

Holiday Wines

AS WE HEAD INTO THE THANKSGIVING, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year's holiday period, I would like to offer appropriate wine selections for typical foods served at each. Since many people offer some version of the same entrée at two or more of these holidays, I'll let the food, and not the holiday, drive the wine choices. ••• My favorite holiday of the year is Thanksgiving for the absence of excess spending encountered at Christmas, and because it is a day set aside that causes us to reflect on reasons to be thankful for what we have. It is also the first major holiday of the fall, and I tend to focus more on food when the weather is cooler.

The essence of food for Thanksgiving and Christmas revolves around turkey. During the rest of the year, my family occasionally has marinated turkey breast prepared by grilling which is always served with Pinot Noir either from the New or Old World. The preparation of whole turkey accompanied by such varied and flavorful side dishes opens up wide choices of accompanying wines. Because Thanksgiving is an American holiday, I tend to drink Pinot Noir from the United States. As a big fan of dressing, I lean toward a more masculine expression of the grape.

My favorite Pinot Noirs are reviewed in the QB article, Pinot Noir "The Holy Grail." Current good choices abound, but I recommend Gary Farrell's Russian River (\$30) and Belle Clos Las Alturas (\$35) for more full-bodied options, and Argyle (\$20) from the Willamette Valley (\$20) for a lighter style. The full-bodied choices go better not only with the dressing, but with other commonly served, flavorful items such as Brussels sprouts, cranberry relish, and butternut squash.

For those who prefer white wine with turkey, a Riesling at the Kabinett sweetness level (dry to off-dry) is nice. Riesling also goes well with baked ham. My favorite Riesling is the Eroica (\$20) from Chateau Ste. Michelle, which is from a joint venture by Germany's Dr. Ernst Loosen, one of the world's best Riesling producers, and the Washington-based Chateau Ste. Michelle. Eroica is consistently ranked in the top five wines from Washing-

ton and is often the only white so ranked. Pinot Gris also pairs well, and I like King Estate (\$20) from Oregon. Another good choice with turkey or crown roast of pork is Beaujolais (not Beaujolais Nouveau) particularly the Morgan appellation.

I am a huge fan of red Zinfandel and would not consider having Thanksgiving without a bottle on the table. As I have noted in previous articles mentioning Zinfandel, my favorite producer is Ridge. The Ridge Lytton Springs (\$35) and Ridge Geyserville (\$35) are my choices over all others and when paired with food. Nothing pairs better with the traditional turkey and all its trimmings. The CEO of Ridge, Paul Draper, hails from Barrington and has been the genius and winemaker behind all wines from Ridge since 1968. The Ridge wines do not identify themselves as Zinfandel, as a vineyard vine count some years ago revealed that Zinfandel vines constitute less than 75 percent of those planted and therefore, by law, should not be so labeled. However, the majority of the grapes in each are in fact Zinfandel. It should be noted that Ridge also produces Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon from the Montebello vineyards which are among my favorites of each varietal from the United States.

Many people serve beef, such as prime rib, at Christmas and New Year's. With beef, I prefer high-quality Cabernet Sauvignon from the United States, including Ridge Montebello (\$125), Chateau Montelena (\$100), or the Caymus Napa



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.

Valley (\$60). There is a spectacular Cabernet wine value from Chile called Manso de Valesco (\$35). It is made from 100-year-old vines. To the extent possible, I suggest you choose one of the above United States wines with several years of age.

Finally, I suggest that a Bordeaux would be a great choice with the prime rib meal. I relish older vintages of Pichon Lalande, Leoville-Las-Cases, Palmer, Cantemerle, or even First-Growth Bordeaux, if the budget permits. These prices will vary widely according to vintage and choice, yet a splurge is well worth it. After all, we all have only limited numbers of Christmases and New Year's left. A Sante! U

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