



TRAVEL, FOOD & DRINK VINEYARDS & WINE

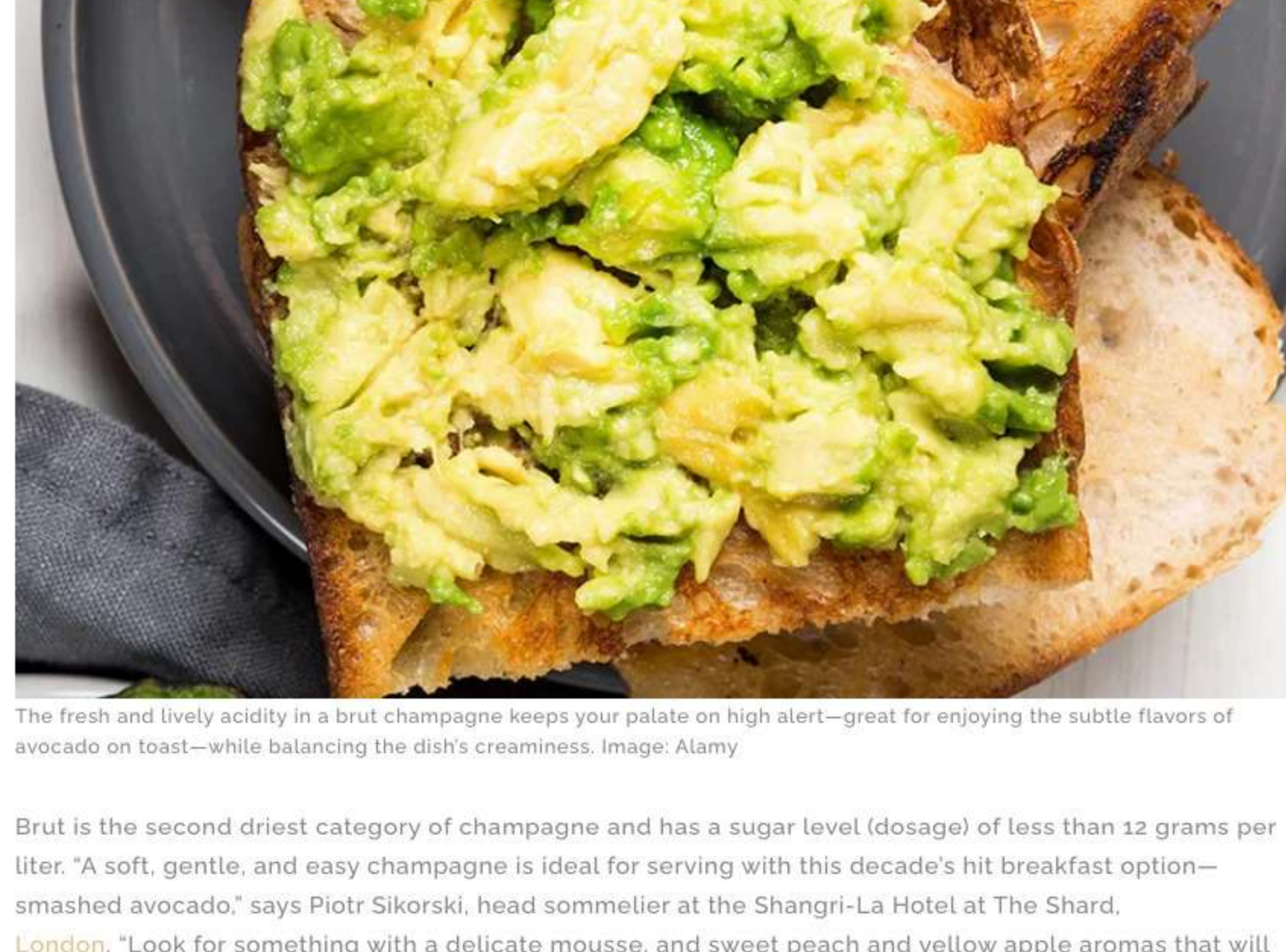
Bubbling Over: 10 Champagne and Food Pairings for Every Occasion

Top sommeliers share their brilliant combinations of champagne and food to try on New Year's Eve—and beyond
December 16, 2020

Ask chef sommelier Daniel Pires when he believes the best time is for a glass of bubbly, and his answer is simple: "Any time, and with any meal." As the resident food and drink expert at the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa in Champillon, France, he knows a thing or two about champagne and food pairings. "Champagne is a multifaceted, all-terrain drink," he explains. "Of course, it's a wonderful aperitif and an excellent companion for fine dining, but it's equally delightful served with crispy fries and a burger."

Like other leading sommeliers, Pires has been championing the versatility of champagne for decades. Here, he and three other experts share their favorite pairings—for meals from breakfast to midnight snacks, and dishes from lobster to mac 'n' cheese—that are guaranteed to turn any occasion into a celebration.

Pair Smashed Avocado on Sourdough with... a Brut



The fresh and lively acidity in a brut champagne keeps your palate on high alert—great for enjoying the subtle flavors of avocado on toast—while balancing the dish's creaminess. Image: Alamy

Brut is the second driest category of champagne and has a sugar level (dosage) of less than 12 grams per liter. "A soft, gentle, and easy champagne is ideal for serving with this decade's hit breakfast option—smashed avocado," says Piotr Sikorski, head sommelier at the Shangri-La Hotel at The Shard, London. "Look for something with a delicate mousse, and sweet peach and yellow apple aromas that will complement the flavors and textures in the dish."

Try Deutz Brut Classic NV

Pair Fresh Fruit Salad with... a Rosé



With their natural aromas of strawberry and raspberry, and hints of creamy vanilla and spice, rosé champagnes are a natural fit for a healthy breakfast of berries and melon. Image: Getty Images

The red fruit notes of rosé champagne make it an ideal companion for a breakfast bowl filled with luscious red berries, says Ngoni Mtizwa, sommelier at Singita Sabi Sand, South Africa. "A bright and fresh fruit salad goes very well with a rosé or demi-sec champagne. Of course, you can refine your choice depending on which fruits dominate, but a good rosé will not disappoint."

Try Laurent Perrier Cuvée Rosé NV

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Pair Flavorful Hors d'Oeuvres with... a Blanc de Blancs



Fine champagne is an excellent match for Asian cuisine—opt for a slightly sweeter version of the drink to balance especially spicy dishes. Image: Getty Images

Made only from Chardonnay grapes, blanc de blancs champagnes have good natural acidity and minerality, which makes them an excellent match for a wide range of foods. "It goes especially well with complex and flavorful Asian-inspired starters—such as Vietnamese spring rolls, chicken satay, and seared tuna—which need a full-bodied, rich, and rounded champagne with a gentle acidity to balance the spices," says Sikorski.

Try Pascal Doquet "Diapason" Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs Brut, NV

Pair Sushi with... a Brut



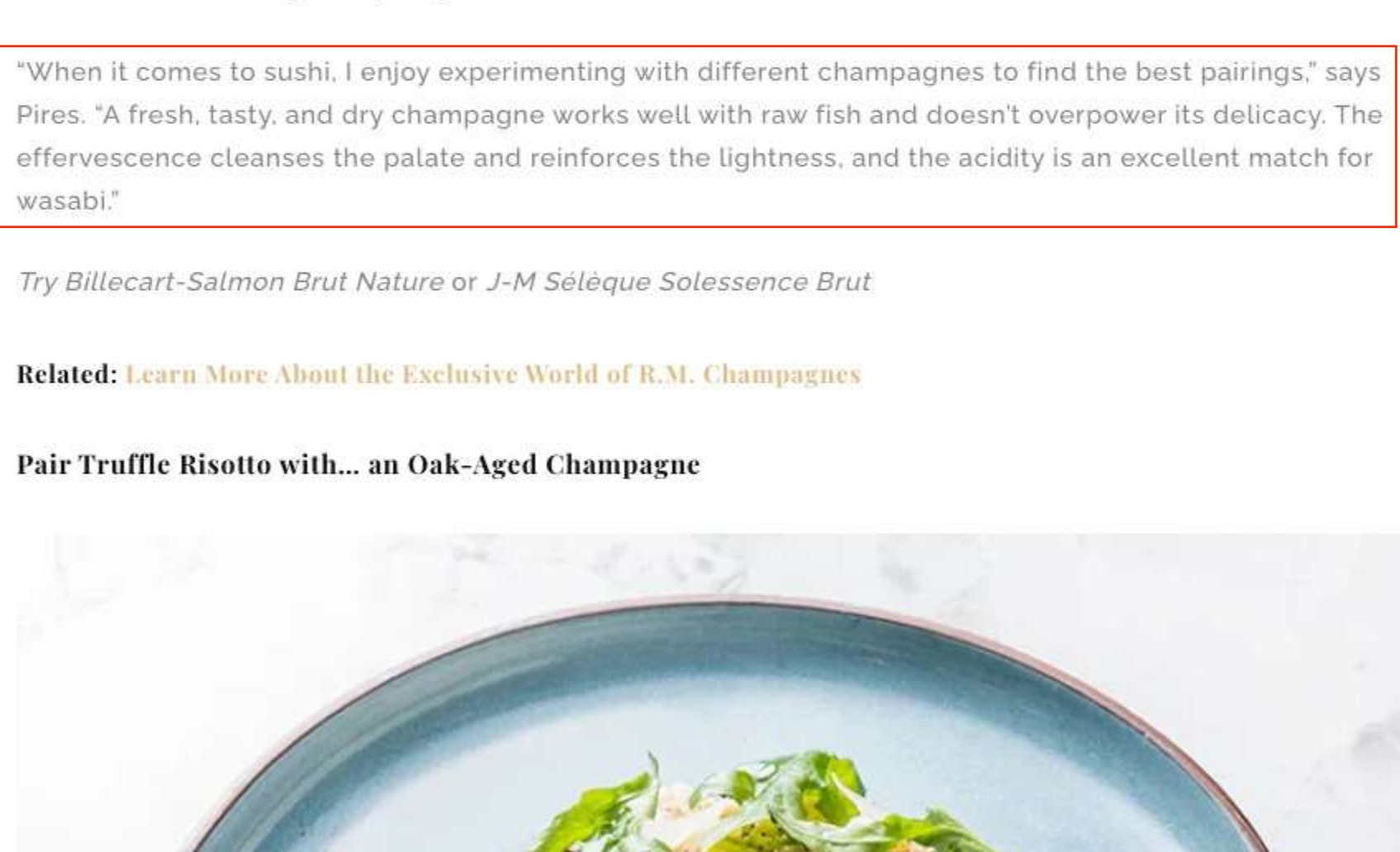
The fine bubbles in a brut add an interesting textural element to a meal of sushi, while cutting through the brininess and saltiness in the dish. Image: Getty Images

"When it comes to sushi, I enjoy experimenting with different champagnes to find the best pairings," says Pires. "A fresh, tasty, and dry champagne works well with raw fish and doesn't overpower its delicacy. The effervescence cleanses the palate and reinforces the lightness, and the acidity is an excellent match for wasabi."

Try Billecart-Salmon Brut Nature or J-M Séléque Solesence Brut

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Pair Truffle Risotto with... an Oak-Aged Champagne

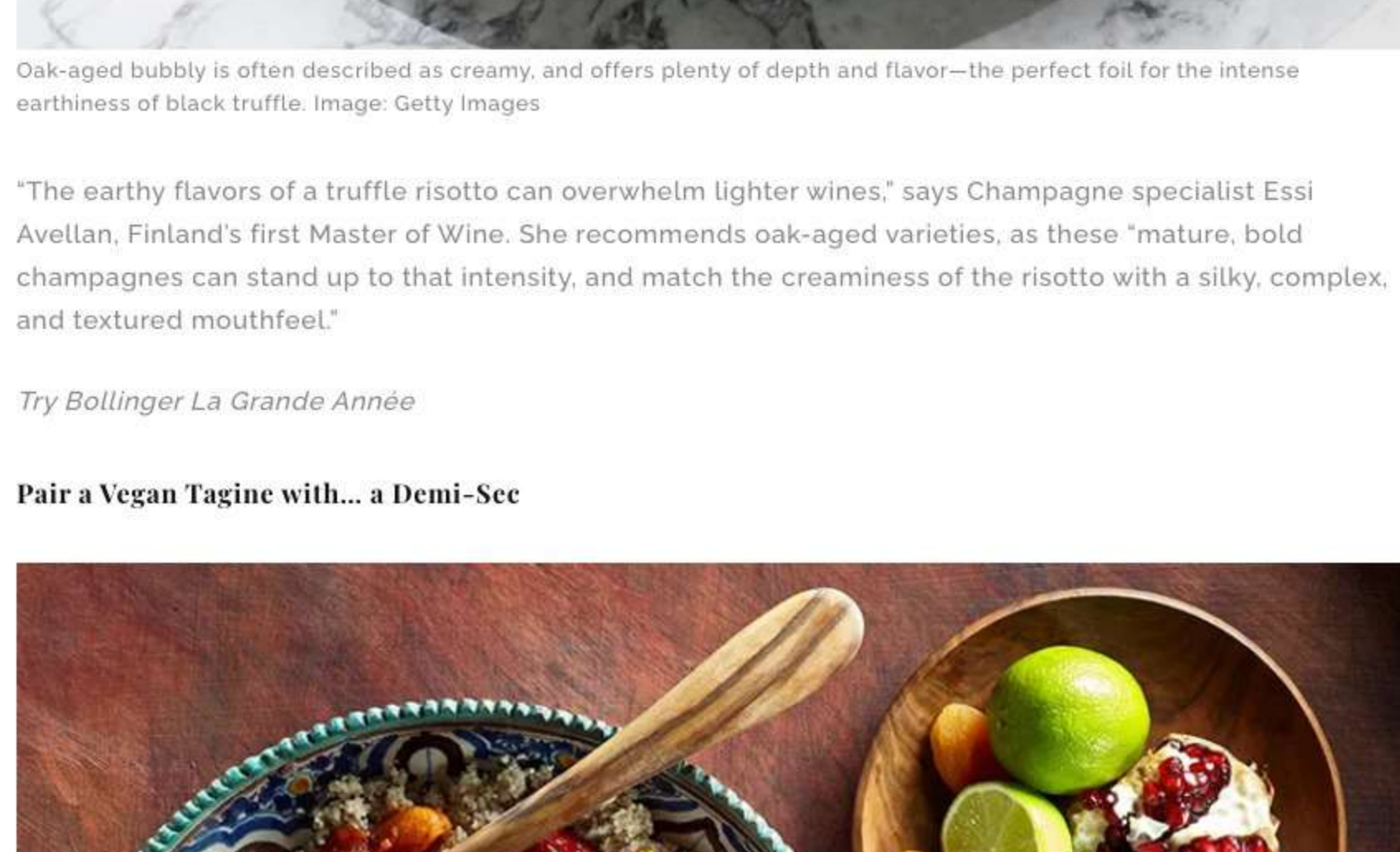


Oak-aged bubbly is often described as creamy, and offers plenty of depth and flavor—the perfect foil for the intense earthiness of black truffle. Image: Getty Images

"The earthy flavors of a truffle risotto can overwhelm lighter wines," says Champagne specialist Essi Avellan, Finland's first Master of Wine. She recommends oak-aged varieties, as these "mature, bold champagnes can stand up to that intensity, and match the creaminess of the risotto with a silky, complex, and textured mouthfeel."

Try Bollinger La Grande Année

Pair a Vegan Tagine with... a Demi-Sec



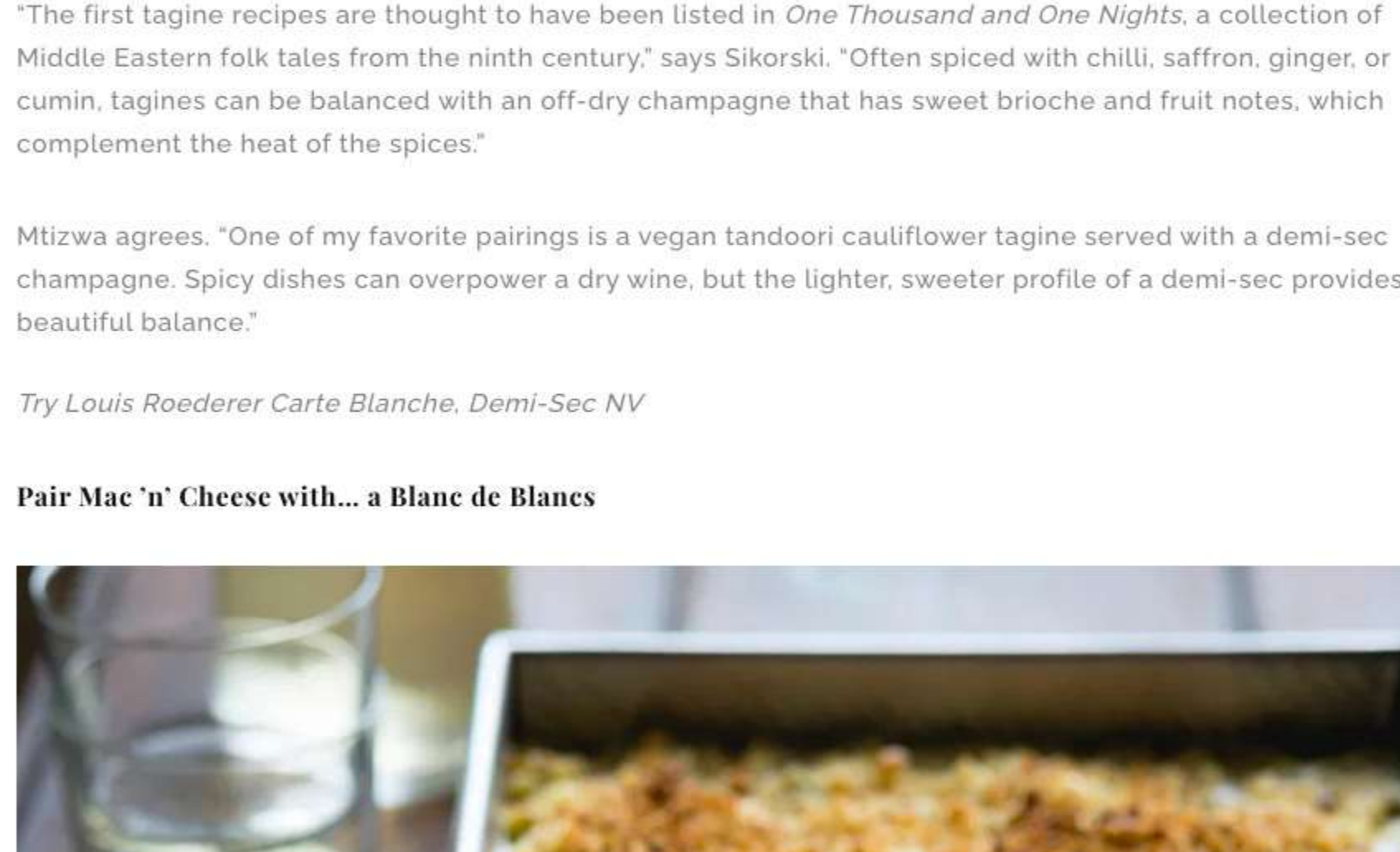
Vegetable-based dishes that are loaded with herbs and spices pair best with lighter and sweeter sparkling wines—and happily, many of the champagne world's biggest brands now offer vegan-friendly options, which fit the bill. Image: Alamy

"The first tagine recipes are thought to have been listed in *One Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales from the ninth century," says Sikorski. "Often spiced with chili, saffron, ginger, or cumin, tagines can be balanced with an off-dry champagne that has sweet broche and fruit notes, which complement the heat of the spices."

Mtizwa agrees. "One of my favorite pairings is a vegan tandoori cauliflower tagine served with a demi-sec champagne. Spicy dishes can overpower a dry wine, but the lighter, sweeter profile of a demi-sec provides beautiful balance."

Try Louis Roederer Carte Blanche, Demi-Sec NV

Pair Mac 'n' Cheese with... a Blanc de Blancs

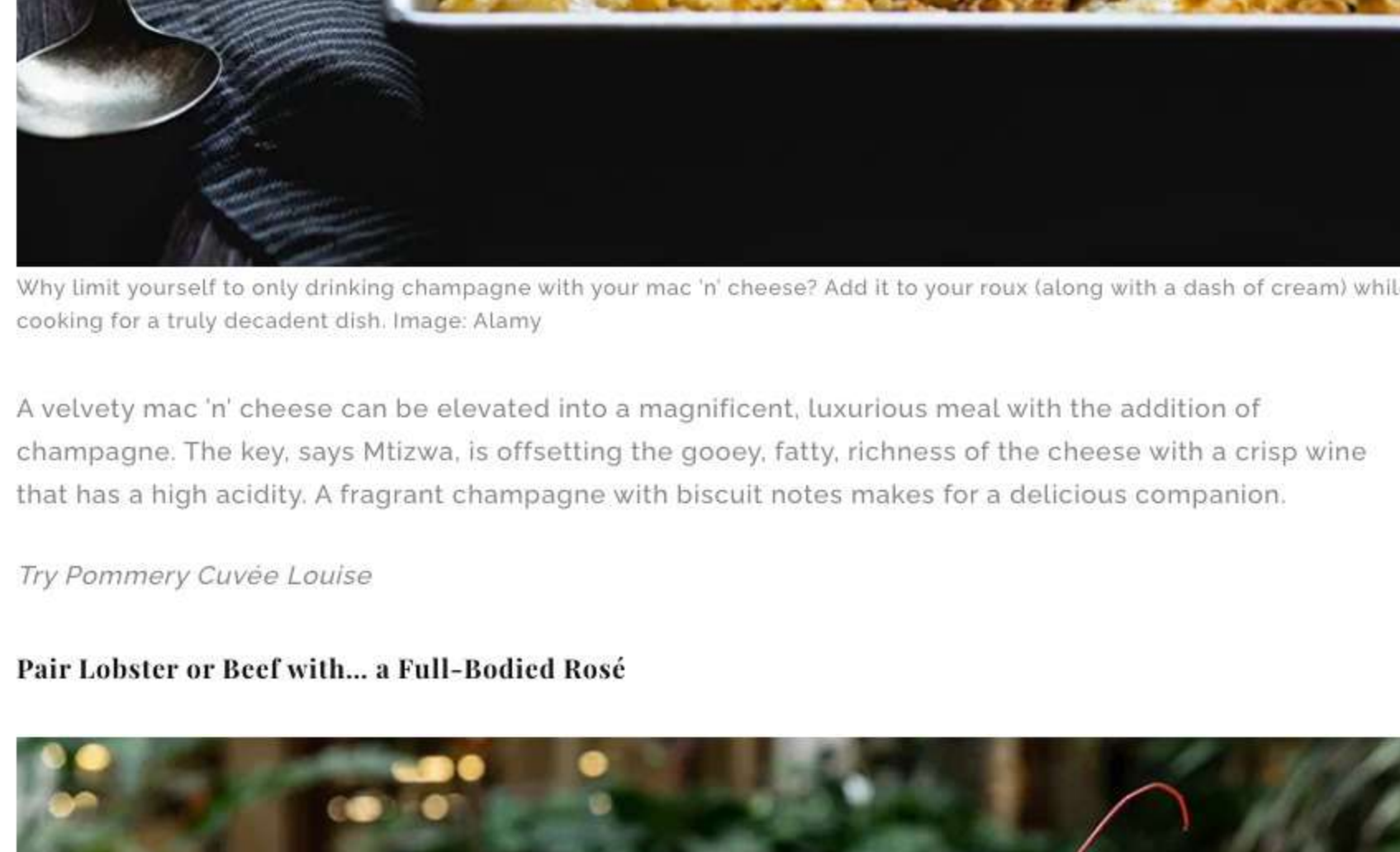


Why limit yourself to only drinking champagne with your mac 'n' cheese? Add it to your roux (along with a dash of cream) while cooking for a truly toasty dinner dish. Image: Alamy

A velvety mac 'n' cheese can be elevated into a magnificent, luxurious meal with the addition of champagne. The key, says Mtizwa, is offsetting the gooey, fatty, richness of the cheese with a crisp wine that has a high acidity. A fragrant champagne with biscuit notes makes for a delicious companion.

Try Pommery Cuvée Louise

Pair Lobster or Beef with... a Full-Bodied Rosé



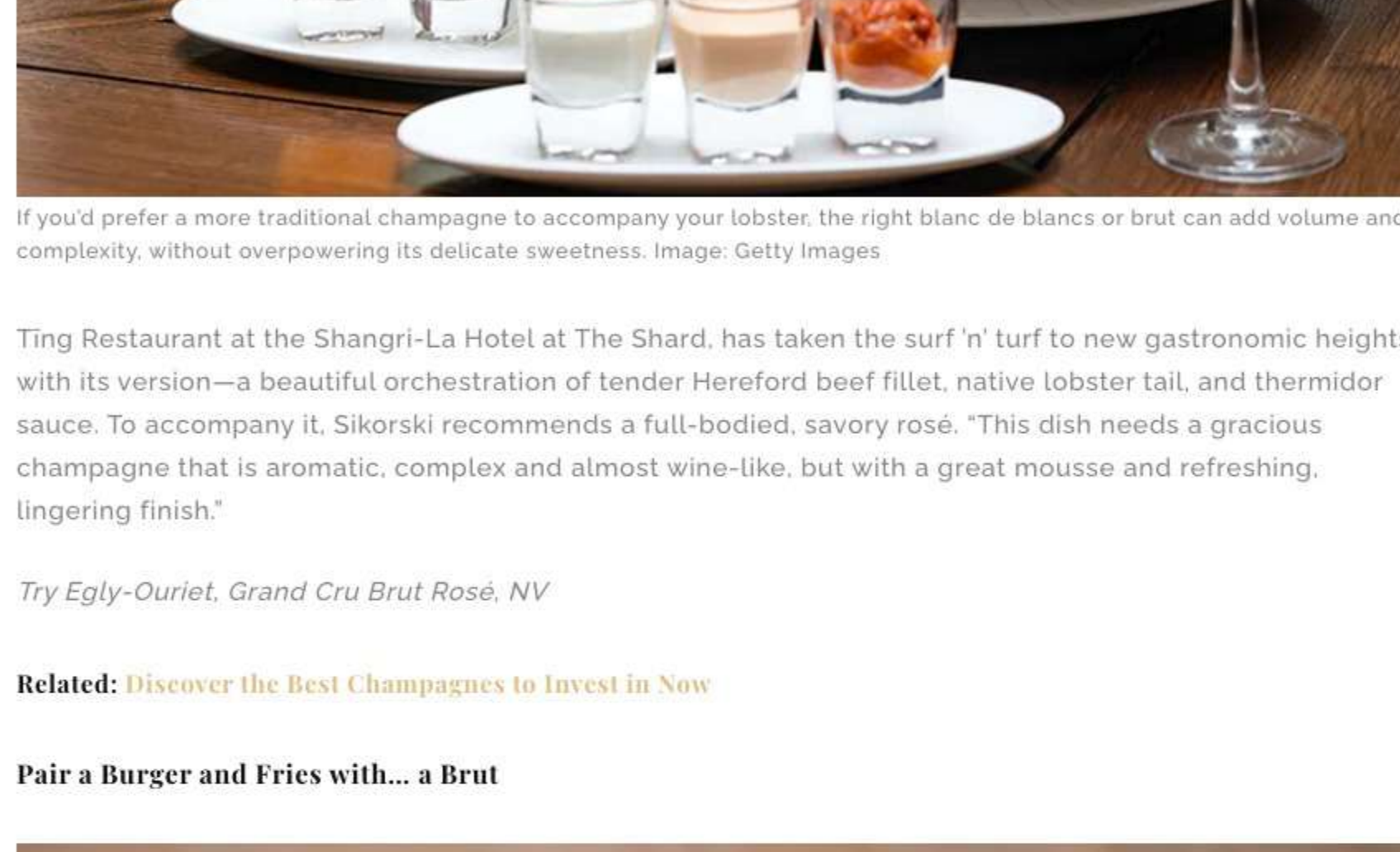
If you'd prefer a more traditional champagne to accompany your lobster, the right blanc de blancs or brut can add volume and complexity, without overpowering its delicate sweetness. Image: Getty Images

Ting Restaurant at the Shangri-La Hotel at The Shard, has taken the surf 'n' turf to new gastronomic heights with its version—a beautiful orchestration of tender Hereford beef fillet, native lobster tail, and thermidor sauce. To accompany it, Sikorski recommends a full-bodied, savory rosé. "This dish needs a gracious champagne that is aromatic, complex and almost wine-like, but with a great mousse and refreshing, lingering finish."

Try Egly-Ouriet, Grand Cru Brut Rosé, NV

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Pair a Burger and Fries with... a Brut

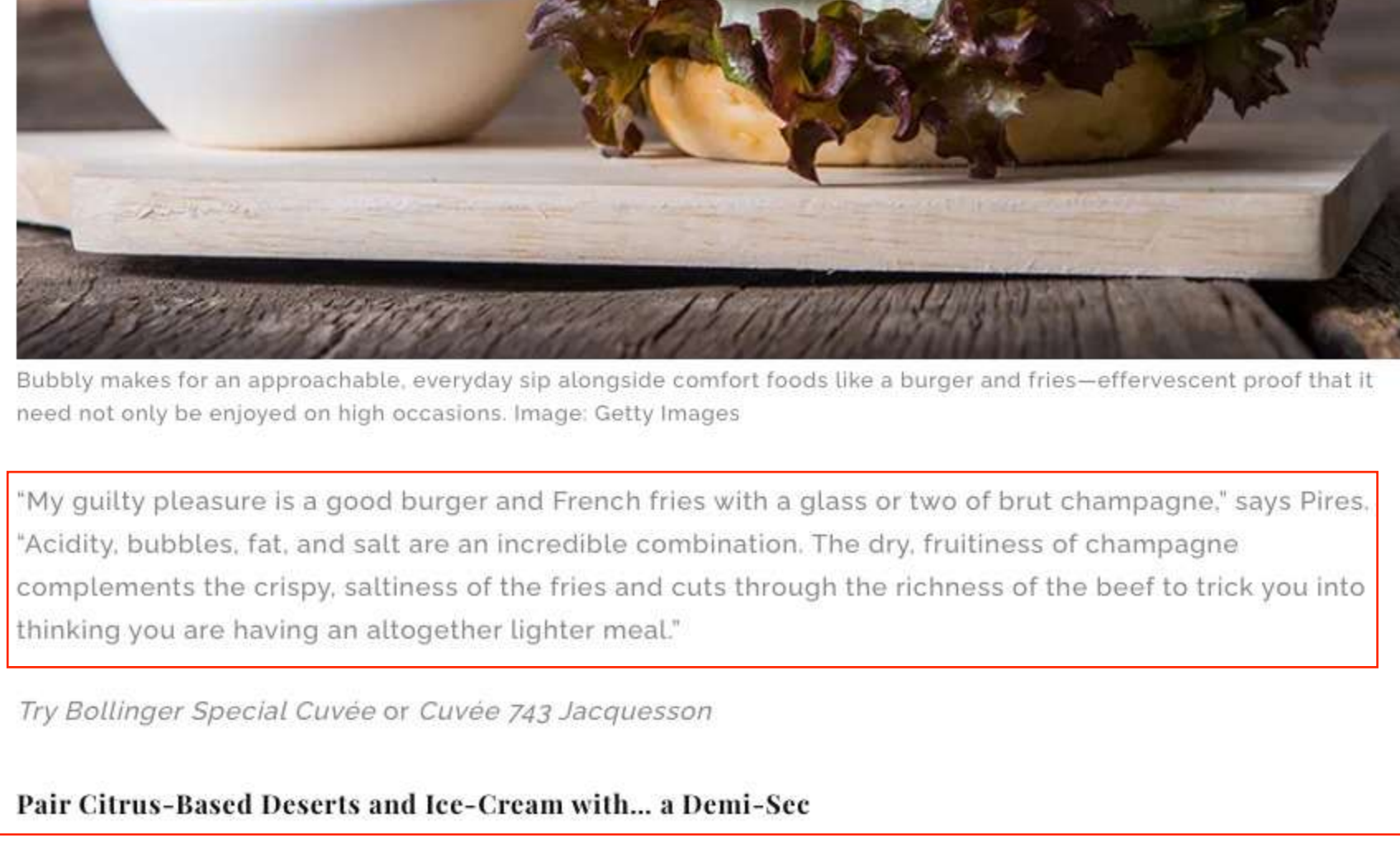


Bubbly makes for an approachable, everyday sip alongside comfort foods like a burger and fries—effervescent proof that it need not only be enjoyed on high occasions. Image: Getty Images

"My guilty pleasure is a good burger and French fries with a glass or two of brut champagne," says Pires. "Acidity, bubbles, fat, and salt are an incredible combination. The dry, fruitiness of champagne complements the crispy, saltiness of the fries and cuts through the richness of the beef to trick you into thinking you are having an altogether lighter meal."

Try Bollinger Special Cuvée or Cuvée 743 Jacquesson

Pair Citrus-Based Desserts and Ice-Cream with... a Demi-Sec



A dessert such as the mandarin baba with creamy lemon sorbet and vanilla whipped cream at Le Royal, the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa's Michelin-starred restaurant, is a celebration in itself.

The trick to marrying a demi-sec with desserts according to Pires, is to find a champagne that perfectly balances the sweetness with a touch of bitterness. He pairs the Royal Champagne Hotel's sensational citrus baba, made with Ardenne Tripel beer, with a demi-sec that has a sugar level or dosage of between 30 grams and 40 grams per liter. You may need to experiment, he concedes, but your efforts will be well-rewarded.

Try Philipponnat Sublime Réserve 2008 or Georges Laval Garennes

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