Is all fizz 'champagne' on the ocean wave?

13 Aug 2012 by Jancis Robinson

This correspondence is self explanatory, and possibly not unusual.

Early July 2012

To Holland America Line [whose tagline is 'A Signature of Excellence' - JR]

I recently returned from a cruise with Holland America Line from Dover to the Baltic states and St Petersburg. Every night a newsletter was sent to each cabin and on the front page was an advertisement for the Explorer's Lounge offering a wine, champagne and cheese party with '$4.50 for all house champagnes and wines'. I went along and asked for two glasses of house champagne. A bottle of Italian Vin Moussec was produce & I told the waiter I wanted Champagne. The Cellarmaster was called for and he told me 'this is what the company call house champagne.' I said that only wine produced in the Champagne region can be called champagne and he shrugged and said he could do nothing about it. The next day I went to a wine tasting and, looking at me, he said we are tasting two wines from Mumm today: a champagne from France and a sparkling wine from California. I would like to know what you are doing about this illegal action and what I can expect IF I go on any other HAL holidays. I drink quite a lot of champagne and this was a definite black mark on this holiday. I await your reply.

Ed Bevan

6 July 2012

To Ed Bevan

Dear Sir,

It is indeed to the cruise company that you may complain.

On our side, we can only do so if we are been given the details of the cruise company name, boat name, cruise name and dates ideally, picture of the drink list and date of the picture if possible, as these elements will make us able to elaborate a complaint to the cruise company ourselves.

We sincerely thank you for your attention to the respect of the name Champagne.

Mrs Robinson, thank you for forwarding as well.

Best regards,

Thibaut Le Mailloux, Directeur de la Communication, CIVC, Epernay

31 July 2012

To Holland America Line

Dear Sirs,

Please find attached [below] my second letter to your company regarding a cruise I took on 9 June 2012, Baltic and St

Petersburg. I have also emailed but still have not received an acknowledgement for either.

Every day on the MS Ryndam a newsletter was placed in the cabin and on the front page bottom left was an advertisement for the Explorers Lounge stating 'Wine, Champagne & Cheese Party 07.00-22.00. $4.50 for all HOUSE Champagne & Wines.

I went along one evening and asked for two glasses of house Champagne and the bottle produced was Italian Vin Moussec! I asked to see the Cellar Master who told me that is what the company call House Champagne. I pointed out to him it was illegal to sell wine that had not been produced in the Champagne area (Reims/Epernay/Ay) as Champagne, which he said he knew.

I wrote to you in Seattle at the beginning of July and emailed and have not even had an acknowledgement of the letter and email having been received.

I think for such a serious complaint you should have responded to me as a matter of urgency.

My holiday was spoilt as I couldn't have an evening glass of Champagne and usually when on a cruise we have a bottle of Champagne prior to the evening meal. Please explain to me what action you are going to take to remedy this.

I am also sending a hard copy via your Southampton office so that you will definitely receive it.

Yours faithfully,

Ed Bevan

31 July 2012

To Holland America Line

Dear Sir,

With regards to the above cruise I wrote to you 7 July 2012 complaining about the MS Ryndam passing off Italian Vin Moussec as champagne.

I would have thought such a serious complaint would have been quickly answered by your company and as at today's date I have not even had an acknowledgement letter. Please don't tell me that you have not received my first letter.

I wish to know what you are going to do about this illegal practice as it was still evident on the July 2012 cruise. In case people who make the decisions regarding the sales on your ships are not aware that only wine produced in the Champagne area of Reims, Epernay and Ay are allowed to be called Champagne. I hope you will stop the illegal practice of passing off sparkling wine from any country in the world?

I also would like to know what you are prepared to do about my holiday that was spoilt by the fact I could not purchase, each night, champagne by the glass?

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter and let me have a speedy reply.

Yours faithfully,

Ed Bevan

10 Aug 2012

Dear Mr Bevan,

First and foremost, thank you for the email regarding your *MS Ryndam* sailing on 9 June 2012.

We lament learning that you feel your vacation was ruined because the house 'champagne' (Italian Vin Moussec) which was being offered was actually sparkling wine. We are fully aware that only sparkling wine that comes from the Champagne region of France, in the northeastern part of the country, can be labeled 'champagne' by winemakers. However, it is quite common for **consumers and wine sellers** to refer to any type of white sparkling wine as Champagne, regardless of where it was produced. We are sorry for your discontent with this practice, but we wish to assure you that if [you] do not want to partake of the house sparkling wine that is offered on board our vessels, you do have the option of purchasing a traditional champagne or bringing your own champagne on board with you to be enjoyed in your stateroom. If you would like to bring your own champagne to the dining room, there is a corkage fee.

We truly value feedback from our guests, and as a gesture of our appreciation for your comments we are proving(sic) you a bottle of Cuvee Dom Perignon, Brut, for your enjoyment on a future sailing with our cruise line. This amenity will be built in direct association with your Mariner Society number, and will automatically be credited upon booking your next Holland America Line cruise. We kindly ask that this offer be verified with a Reservations Agent at time of confirmation to ensure that the booking is noted appropriately.

We are always pleased to receive communication from guests who have previously sailed with us, please let us know if we can assist in any other way.

Best regards,

Walter Pagan, Special Advisor, Office of the President, Holland America Line, Seattle

13 Aug 2012

To Ed Bevan

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your last e-mail. We confirm that Champagne is not a generic term and cannot be used to designate any type of sparkling wines. Such use is infringing the designation of origin Champagne and could be considered as consisting in misleading information. By the way, the fact that they propose to offer you a bottle of “genuine” Champagne proves that they feel uncomfortable with this practice.

On the basis of the information you provided to us, we will write to this company in order to obtain that they immediately stop presenting sparkling wines as “house champagne” and undertake not to repeat it.

Thank you again for your appreciated vigilance,

Best regards,

Charles Goemaere, Directeur Economie et Juridique, CIVC, Epernay