

A Toast to Holiday Wines

Take your wine choices a step further and discover some new varieties.

By Lisa Redwine



There's a fall chill in the air, and the holidays are rapidly approaching. It is hard not to think about all the special holiday meals to prepare, parties to attend and work functions to plan. In all that planning lies the inevitable question: What wine do I serve?

With the holidays being a fiscal challenge for many this year, it's time to look beyond the norms of what we serve and expand our horizons. There are many bargains to be had in the global wine marketplace, and the holidays are an opportunity to explore.

Beyond the usual

Look to broaden your palate by trying different varietals or favorites from different countries. Often we think of crisp white wines to pair with the richness of our holiday fare, so look beyond the world of Sauvignon Blanc and explore an interesting wine such as a Grüner Veltliner from Austria. The Leth Grüner Veltliner Steinagrund Lagen Reserva is a solid producer, not expensive and

a nice representation. Try an Albariño from Spain—I like Pazo de Señorans—or maybe even a Torrontes from Argentina. Pazo Pondal makes a nice Torrontes

Brachetto d'Acqui, a sweet red sparkling wine from the Piedmonte region in Italy, is a festive aperitif. At half the price of Champagne, this wine's red color, juicy acidity and bright bouquet will ignite your guests' appetites. It is a fantastic choice for dessert, and its minimal alcohol content makes it perfect for brunches and afternoon affairs. Banfi makes the Rosa Regale—it's easy to find. There are other producers, but Banfi is a good place to start.

Turkey time

The Thanksgiving Day meal offers challenges of its own, as no one makes the traditional turkey the same way. The many side dishes that accompany this festive meal offer an array of flavor combinations, as well. Then there is the turkey, which can be roasted, stuffed, fried or smoked. Each cooking method

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offers exciting opportunities to branch out and explore different wines.

With the popularity of fried turkey on the rise, try something on the lighter side. How about a Cortese from the Piedmonte region in Italy, such as the Banfi Gavi Principessa Perlant '05? It is bright and lively, slightly earthy, with a hint of spritz on the palate. Or try a sparkling Cava from Penedes in Spain. We all know the famous black bottle of Frexinet, but try a small producer, such as Castellblanch.

For red-wine lovers, I like Barbara, again from the Piedmonte region, or a Pinot Noir from the Russian River. Both of these wines offer a varied selection in a range of prices. Neither is overly tannic for the fried turkey, and they offer the needed acidity to cut through the richness.

I smoked a turkey a couple of years ago, and have never looked back. When you open the barbecue, the heady smoky aromas fill the air. The challenge is to find a wine to complement the delicate smokiness of the turkey without

overwhelming it. I found it best to stay away from over-oaked, high-alcohol wines. The bright flavors and minerality of Pinot Gris or Gewürztraminer from Alsace pairs nicely. I am a big fan of Dirler, or even an Oregon Pinot Noir works well.

A glass of Riesling

Being German, I grew up drinking German Riesling for Thanksgiving. My mouth waters at the thought of my grandmother's perfectly browned turkey coming out of her Nesco electric roaster.

For me, a Kabinett or Charta Riesling is the way to go. I am a huge fan of the Barth Charta Rieslings from the Rheingau. The slight fruitiness and compelling acidity are the perfect foil for any roasted turkey/stuffing combination. I love a Cru Morgan, made out of the Gamay grape from Beaujolais. Its soft fruitiness, light tannins and easy finish offer something for all palates, and will satisfy both red-wine and white-wine fans.

A gift of wine

Special wines make wonderful gifts, as well. One of my favorite wines to give

as a gift is a vintage Madeira. Available in a range of styles from dry to sweet, or very old vintages, it is a perfect choice because it never goes bad, pairs amazingly well with cheese (one of my favorite foods) and feels festive. It's a wine that offers uniqueness and a sense of occasion and thoughtfulness.

This year, with the woes of the economy, the presidential election and world affairs, it's time to pull a cork, pour a glass of whatever you enjoy and truly celebrate. Wine has a magic all its own that makes lifelong friends out of strangers, makes a meal a feast and makes the holidays a time of magical memories.

Lisa Redwine is wine director/manager at The Shores Restaurant, located at La Jolla Shores Hotel, La Jolla, Calif., owned/operated by La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club, Inc. She is a graduate of the hotel and restaurant management program at the University of Wisconsin—Stout, Menomonie, Wis., and has a degree in culinary arts from The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y. Redwine is a certified sommelier from the Court of Master Sommeliers and a certified wine professional.