



Jim Bryant recommends a variety of white wines for Christmas.

Wines for the Holidays

AS THE HOLIDAY SEASON approaches, I find that many people ask for the same advice, that is, what are my wine choices for meals prepared for these festive and joyous occasions?

For decades, my favorite holiday has been Thanksgiving, in part due to the lack of commercialism. In addition, much of the celebration involves great food and wine which makes for a natural fit for many of us. Furthermore, this is our first U.S. holiday and for those of us proud to be American, it is our holiday.

THANKSGIVING ZINFANDEL

The centerpiece for this meal for most is turkey—one of my favorite meats. With the traditional dressing and side dishes it provides a perfect backdrop for an all-American wine, Zinfandel. Although not an indigenous grape from America, it is Croatian in origin; however, the greatest number of and highest quality Zinfandels come from the U.S. The richness and spiciness of the grape makes for a near-perfect match with this meal. Seghesio makes a readily available \$25 wine as well as the Old Vine version. If you feel like splurging and going on a treasure hunt, my favorite two are Ridge Lytton Springs and Ridge Geyserville. Both are \$45 and worth every penny.



Pinot Noir for Thanksgiving.

THANKSGIVING PINOT NOIR

Many people think that Pinot Noir is best with turkey and I think it is great, but heavily spiced side dishes might overwhelm the more feminine versions of the wine. Louis Jadot produces various levels of quality which can fit most budgets. If you want to stay all American, I recommend Belle Glos' Las Alturas, and Clark & Telephone, and Goldeneye Gowan Creek Vineyard for a great match. There are many great choices, particularly

from the Willamette Valley (Oregon) or Sonoma (California), as well as many from Burgundy, the birthplace of Pinot Noir.

THANKSGIVING BEAUJOLAIS

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not endorse Beaujolais from one of the 10 crus (definitely not Beaujolais Nouveau). These wines are not



Wines for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

expensive (\$20-\$35) and I would recommend trying several from the different appellations or crus. These wines, although all 100% Gamay, range lighter to fuller in mouthfeel and thus pair with different flavors. In general, for this meal I prefer a richer, full expression of Gamay, e.g., from Moulin-a-Vent and Morgon. For those who prefer white wines, I recommend an off-dry Riesling, and in particular, I prefer Chateau Ste. Michelle Eroica.

CHRISTMAS APPETIZER & WINE

Turning to Christmas, I would like to offer one of my favorite festive appetizers. It is a small round of Brie, baked within a pastry accompanied by chutney and spread on slices of crisp apples. For an unforgettable experience, sip a glass of Viognier with each bite. I propose Guigal's Condrieu, or the rarer Guigal's Condrieu La Dorian, which may be the most beautiful wine label in the world. You will not forget this oral symphony.



Holiday Bordeaux.

CHRISTMAS EVE CHARDONNAY

For those who traditionally eat fish on Christmas Eve, I recommend Raeburn or Walter Hansel Chardonnay. They both have an element of richness, without being overly oaky. For those who enjoy shellfish at this time, lobster would go well with the above wines, but it pairs best with Corton Charlemagne, e.g., Louis Latour or Bonneau de Martray or Leeuwin Estate Art Series Chardonnay from Australia. Shrimp and scallops would be perfect with Chablis Premier or Grand Cru Chablis. Four value/quality ratio, I find William Fevre almost impossible to beat. I would recommend looking for 2014, 2016, or 2017 at this time. For a special treat with either fish or crustaceans, including King Crab, I highly recommend the El Enemigo Chardonnay from Argentina. It is a fantastic Chardonnay for a reasonable price (worth multiples).



Cabernet for the holidays.

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S EVE

For Christmas and New Year's Eve, many prefer either beef tenderloin or prime rib. These richly flavored big dishes show their best with rich, bold reds. Cabernet Sauvignon is very popular with both. A best buy remains Black Stallion from Napa Valley. Moving up in price, Stags Leap Winery Cabernet Sauvignon has a well-earned, loyal following. If you have 10- to 30-year-old Chateau Montelena Cabernet, I highly recommend this pairing, especially the '85, '86, '87, or '90 vintages. Also consider older vintages of Caymus Special Selection and Philip Togni. All are worthy.

For those who prefer old world Cabernet, any well-stored Bordeaux from the Left Bank included in the 1855 Medoc Classification would provide a memorable experience. As Cabernet Sauvignon lovers know, the richness of the dark black and red fruited wines pair well with richness of the meat. If you love pepper, I recommend pairing these rich meats with a great Châteauneuf-du-Pape. My favorites include Beaucastel, Vieux Telegraphe, Clos des Papes, and Domaine de Pegau. These wines are rich, voluptuous, and have distinctive pepper overtones which are a perfect complement to the pepper rub or seasoning on the meat.


For those who prefer ham at any of these occasions, I recommend pairing with a Beaujolais Cru or an off-dry Riesling such as the Chateau Ste. Michelle Eroica. Both are great complements.

PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE PORT

After any of these great meals, I enjoy one or more glasses of Port. If you want only Port, I

recommend a bottle of 20-year Tawny Port from Dows, Fonseca, Grahams, or Taylor. Once opened, the freshness lasts for 30 days.

For an out-of-this-world experience, I recommend securing a bottle of Vintage Port from one of the afore-mentioned producers from one of the following years: 1970, 1977, 1983, 1985, 1992, 1994, or 2000. Set the bottle upright for several days for the sediment to deposit.

Then, prepare plates with crackers with a slice of Stilton cheese on each. On a separate plate, place thin slices of crisp, sweet apples and a mound of fresh walnut pieces. After placing a wafer with Stilton in your mouth, chew some walnuts followed by eating the apple. Try to keep all in your mouth. Then drift a decanted glass of Vintage Port over this mélange and prepare to enter the New World. As my artist friend Bobby Joe Scribner says, "This surely is one of the greatest art forms ever invented." A Votre Santé! 



A selection of Châteauneuf-du-Pape wines.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.