

Wine All Around!

Our guide to the perfect bottle
for all kinds of holiday occasions.

WRITTEN BY BONNIE GRAVES

1. LET’S TALK TURKEY

When it comes to food and wine pairing, what “goes” with turkey is the subject of seemingly endless articles, blog posts and unnecessary agony. Let me cut to the chase. Turkey itself is bland—what makes the magic is what goes with it: those wonderful side dishes. You want wines that can complement a wide variety of flavors without overshadowing any of the food.

For whites, go with French chardonnay. The great white wines of Burgundy are incredibly versatile without being overtly oaky. Don’t be put off by labels that lead with place names rather than grape names. Look for good-value Pouilly-Fuissé or wines from the Mâcon-nais, if you’re having a big crowd. If you’re having a more intimate meal, splurge on some 1er cru Meursault, one of my favorite villages for elegant and complex chardonnays.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Mâcon, “Les Morizottes,” Marie-Pierre Manciat (Burgundy, France–2013), SRP \$14

Reds with turkey? Sure, but stay on the lighter side of things with bottles that echo cranberry and herb notes. I love “cru” wines from the 10 villages of Beaujolais that focus on the gamay grape. These are worlds apart from the el cheapo bottles of Beaujolais Nouveau that invade our grocery stores every November. Look for the villages of Morgon, Régnie and Moulin à Vent for gamay that is juicy, herbal and yummy, just like that perfect turkey you’re gonna master this year.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Moulin-a-Vent, Domaine Richard Rottiers (Beaujolais, France–2014), SRP \$20



2. BOTTLE FOR MY BOSS

You want to impress, but you don’t want to go too spendy. Remember that, in the era of smartphones, she can discover EXACTLY how much you spent on a given bottle in seconds—so establish your budget first. If you don’t know what she likes to drink, go red. It’s safer. I typically suggest better quality California pinot noir for bosses. Look to the Sonoma Coast and Russian River Valley appellations. Around \$65 buys you a spectacular pinot without breaking the bank.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Alquimista Cellars Pinot Noir, “Confluence” (Russian River Valley, CA–2013), SRP \$67



4. GIRLFRIEND GIFTING

No, she doesn’t want a scarf. She wants wine. Trust me. Buy the girlfriends on your list a decent bottle of dry rosé wine. Here in SoCal, it’s basically endless Mediterranean summer such that a refreshing bottle of pink is appropriate year-round. Dry rosés are currently the hottest category in wine sales in the U.S.—and for good reason. They’re versatile, comparatively lower in alcohol and delicious. I like rosés made primarily from Rhône varieties like grenache. Spend less than \$20 on this bottle, get a pocket calendar from the Dollar Spot at Target and circle the date on which you plan to drink this bottle together with her. Done.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Beckmen Vineyards, Grenache Rosé, “Purísima Mountain Vineyard” (Santa Ynez, CA–2014), SRP \$17

5. WINE FOR WRAPPING GIFTS

Maybe you’re like my friend Debbie. Debbie has a box for her label maker(s), which is carefully labeled “Label Makers.” Debbie likely has her shopping and wrapping done well before December 24. Maybe you’re like me. Bonnie has a Sharpie. Bonnie has a large—very large—pile of gifts to wrap, and it is almost midnight on the 24th. You need the right bottle of wine for this moment. Buy it ahead of time and look at it sitting in your wine rack when you need courage during the holiday season. It will be there for you when your husband has gone to sleep. Label it “Santa’s Gift to Me.” With a Sharpie, if you have one that works.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Peter Michael Sauvignon Blanc, “L’Après-Midi” (Knights Valley, CA–2014), SRP \$55

6. NEW YEAR’S EVE: THAT ONE SPECIAL BOTTLE

Champagne is tricky. Is it all smoke and mirrors, or does expensive Champagne really taste better? The region of Champagne is kind of like the story of David and Goliath, with the large houses like Moët, Clicquot and Mumm dominating the American market. If you’re going to spend on one special bottle for New Year’s (and you should, by the way), seek out a bottle of grower Champagne—the Davids or little guys—where the farmers grow, keep and carbonate their own bubbly. Look for the important letters “RM” on the bottle, which stand for “récoltant-manipulant” in French. It means the farmer made the fizz. It’s not that the big houses don’t make amazing products—they do, of course. But if you’re always drinking Yellow Label, you’re not exploring the complexity of this amazing region.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Champagne Pierre Péters, “Les Chétillons,” Blanc de Blancs Brut (Le Mesnil-sur-Oger, France–2009), SRP \$125



3. INEXPENSIVE PARTY BUBBLES (THAT WON’T GIVE YOUR GUESTS A HANGOVER OR EMBARRASS YOU)

You’re doing it. You’re giving a fabulous holiday party, and you’ve already blown your budget on food and décor. Are you doomed to serve crappy Trader Joe’s wines that all your guests know cost exactly \$6 because they’re definitely buying and drinking them at home too? Just say NO to Barefoot Bubbly, please. Your solution here is inexpensive European sparkling wines. They may cost less than \$10, but your guests likely won’t know that—and they often taste pretty darn amazing for the price. The obvious choice is Prosecco from Italy, but I actually prefer good-value Cava from Spain or well-made bubbles from places like Hungary. Check how the wines are made. The labels should say something about “método tradicional” or “méthode Champenoise.” These indicate more care was taken in the production method (fermentation inside the bottle). Less headaches for all.

SUGGESTED BOTTLE: Cava, Castell d’Age, “Cuvée Anne Marie,” Brut Nature (Peñedès, Spain), SRP \$12