



Larry Mawby puts the pizzazz in area wineries' champagnes

When you ask Larry Mawby if it's true that champagne should be consumed at special events, he answers in the affirmative, but is quick to add that when it comes to the bubbly stuff, every day is a special event.

In other words, put aside those "puritanical prohibition era attitudes" we have about wine, says the man who owns L. Mawby Vineyards in Leelanau County and has a reputation as a "champagne meister."

"It is true, every day is a special event, yet an ethos we somehow carry around is that pleasure is to be feared and you don't want to do too much of it," explained Mawby.

"Wine is a great sensual experience, and sparkling wine is an important part of that. You should do it whenever you want to feel special."

Mawby said that some of the misconceptions about champagne begin with its name, a term that is commonly misused in the U.S. In its strict terms, it refers to a region of France and a wine that comes from there, and all other sparkling wines are just that. Locally, Mawby uses the same methods and techniques as are used in France, so his wines are identified as Methode Champenoise, even though they are made with grapes from Leelanau County and Old Mission Peninsula.

"The French are over protective of the term, applying it only to product from the region, while the USA violates this thinking and uses it semi-generically," he said. "We might call wine champagne, and put that on the label, as in Leelanau Peninsula

Champagne, out of respect for that, but we do choose to make a traditional style using Champagne Methode."

That means the grapes are harvested by hand and carefully pressed, and the juice is fermented to dryness. Mawby carefully measures sugar and yeast, and the beverage is bottled under heavy pressure. The yeast consumes the sugar and produces CO2 and alcohol, which produces the bubbles. The wine is then kept in the bottle with yeast for several

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months to several years.

The ones kept for several months have much less flavor of the yeast and the fruit flavor from grapes is more pronounced. They are less costly because time is money when beverages age. Those aged for a longer time are likely to be more costly and have their fruit flavors diminish with age (the longer yeast is in the bottle while it's aging, the more flavor it contributes to the wine.)

Mawby makes 10 different sparkling wines, using mostly Chardonnay and Vignoles grapes that he has been growing here since planting them in the early 1970s. He believes he is the only person in the world who uses that variety, which has made it something of a calling card.

"Those who like it think it's great, and others don't, but it has a distinctive variety and flavor," he reasons. "Few people are indifferent, whether they like it or not."

Of the 10 he makes, three are from grapes he grows that are estate bottled wines: Cremant (Vignoles), Talisman (four different grapes and one of most popular names, featuring a blend of every vintage from 1992-97 (that will run out in the next couple of months), and Mille (Pinot Noir dry grapes of 1995 vintage).

The next group includes Blanc de Blanc (a Chardonnay that represents 40 percent of the total production of sparkling wine), Blanc de Noir (a predominantly white wine made from a red grape), a Rose named Dionysus after the Greek God of wine, a sparkling red called Redd, Consort (a blanc de blanc that has twice the amount of sweetness and is a sec vs. a brut, which is dry), and an even sweeter one called Fizz Demi-Sec, the newest kid on the champagne block.

If you want to help a worthy cause while indulging yourself, keep in mind that \$2 of the

sale of each bottle of Conservancy goes to benefit the Leelanau Farmland Preservation Fund and is only sold in this area of the state. Mawby's wines can be found throughout the greater Grand Traverse area in specialty grocery and wine shops — anywhere, he says, that "people will know what they're talking about if someone asks them about anybody's local wines."

Of course, you can try Mawby's creations at his tasting room, where he offers several different "flights" on a paid basis, some with several wines and cheese or crackers or pate, and even chocolates. He usually offers a sample of

at least one sparkling wine without charge. Hours of operation are Thursday-Sunday, 1-6 p.m. between May and October, and the rest of the year on Saturdays from 12-5 p.m.

From Traverse City, go north on M-22 for eight miles, turn left at Hilltop Road, and travel west until the road ends (less than a mile), turning right on Elm Valley and going 1/2 mile farther on the right hand side. Look for a Bob Purvis sculpture of a hand coming out of the ground holding a stainless steel champagne bottle with its cork popping.

