

Wine

The Sparkling Wine Standard

Five steps for opening and pouring sparkling wine, Champagne included.
The bottle holds about six bar of pressure, so the thumb stays on the cork.

Who

Sommeliers, servers and bartenders who open sparkling wine

When

Every bottle of sparkling wine opened in front of a guest

You need

A bucket of ice and water, a napkin, polished flutes or tulips, a stand

Measured by Bottle at 6–8 °C before it is opened · Thumb on the cork from cage to cork out · Opened with a sigh, never a bang

1 Chill it

Sparkling wine reaches the table at 6–8 °C, or 8–12 °C if vintage. A bottle from the wine fridge needs 10 minutes in ice and water; one from the store needs 25. Carry it upright and never shake it.

"Your Champagne is in the ice now, Ms Dubois. It will be ready in two minutes."

Common mistake Taking a bottle straight from a warm store room. It foams over as the cork moves, and a glass ends up on the cloth.

2 Loosen the cage

Show the label to the host. Point the bottle at 45°, away from guests, lights and windows. Remove the foil, put your thumb on the cork, untwist the cage six half-turns and leave it on the cork.

"One moment while I open it, turned away from the table."

Common mistake Loosening the cage and putting the bottle down to reach for the napkin. The cork can leave on its own.

3 Ease the cork

Cover cork and cage with a napkin. Hold the cork still and turn the bottle, so the pressure eases the cork into your hand. The sound you want is a soft sigh; a bang wastes wine and startles the room.

"There we are. A quiet opening keeps the bubbles in the wine."

Common mistake Popping the cork for effect at a table that did not ask for it. Half the room turns round and the first glass is foam.

4 Pour in two

After the host's taste, pour into each glass where it stands, in two movements: a splash to let the foam rise and settle, then up to two-thirds. Turn the bottle a quarter as you lift it, so no drop falls.

"Would you like to taste it first, Mr Castellano?"

Common mistake Pouring in one go. The foam runs over the rim, and the guest's first sip comes from a wet glass.

5 Keep it cold

Return the bottle to the bucket with a napkin over the neck, and top up before any glass falls below a third. If the table leaves wine in the bottle, close it with a hinged stopper and keep it in the ice.

"I'll keep it in the ice here and top you up as we go."

Common mistake Leaving the bottle on the table so it looks generous. In twenty minutes it is warm and the bubbles are coarse.

Sparkling Wine Opening Check

Thirteen points to watch while a bottle of sparkling wine is opened, from the bucket to the top-up. Tick only what you saw.

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| ☐ Bottle at 6–8 °C, or 8–12 °C if vintage | ☐ Cage loosened and left on the cork |
| ☐ Bucket filled with ice and water, not ice alone | ☐ Bottle turned, cork held still |
| ☐ Flutes or tulips polished and smell-checked | ☐ Opened with a sigh: no bang, no foam |
| ☐ Bottle carried upright, never shaken | ☐ Host offered a taste first |
| ☐ Label shown to the host, vintage named | ☐ Poured in two movements, up to two-thirds |
| ☐ Bottle held at 45°, pointed away from people | ☐ Bottle back in the bucket, napkin on the neck |
| ☐ Thumb on the cork from the first twist | |

How to use this with your team

In the first week, every new team member opens three bottles watched by the head sommelier before opening one alone. After that, the supervisor watches one table per service and ticks this card with them.

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