



Holiday Wines

Even during these tough economic times you can enjoy wine without busting your budget!

BY THOMAS M. CIESLA

The essence of the holiday season is perhaps best captured in three simple words: family, friends, and food. During the five week marathon between Thanksgiving Day and New Years Day, we surround ourselves with loved ones, great food, and in my household – plenty of tasty wines. While many of us have been forced to cut back on spending, the good news is, you can find plenty of quality wines for under \$20 a bottle – many of them even under \$15.

Wine is a natural compliment to the celebratory nature of this season, isn't it?. At gatherings, wine lubricates conversations, enhances our meals, and helps us to focus on what's important in life. But let's be honest: selecting wines for the wide variety of entrees and side dishes served during Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner can challenge even the most savvy wine geek. Let's examine an easy way to solve this wine dilemma.

THANKSGIVING

There is no such thing as an all-in-one wine for your holiday dinner, though Sparkling wines come very close. For Thanksgiving gatherings, lighter, fruity wines are a good choice to work with the various flavors without overwhelming any one dish. For white wines, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling or Viognier are tasty and very accessible. Sauvignon Blanc with its slight acidic and herbaceous flavors, is viewed by some as the ultimate poultry wine. Dry Riesling is a personal favorite for Thanksgiving dinner, possessing spicy, fruity flavors along with a floral fragrance that compliments the sugars in the main dishes. Viognier remains a mysterious wine to many wine drinkers, yet with its low acidity and floral, fruity flavors makes for a great dinner companion.

RED WINE? It's true, you can serve red wines with your Thanksgiving dinner. The secret is to stay away from the heavy, tannic wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, and focus on lighter, fruity wines that won't overpower the flavors in the various dishes. These include Pinot Noir, Red Zinfandel, Beaujolais and Syrah.

As a rich, lighter wine, Pinot Noir is absolutely wonderful with turkey, expressing hints of plums, strawberries and cherries. Red Zinfandel offers fresh jammy flavors and even peppery notes, but doesn't overpower the nuances of your lighter dishes. Beaujolais may be the perfect red wine for this meal; light and dry, offering fruity flavors. Syrah may be a surprise to many who think of this as a more tannic wine, but older Syrahs are fruity with spice and pepper notes.

WINE TIP:

Some winemakers believe that you can't make a quality Zinfandel without blending in a little Petite Sirah. Look to wines such as Bogle Phantom, Seghesio Zinfandel, or Louis Martini "Gnarly _Monte Rosso" Zinfandel as good examples of this blending philosophy.

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEARS

Unlike the Thanksgiving meal which focuses on turkey and things American, Christmas dinner often focuses on family tradition and the foods and recipes our ancestors brought with them to this country. Your heritage generally dictates the focus of your meal, be it Italian, German, Jewish, Japanese or Jamaican.

Christmas wines can be chosen from the same region where the recipe originated. Perhaps a Chianti or Brunello with an Italian meal, a kosher wine with a Jewish dinner, or Riesling to pair with a German meal. Or, look to New World wines from U.S., South American or Australian producers. As with Thanksgiving, there is no one wine solution for Christmas, so have a selection available for before and during dinner. Sparkling wines, Pinto Gris, Chenin Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc are refreshing while enjoying pre-meal

conversation. If you know certain favorite wines of family or friends, – like Aunt Ethel’s penchant for buttery Chardonnay – make an effort to have some open, or even suggest that everyone bring a favorite wine to share with other guests.

Given the diversity of foods and folks, try experimenting with red wines this time of year, when you can bring out some bolder wines such as Cabernets, Tempranillos, Super Tuscans, or oakey blends. Roasts, beef dishes and Red sauces pair well with more substantial red wines.

As a guest, consider bringing wine as a gift; your host may appreciate a bottle of wine under the tree for use during the remainder of the season. For packaging, many grocery stores offer a good selection of attractive wine bags or sturdy decorative cardboard tubes to hold one or multiple bottles.

NEW YEARS EVE

The first thing that pops into mind when someone mentions New Years is, of course, Champagne. Even people that don’t like Champagne (there are some out there), will have a glass to toast the holiday. If Champagne is a bit pricey for your budget, consider Sparkling wines from America, a Prosecco from Italy, or a Cava from Spain. Many of these producers offer good sparkling wines to fit any budget. And don’t forget Rose` sparkling wines for that extra festive feel. It’s also a good idea to offer both Brut and Semi-Dry sparkling wines to satisfy a wide range of preferences.

Now, let’s look at a few wine suggestions:

Giving Wine This Holiday Season

TIP #1:

If you don't know much about wine, ask a good wine merchant for advice. Don't worry about being ripped off, folks at good wine shops want to make you look good so you'll be a return customer. Give them a firm price range and anything you might know about the recipients wine preferences as a guide.

TIP #2:

If your budget is a little tight this year, stay away from the pricey, heavy guns such as Napa Valley Cabernet's or French Bordeaux. You can find some terrific Australian or California wines for under \$20. If you don't know the individual's wine preference there's a good selection of Merlot, Zinfandel, Chardonnay or Riesling in this price range.

TIP #3:

Nothing compliments the fun and festive nature of the holidays like Champagne. The good news – sparkling wines and champagnes are available in all prices ranging from \$8 to over \$100. Many manufacturers use attractive packaging this time of year for an eye pleasing gift.

TIP #4:

You might want to consider bringing a sweet wine such as Gewurztraminer, Riesling or a Late Harvest Muscat Canelli. These wines compliment many holiday dishes, which are often made on the sweet side. Many wineries offer half-bottle sizes, which helps if you're attending a small dinner party.

TIP #5:

Consider buying a large format bottle like a magnum, which is the equivalent of two bottles of wine. There's something about magnums and even larger bottles that folks find riveting and impressive.



CHEESE IT!

Cheese plates (along with some fruit) are great additions to any party, but for your holiday celebrations, don't forget the magic created by combining wines with cheese plates. The secret is to avoid strong cheeses that overwhelm the palate. Instead go for the creamy, light cheeses that won't fill up your guests before the main meal. Here's some pairing to consider...and keep a few strawberries on hand for the sparkling wines....delicious!

CHEESE	WINE
Brie, Vintage	Champagne, Sweet Sherry
Brie, U.S.	Chardonnay, Riesling, Champagne
Camembert	Chenin Blanc, Champagne
Chevre	Champagne, Gewurztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc
Danish Blue	Cabernet Sauvignon
Goat Chesse	Sancerre, Vouray
Swiss	Pinot Noir, Gewurztraminer

Some Under \$20 Wine Ideas For The Holidays



Sparkling Wine:
Scharffenberger Brut
(Anderson Valley)

65% Pinot Noir producing red fruit forward combined with 35% Chardonnay giving expression of lychee nuts and mango; After several months in bottle the wine develops caramel and hazel notes.

Price: \$17.64



Red Wine:
Norton Reserva
Malbec 2006

Offers mocha and spice aromatics; plenty of raspberry, fig and plum notes; a long, elegant finish.

Price \$15.00



Rose` Wine:
Finca El Retiro Malbec
(Argentina)

Elegant wine with sweet aromas of raspberries and strawberries. Highlights of violets and spice.

Price: \$ 8.95



Red Blend:
Bogle Vineyards
Phantom 2006

A blend of Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and Mourvedre. Rustic wine with lots of big fruit and hints of black pepper.

Price: \$16.26



White Blend:
Pine Ridge Chenin Blanc/
Viognier 2008

Aromas of ruby grapefruit, pear and melon, with a touch of spicy white florals. Citrus and tropical fruit flavors. Off-dry finish is clean and crisp.

Price: \$13.95



Red Blend:
Novella Synergy 2007
(Paso Robles, CA)

37% Petite Sirah, 25% Zinfandel, 20% Merlot, 18% Sangiovese. Cherry and berry flavors, long elegant finish of blackberry, cedar and spice. Hints of chocolate.

Price: \$14.95



White Wine:
Joel Gott Sauvignon
Blanc 2008

Full of zesty melon and citrus flavors.

Price: \$12.00



Red Blend:
Lyeth Meritage 2006
(Sonoma)

Classic Bordeaux blend. Luscious and full-bodied; balanced complexity, some black pepper, hint of licorice and clove spice. Long ripe finish.

Price: \$ 14.28

Here's A Great Holiday Party Appetizer

GRAPE MEATBALLS

Preparation Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 2 hours

Serves: Many

1 pound of ground beef
1 16 ounce bottle of grape jelly
1 14 ounce bottle of ketchup
1 table spoon lemon juice
1 egg, lightly beaten
3 tablespoons breadcrumbs
½ teaspoon pepper
1/4 teaspoon of salt
1/4 cup of parmesan cheese
1 table spoon garlic powder
toothpicks

In a mixing bowl combine ground beef, egg, pepper, salt, breadcrumbs, cheese and garlic. Mix ingredients thoroughly and make into ping-pong sized meatballs. Cook meatballs in oven at 350 degrees for 30 minutes, turning once.

In a medium sized pot combine grape jelly, ketchup and lemon juice and place on medium heat. When mixture is almost bubbling, place meatballs into sauce, cover and allow to slowly cook for 1 ½ hours.

Transfer meatballs to a crock pot set on low heat. Provide toothpicks for guests to sample meatballs.

Wine: Beaujolais, Riesling, Merlot

WHAT ABOUT DESSERT WINES?

Dessert wines come in a broad range of styles, including sweet and semi-sweet sparkling wines, late harvest wines, ice wines, and fortified wines like Port. When choosing a dessert wine, just remember that the wine should be sweeter than the dessert.

So for a lemon souffle, banana nut bread, or pumpkin pie, a late harvest Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc would pair well. Pair cheesecake, pot de creme or bread pudding with ice wine – though very sweet – it contains enough acidity to please the palate.

For slightly acidic desserts such as lemon cake or tropical ice cream or sorbets, select a sparkling Muscat or Syrah. Desserts such as chocolate cake or cherries jubilee will be delicious with a late harvest red Zinfandel or a tawny Port.

WINE TIP:

Something wonderful happens when you pair Merlot with milk chocolate treats, be it chocolate kisses, truffles, or even chocolate cream pie. The fruitiness of the Merlot compliments the flavors in the chocolate to create heaven on your palate.



If Salmon is on the menu, a Pinot Noir from the Pacific Northwest is the perfect pairing

HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU BUY?

For stand-up parties count on two glasses per person for the first hour, then one glass per hour afterwards. To estimate wine with dinner, figure on either one bottle per couple (five pours), or one drink per person per course. That doesn't include a glass of Champagne upon arrival, your dessert wines, or account for non-wine drinking guests. Always have water or other beverages available.

LEFTOVERS?

Approach leftover wine the same as food: re-cork the bottle and keep it refrigerated. The leftover wine will remain fresh throughout the holiday weekend.