

ONE BOTTLE:

The Lucien Albrecht Crémant D' Alsace Brut Rosé

by JOSHUA BAER

The day will come when you will make a list, get into your car, drive to the store, and find a riot waiting for you in the parking lot. There will be food in the store. The problem will be the limited amount of the food. The people in the parking lot will be rioting because they have money but no food. The police in riot gear will be keeping the people in the parking lot from going into the store and spending their money. The people who run the store will be inside, wondering what to do. One thing they will know with absolute certainty is that the food inside the store is worth more than the money in the parking lot. Maybe they will ration the food. Maybe they will raise their prices. Maybe they will hold an auction. Or maybe they will eat some of the food and save the rest for themselves and their friends.

This is what happens when a country devalues its currency. It happened to the German *Reichsmark* in 1923, when food prices doubled every forty-eight hours. It happened to the Hungarian *pengo* in 1945, when prices doubled every fifteen hours. It happened to the Chilean *escudo* in 1974, to the Argentine *austral* in 1989, and to the Zimbabwean dollar in 2006. The reason the American dollar is losing its value in 2008 is because there are now, officially, too many dollars in the world: one hundred trillion at last count, and climbing.

The curious part of this phenomenon is where we are in the cycle. Since the establishment of the Federal Reserve Bank in 1913, the dollar has lost ninety-six percent of its purchasing power. Since 2001, when President Bush took office, the dollar has lost thirty-eight percent of its purchasing power—sixty-one percent if you factor in the prices of gasoline and diesel. And yet, our once mighty dollar can still get the job done. We can still make a list, drive to the store, park, go in, get a cart, and buy more food than we can eat. Times may be tough, but compared to what's coming, these are good times. After the riots start, we will look back on these days as the good old days. 2008 will be remembered as one of the twilight years when you could still buy food with money. Just think, we'll say to each other. We were alive during the golden age of groceries.

Given our good fortune, celebration is in order. June is a hot month. Nothing tastes better on a warm June evening than a glass of cold Champagne. Unfortunately, good Champagne has gotten expensive. The French still make boatloads of it but they insist on pricing their Champagne in Euros. The French are clever that way. What with the dollar losing the lion's share of its purchasing power, the bottle of vintage Champagne that cost \$80 in 2006 costs \$120 today. Fortunately, the French make a less expensive alternative to their Champagne. They call it Crémant.

Crémant is the French word for "creaming." A more idiomatic translation would be "creamy." The preferred pronunciation is *Cray-mawn*. In France, if you make a sparkling wine in the province of Champagne, you call your sparkling wine Champagne. But if you make a sparkling wine in Alsace,

Bordeaux, Burgundy, or the Loire, you call your sparkling wine, respectively, *Crémant D' Alsace*, *Crémant De Bordeaux*, *Crémant de Bourgogne*, or *Crémant De Loire*.

Compared to vintage or non-vintage Champagnes, Crémants tend to be understated. In terms of bouquet, bead, attack, and finish, Crémants often attempt less and accomplish more than their Champagne counterparts. Crémants also cost less than Champagnes. A good non-vintage Champagne like the Piper-Heidsieck Champagne "Cuvée Brut" costs \$48 a bottle. A good non-vintage Crémant like the Paul Chollet *Crémant De Bourgogne Blanc* costs \$18 a bottle.

Some of the best Crémants are the *Crémants D' Alsace*. In the wine world, Alsace is the region where austerity, generosity, and subtlety converge. When wine people think of Alsatian wines, they think of Zind-Humbrecht's classic Reislings or Meyer-Fonné's phenomenal Pinot Gris. They don't think about Pinot Noir because the Pinot Noir grape is associated with red Burgundy, and rightly so. Pinot Noir dies and goes to heaven in Burgundy. But there are two other regions in France where great wines are made with Pinot Noir. One of those regions is Champagne. The other is Alsace.

Which brings us to the Lucien Albrecht *Crémant D' Alsace Brut Rosé*.

In the glass, Albrecht's Brut Rosé is a transparent copper. The bead manages to be delicate without becoming fussy. The bouquet is fresh, immediate, and kind. The attack is a surprise. When I first tasted this wine, I wanted to go back to Liquor Barn and buy every bottle they had. If you like red Burgundy, you will want to own cases of this wine. It is one hundred percent Pinot Noir. The shy aggression of the Pinot Noir grape is evident in every sip. The finish is like the bouquet. It underwhelms you, but that makes you wonder if the sip you just took was really as good as it tasted. This makes you take another sip, which confirms your first impressions: You are drinking a seriously great sparkling wine that costs \$19 a bottle.

Nobody knows when the riots will start. Nobody knows when the American dollar will be forced into retirement and a leaner, meaner, more ambitious currency will move into the corner office and take over as C.E.O. of the world's currencies. That's the problem with the future. You can see it coming but you can't know when it will arrive. In the meantime, while we wait for the future, we have the wisdom of the past to keep us entertained. History has taught us, again and again, that anything we take for granted will disappear. ♥

One Bottle is dedicated to the appreciation of good wine and good times, one bottle at a time. The name *One Bottle*, and the contents of this column, are © 2008 by onebottle.com. If you need help finding a wine or building a cellar, write to Joshua Baer at jb@onebottle.com.

