in. Something about fizzy drinks in fancy flutes just puts people in a party mood. But how many of us bandwagon revelers are guilty of taking a few sips and leaving the rest on the table?

This holiday season, a solution for the culprits – the Champagne cocktail. Glittering along with the rest of the sequined season, these celebratory bevs give a sweeter alternative to straight-up bubbles.

“People might be scared off by the dry, bready qualities that you can get from Champagne,” says Matthew Christoff, wine director at Moderne Barn. He’s earned the Armonk eatery Wine Spectator’s Best of Award of Excellence both years since his arrival in 2011 and has some nose-tickling tips for this season’s party hosts.

“Try the classic Champagne cocktail, which is a sugar cube with a dash of bitters topped with Champagne,” says Christoff. “The sweetness gives it a nice refreshing quality and the bitters provide layers of flavor.”

Moderne Barn uses Basement Bitters from Gardiner’s Tuthilltown Spirits, though Christoff says Angostura bitters with their “good, balanced spice and dryness” are a versatile go-to for the home bar. For bubbles – always the last pour in the glass – he uses Piper-Heidsieck Brut or Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs, the latter he calls a “really exceptional” California sparkling wine made in the Champagne tradition.

And with wine of this caliber, he says, less is more.

“Look at the proportions of the drink,” says Christoff. “If you’re just going for texture as opposed to the drink being based on the Champagne flavor, it makes the most sense – and out of respect for the actual producer and the quality of the wine – to go with something like Prosecco.”

Bellini lovers know Prosecco is the way to go, but don’t limit yourself to peaches. Hit your local market for seasonal fruits like winter raspberries for a fruity concoction of your own.

“One of the most delicious and easy-to-

make drinks is made using fresh fruit purees,” says Christoff, who went that route for his wife’s most recent birthday. “You simply sauté your fruit on the stovetop with a little bit of sugar and maybe some orange zest to pull out a lot of the flavor. Then puree it and over ice you pour that puree and a bottle of Prosecco. It looks great, it tastes phenomenal, and it’s simple and really well-prepared.”

For parties, hosts can mix large batches to serve immediately or delight guests with a Champagne cocktail bar where revelers can select their own fresh fruit flavors and refill at a whim.

And when planning menus, pair the aperitif with salty hors d’oeuvres like brioche crostini or small bites like Moderne Barn’s Coquilles St. Jacques, broiled bay scallops with black truffle gruyere cheese fondue. Festive mains do the trick, too.

“Going into the holidays, you have clove and cranberry and orange flavors so your classic white meats are going to go really well, like turkey or roast chicken and dishes like that,” Christoff says.

He’s now using fresh cranberries cooked down in spiked syrup for Moderne Barn’s festive Sparkling Season. The wintry elixir uses Lamberti Prosecco over an ounce of Chambord, which at about 30 percent alcohol will add flavor without diluting the Prosecco. As a general rule, Christoff adds, reach for liqueur, not liquor, to complement bubbly best.

“You have to be careful with your use of high-proof alcohols because if you pour a good Champagne on a shot of vodka you’re losing that beautiful texture,” he says.

Another way to preserve those precious bubbles – always serve them in a flute. How often do you get to break them out anyway?

Well, Christoff may more than most.

“I personally love drinking Champagne any time of the year,” he says with a smile.

Moderne Barn is at 430 Bedford Road in Armonk. For reservations or more information about the eatery’s special Christmas Eve or New Year’s menus, visit modernebarn.com or call (914) 730-0001. ■