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Six Festive, Budget-Friendly Wines to Cheer Up a Dreary Year

5 Dec

With turmoil in the Middle East, Europe's leaders paralyzed and politicians in the U.S. unable to agree on anything, it seems that we could all use a little extra cheer this year. Because we may need to celebrate a little bit more, we may also need to celebrate a little more inexpensively. Here are a few reasonably priced wines to brighten your holidays.

Prosecco is the delicate, crisp, refreshing, charming, fruity, sophisticated yet casual sparkling wine that Italians, especially in the Veneto, sip (occasionally) in the morning, (more regularly in) the afternoon and evening. **Mionetto**, one of Italy's largest Prosecco producers, offers many choices. Its **IL** line (\$12 SRP*) comes in three versions—**Prosecco**, Moscato and Rosé. The Prosecco is *frizzante* (lightly sparkling), light bodied, fresh and crisp with pear, citrus, apple and peach aromas and flavors.

IL Prosecco makes an excellent aperitif and complements light cuisine. It's perfect in Bellinis, the signature drink of Venice, and other cocktails. It's lighter in body than Champagne, lower in alcohol (10.5%), easy on the pocketbook, great for parties—and terribly easy to sip all day long. But it's not a wine to cellar—it's best within three months of purchase.

For something more elegant, try **Korbel's 2008 Natural Russian River Valley Champagne** (\$14 SRP, 12.5% alcohol). Like French Champagne, it's made using the *méthode traditionnelle* (formerly called the *méthode champenoise*), in which the wine is fermented inside the bottle from which it's served. Korbel also uses traditional French Champagne grapes—in this case 65% Pinot Noir and 35% Chardonnay. The wine is crisp, dry, delicate and delicious—delicious enough to have been served at the last seven presidential Inaugurations. Korbel notes that its Natural is one of the few things both political parties agree on. The wine fares well as an aperitif and also with lighter fish dishes, grilled prawns and fresh fruit, especially citrus and apples.

While it's been around since Roman times, when it was called Moscatellum, Moscato today is all the rage. It's recently seen phenomenal growth. Over the 52 weeks ending Nov. 12, according to Nielsen, sales of Muscat wines in the U.S. grew 75.3% while the wine market overall grew about 2.9%. Danny Brager, vice president of Nielsen, has dubbed it one of this year's "speeding bullets." It's no longer just the darling of wine connoisseurs. Hip-hop artists—Nelly, Eminem, Lil' Kim and Kanye West—have embraced the wine in their songs and their beverage preferences, and their audience has followed. Others have too.

The versatile muscat grape, which ranges from dry to sweet, comes in four main varieties. One of the loveliest is Italy's **Moscato d'Asti**, a medium-sweet wine from Piedmont. Moscato d'Asti is fizzy (aka *frizzante*) and light, with heady fruit and floral aromas. It's delightful, seductive and delicate—never overpowering. One of the loveliest Moscato d'Astis is **Vietti's Cascinetta 2010** (\$17 SRP, 5.5% alcohol), with aromas and flavors of peaches, apricots and rose petals. Try it as an aperitif, as well as with cookies, panettone, pastries, fruit and fruit-based desserts and blue cheese.

You may have guessed by now that every region in Italy makes its own sparkling wine. Piedmont is a leading producer of them. In addition to Moscato d'Asti, **Brachetto d'Acqui**, a fizzy, aromatic, light red, made from Brachetto grapes in the town of Acqui Terme, also dates back to ancient times. Legend has it that Julius Caesar and Marc Antony presented Cleopatra with several gourds of Brachetto d'Acqui as a gift when they were vying for her affections. It's also said she believed the wine had the power to unleash the passion of her lovers. If you know anyone whose passion you'd like to inspire, you might try it.

One of the most charming Brachettos is **Vigne Regali's** semi-dry (i.e. slightly sweet) **Rosa Regale** (\$20 SRP). It's low in alcohol (7%), has the aroma of rose petals and raspberries and the flavor of strawberries. It's surprisingly versatile: it works with savory food including spicy Asian and Latino dishes, quiches, ham and other brunch foods and some seafood dishes, and it shines as an aperitif and with desserts of fresh berries and chocolate. Rosa Regale is conveniently available in many sizes, from single-serve 187-ml bottles to magnums, the equivalent of 2 bottles of wine.

At Washington's **Pacific Rim** winery, Riesling rules (see www.rieslingrules.com). Formerly owned by self-described "Riesling fanatic" Randall Graham, Riesling remains Pacific's Rim's focus (talented winemaker Nicolas Quillé serves as vice president of the International Riesling Foundation [drinkriesling.com])—and Pacific Rim's wines remain excellent values.

Grapes for Pacific Rim's **Vin de Glacière 2010** (\$14 SRP, 375 ml, 9% alcohol) are grown in the Wallula Vineyard, the first and only biodynamic and organic-certified vineyard in Washington, where 150 sheep roam around the vineyard eating weeds. Unlike high-priced ice wines, the grapes for this wine are frozen after they're picked. With aromas and flavors of apricot, pear and honey, the wine goes especially well with fruit tarts, cheesecake and blue cheese. In addition to being delightful with dessert, it's delightful as dessert.

Port, a fortified wine with about 20% alcohol, is made in several different styles, with three-vintage, tawny and ruby—being best known. Unlike prestigious vintage Ports, ruby Ports are nonvintage (obviously), simple, fruity, inexpensive and delicious when young. One of the most popular in the U.S. is **Fonseca's Bin No. 27** (\$18 SRP), technically a step up, a ruby reserve. It's a great introduction to Port. Bin No. 27 has aromas and flavors of black fruit, especially blackberry, and cassis and is an excellent match with milk chocolate, dark chocolate, berries and cherries and desserts made with them.

Although 48 grape varieties are permitted in Port, Bin. No. 27 uses six: Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Barroca, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão and Tinta Amarela. If you'd like to become a member of The Wine Century Club (winecentury.com), for adventurous wine lovers who've tasted at least 100 different wine grapes, this is a wine to try!

*The wines can usually be found for less than the SRP (suggested retail price), sometimes considerably less. To get some idea of prices in the marketplace, check out wine-searcher.com. (These wines range from about \$6.50 to \$16.)

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[The Food Lover's Guide to Wine by Karen Page with Andrew Dornenburg](#)

[21 Nov](#)

Every year hundreds of new cookbooks and books about food and books about wine join the thousands already published. But books about food and wine, well, that's a different story. You can count them on one hand—well, maybe two or three hands. Fortunately, Karen Page and Andrew Dornenburg, the First Couple of Food-and-Wine, have just written their second book that explains and simplifies the task of choosing the right wine and the art of pairing food and wine.

The Food Lover's Guide to Wine (Little, Brown; 336 pp.; \$35) picks up where *What to Drink with What You Eat* left off by describing the flavors of some 250 wines and varietals. (The authors' nickname for the new book is "The Flavor Bible for Wine Drinkers.") It calls upon the familiar language of food as the logical tool to understanding wine. The authors' premise is that "if you love food, you know flavor — and you can master wine."

The guide is very timely. While more and more Americans are interested in wine—as of 2011, the U.S. is the world's number-one consumer of it—many are overwhelmed by the thousands of choices. The authors aim to educate consumers and demystify wine, to take the fear out of buying wine and matching it with food. And they do it so well—clearly, comprehensively, enthusiastically.

The heart of the book is a hefty chapter that profiles more than 250 different wines by grape, region, intensity, acidity, flavors, texture, food pairings, notable producers and more. In this section, you really get to know the characteristics of and differences among the wines. Included, of course, are the usual suspects—Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon—and many of the unusual, like Roter Veltliner, Saperavi, Taurasi, Terroldogo, Tsinandali.

To further illuminate this complex subject, they have enlisted the help of dozens of the world's best sommeliers. Their opinions, advice, passions, loves and secrets play a crucial and entertaining part in this book.

I especially enjoyed the dozens of helpful sidebars on topics like "Matching Wine to Common Dishes," "Go-To Wines: Sommeliers' Picks of Wines That Never Let Them Down," "Choosing a Wine by Flavors," "Wines Under \$15," "Second Label [Lower-Priced] Wines [from Top Producers]." The last chapter, a valuable resource, features recommended books, websites and magazines.

Bottom Line: With Page and Dornenburg as your guides, you'll feel comfortable selecting wine, serving it and enjoying it regularly. Their love of wine and food is infectious. They've written another must-have book for anyone interested in food-and-wine pairing or furthering their understanding of wine. It's empowering, eminently browsable and just plain fun.

For more information on the authors, go to www.becomingachef.com

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Let's Talk Turkey: Think Young, Food Friendly and Fruity When Choosing Wines for Thanksgiving

16 Nov

Before Big Macs, Whoppers and Kentucky fried chicken, before hot dogs, corn dogs and chili dogs, there was Thanksgiving. Actually, Thanksgiving dinner, which dates back to the early 1600s, is America's oldest food tradition. Today most families cherish their own traditions and serve the same dishes year after year. The menu is practically written in stone. You risk the wrath of Uncle Bill or Aunt Rose, not to mention cousin Sam or mother-in-law Miriam, if you remove any item from the repertoire. "Americans would no sooner change the menu for Thanksgiving dinner than paint the White House beige," writes Diana Karter Appelbaum in her book *Thanksgiving: An American Holiday, An American Tradition*.

While the menu may require little planning, the food-and-wine pairing probably needs some attention. Although matching wine with turkey is a cinch—almost any wine, from a medium-bodied white to a fairly robust red, will work—matching wine with turkey, marshmallow-topped sweet-potato casserole, creamed onions, Brussels sprouts, cranberry sauce, giblet gravy and—oh, yes!—stuffing that's often laden with oysters, chestnuts, dried fruit, sausage, mushrooms, celery and/or seasonings—well, that's another story entirely! Fortunately, there are several wines that can best handle all the diverse flavors.

And there are some general principles to keep in mind.

- 1) With a cornucopia of different flavors like these, simple, young, fruity wines are best. (Pairing simple wines with complex dishes is a basic food-and-wine-matching tenet.) It's wise to stay away from heavily oaked and high-tannin wines. And it's not the time to uncork your most expensive wines. It's smarter to save them for occasions when fewer sweet dishes, which don't really pair well with complex, sophisticated wines, are on the agenda.
- 2) Because Thanksgiving is usually a lengthy affair, it presents a perfect opportunity to pour several wines, at least a white and a red. After all, abundance is what Thanksgiving is all about.
- 3) Some think American wines are most appropriate for this particular holiday, but I don't subscribe to that theory. Isn't it American to welcome those from other countries to our own?

Now, on to the particulars. Since Thanksgiving is a celebratory day, why not get things rolling with a **sparkling wine or Champagne**? These bubbly are festive, invigorating and well loved. They make any day special—and a special day more so. Their fans will not be unhappy with them throughout this meal.

There are two excellent whites to move on to. **Riesling** is one. Many wine experts consider it to be the best and noblest variety of all. Rieslings are vibrant, with floral, fruity (apple, peach, pear, citrus, tropical) and mineral aromas and flavors. One of their great virtues is their versatility: No wine goes better with food. Their fruitiness, crisp acidity and low alcohol level (German Rieslings range from 7% to 11%) make them a great choice almost anytime, and especially for Thanksgiving. Wine importer Terry Theise says, "Once people try German Rieslings at Thanksgiving, they'll never drink anything else." I recommend off-dry (the German Spätlese) versions, because a touch of sweetness matches the sweetness in this meal. "The dry wine you think will be great with the turkey," says Theise, "will be castrated by the candied yams." German Kabinett (dry to off-dry) are a viable, less expensive alternative. Many think that the best Rieslings in the U.S.—and they are very good indeed—are made in New York's Finger Lakes region. They're surprisingly similar to German Rieslings. Washington also often handles the varietal well. (See recommended producers below.)

If you are interested in something white yet different and exotic, you might try a **Gewürztraminer**. Gewürztraminers, which translates as "spicy grapes," are distinctive, wildly aromatic wines with honeysuckle, rose petal, lichee, apricot and grapefruit aromas and flavors and a rich, luscious texture. They're full bodied and complement heavier meals. Alsations drink them with rich pâtés, foie gras and choucroute garni. In the U.S., they're often considered one of the best wines to accompany spicy Asian dishes. Their spicy quality meshes with the Thanksgiving cranberry sauce, froufrou stuffings and other side dishes.

Kerry Norton, winemaker at Washington's Columbia Winery, touts Gewürztraminer as the perfect Thanksgiving wine. "Gewürztraminer spices up the meal," he says. "It stands out; it wants to be noticed. What better time is there to serve it than at Thanksgiving, where the food can be prosaic?"

Some years ago, wine guru Robert Parker wrote in *Food & Wine* magazine about the wines he features at his Thanksgiving table. "I believe that the stuffing [should] dictate the type of wine that should be served," he said. "Our stuffing is ... a spicy, boldly flavored bread, sausage and celery combination While the turkey itself has relatively straightforward flavors and could easily be matched with a multitude of medium- to full-bodied white wines (such as a California Chardonnay, an Oregon Pinot Gris or a French white Burgundy), the addition of the sausage and aromatic poultry seasoning in the stuffing requires a wine of considerable richness and unmistakable personality." That wine, Parker wrote, is an Alsatian Gewürztraminer. Alsace is the region most associated with this particular grape and produces fantastic versions. Good ones are also made in the U.S.

Norton sees Gewürztraminer as a wine to jazz up a bland meal; Parker sees it as a wine that can handle a complex meal. Taste is subjective, but one thing's for sure: Gewürztraminer is a wine to try on this particular holiday.

Francophile wine-shop owner, importer and author Kermit Lynch suggests both whites and reds for Thanksgiving. "I find that Alsatian wine [which is virtually all white] is in the right spirit for this holiday," he writes. "Beaujolais, too. Both, in their perfumes, contain memories of the past harvest's bounty, which is what we are giving thanks for, right?" You bet.

Beaujolais comes in several levels. All are made from the Gamay grape, with flavors of blackberries, raspberries and cherries. They're low in alcohol, food friendly and should be served slightly chilled. Since Thanksgiving is a meal that celebrates the harvest, Beaujolais Nouveau is

appropriate. It's the first wine of the season, readied in just a few weeks; it becomes available on the third Thursday of November. It's fresh, grapey and simple. If you want something a little more serious, which I recommend, Beaujolais-Villages wines are a couple of steps up, and are even better turkey-and-trimmings matches. Beaujolais-cru wines, from ten designated areas, have more character and complexity and are best of all. In fact, they are probably the ideal red wines for this holiday repast. Look for Fleurie, Moulin-à-Vent and Morgon.

For something trendier, you could try **Pinot Noir**. It's the grape that on its own (it's rarely blended, except in Champagne and other sparkling wines) makes the great reds of Burgundy. It has fewer tannins than Bordeaux's Cabernet Sauvignon, the other superstar French red grape. When Pinot Noirs are at their height, they can be astounding—elegant, complex, silky, smooth, subtle, charming and seductive.

Pinot Noir is made in two styles: fruity or earthy. California Pinot Noirs usually fall in the first category, with flavors of cherries, strawberries, raspberries and plums, and thus are ideal for Thanksgiving. Their fruit complements the sweet food yet doesn't overwhelm it. Pinot Noirs also shine in Oregon, where the climate is not unlike Burgundy's. The wines tend to be closer to Burgundy's in style.

If you like Cabernet Sauvignon, which is best with red meats and usually too powerful for this particular dinner, you might offer the more approachable **Cabernet Franc**, its lesser known, and often overlooked, relative. (Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc are thought to be Cabernet Franc's parents.) Cabernet Franc is one of the grapes used in Bordeaux blends and a mainstay in Loire Valley reds. Cabernet Franc is light- to medium-bodied, fruitier and more aromatic than the weightier Cabernet Sauvignon. Its refreshing acidity and low tannins make it notably versatile. Look for lighter-style French versions from Chinon, Bourgueil, Anjou and Saumur. New York State produces worthy Cabernet Francs, and those from Washington have received good reviews too.

Zinfandel is often recommended for this holiday in part because it's thought of as an all-American wine (even though its ancestry has been traced back to Croatia, where it's called Crljenak Kastelanski!). Its spicy-peppery, fruity flavor goes well with the meal, but it tends to be high in tannins and very high in alcohol (as high as 17%), which would accentuate the heaviness of the food. Since the Thanksgiving feast is often the most elaborate meal of the year and the turkey is laced with sleep-inducing tryptophan, heavy, highly alcoholic wines may be overwhelming. They may even put your guests to sleep! In general, it's a good idea to stick with lighter, low-alcohol wines. I'd look elsewhere for my Thanksgiving wine.

If you and your guests are still vertical after dinner and you would like to serve a dessert wine, I suggest a **Moscato d'Asti** from Piedmont **or a similar slightly sparkling Muscat wine**. Moscato d'Asti is sweet, white, light, low in alcohol, with heady fruit and floral aromas—think peaches, apricots, orange blossoms. It's delicate, elegant, charming and never overpowering. Non-sparkling Muscat wines are also a fine option, although they tend to be heavier and higher in alcohol. There are good ones made in the U.S. as well as lovely Muscats de Beaumes-de-Venise from the southern Rhône.

It's important to remember that while there are rules and guidelines for matching food and wine, drinking what you like is always a good choice. You won't go wrong if you go with your favorites. But remember too that your favorites may not be your guests' favorites. And because Thanksgiving is such a large meal and you'll probably need more than one bottle, it's a perfect time to experiment and try something new. Who knows? You just might discover something wonderful—something else to give thanks for.

Recommended Producers

Sparkling wine:

Spanish Cavas: Aria, Cristalino, Freixenet, Segura Viudas, Sumarroca; *U.S.:* Korbelt, Chandon, Gruet, Roederer, Schramsberg; *New Zealand:* Lindauer; *France:* St. Hilaire; Champagne: That's another story

Riesling:

Germany: Dr. Pauly-Bergweiler, Kurt Darting, Dr. Loosen, J.J. Prum, J.u.H.A. Strub, Selbach and Selbach-Oster, St.-Urbans-Hof; *New York:* Dr. Konstantin Frank, Hermann J. Wiemer, Salmon Run; *Washington:* Pacific Rim, Hogue, Chateau Ste. Michelle, Columbia Crest, Covey Run

Gewürztraminer:

California: Handley; *New York:* Lenz; *Washington:* Chateau Ste. Michelle, Columbia Crest, Covey Run, Hogue; *France:* Léon Beyer, Lucien Albrecht, Pierre Sparr, Hugel, Trimbach, Weinbach, Zind-Humbrecht

Beaujolais:

Georges Duboeuf, Joseph Drouhin, Durdilly, Louis Jadot, Jacky Janodet, Louis Latour, Marcel Lapierre, Trenal Fils, Vissoux

Pinot Noir:

California: Acacia, Beringer, Cambria, Camelot, Cartlidge & Browne, Castle Rock, Clos du Bois, Estancia, Gallo of Sonoma, Kendall-Jackson, Meridian, Montpellier, Napa Ridge, Redwood Creek, Robert Mondavi, Saintsbury, Sebastiani; *Oregon:* Argyle, Cooper Mountain, Firesteed, Lemelson, Ponzi, Wine by Joe

Cabernet Franc:

France: Catherine & Pierre Bréton, Bernard Baudry, Cave de Saumur, Caves des Vignerons, Charles Joguet, Joel Taluau, Olga Raffault, Saint Vincent, Sauvion, Thierry Germain; *New York:* Lamoreaux Landing

Muscat dessert wines: *California:* Bonny Doon, Novella, Quady, Robert Pecota; *Italy* (Moscato d'Asti): Ceretto, Chiarlo, Contratto, Vietti; *France* (Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise): Coyeux, Durban, Paul Jaboulet Aîné; *Israel:* Golan

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White Wine Lovers Flock in Droves to New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc

13 Nov

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is a great success story, a phenomenon really. Although the first vines were planted in Marlborough as recently as 1973 and the first wine made in commercial amounts in 1980, by the early '90s, Sauvignon Blanc had become the country's flagship wine. Soon after, it started to capture much attention and gain fans in the U.S. In doing so, it rejuvenated and redefined the Sauvignon Blanc category. Now its style is emulated by others worldwide.

Over the past year ending on August 20, according to Nielsen, New Zealand wines had the fastest growth rate of all import countries it measured. Volume went up 31.8%. (More than 90% of New Zealand wine sales in the U.S. are Sauvignon Blanc.) And, says Nielsen, sales of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc are growing much faster than those of U.S. Sauvignon Blanc.

Why? The wines have flair. The words often used to describe them are racy, zingy, zippy, zesty, bold, exuberant—all very upbeat, appealing qualities. The wines have distinctive, pungent, powerful aromas and flavors and lots of character and personality, occasionally even bordering on flamboyance. It's a style that's caught on like wildfire. Mary-Ewing Mulligan and Ed McCarthy wrote in *Wine Style*: "Many Sauvignon Blanc wines from the Marlborough region redefine the term aromatics, so intense are their passion fruit, green citrus, or vegetal aromas and flavors."

Most of the country's Sauvignon Blanc is grown in Marlborough, New Zealand's premier wine-producing region, at the north end of the South Island. Marlborough's dry, sunny days and cool maritime nights—no point in New Zealand is farther than 70 miles from the sea—suit the varietal, as does the long growing season.

In the U.S. the wines are easy to find, easy to open—upwards of 95% have screw caps—and often easy on the pocketbook. Here are some brands to know and four delicious wines I tasted recently, either with the winemaker or from samples I received.

Recommended Wineries and Wines

Cloudy Bay (www.cloudybay.co.nz) was named in 1770 when British naval Captain James Cook was navigating the New Zealand coast. The winery that took its name was founded in 1985. Cloudy Bay is usually considered the best New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Master Sommelier Vincent Gasnier wrote in *Top 10 Wines: Australia and New Zealand*: "Cloudy Bay defined the archetypal New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and became an international celebrity." In September, Drinks International released its list of the World's Most Admired Wine Brands, a comprehensive industry poll of the world's best regarded wines, and Cloudy Bay was among the Top 10.

Cloudy Bay Marlborough 2010: Aromas and flavors of lime, grapefruit, mango, nectarine, gooseberry and orange blossoms. Mineral tones. Elegant and crisp. Most New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs are cold fermented in stainless steel, but a small portion of this wine spent time in old French oak barriques. An excellent value at \$25 SRP (suggested retail price*).

In 1943 Nikola Nobilo, a Croatian immigrant, planted his first vines in his new home west of Auckland, at the north end of the North Island. Nobilo became one of New Zealand's pioneering winemakers. He played an important role in steering plantings toward Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir and developing the Marlborough region. Today **Nobilo** (nobilo.co.nz), now owned by Constellation NZ, is one of the top-selling New Zealand brands in the U.S.

Nobilo Regional Collection Marlborough 2010 (\$14, SRP): Aromas and flavors of lime, pineapple, melon, passion fruit and tropical fruits; fresh, crisp, fruit forward. An excellent value.

Dashwood (www.vavasour.com) was founded in 1989 by Vavasour Wines, which made its wine with grapes from the Ataware Valley. But Vavasour wanted to offer a different style, one with crisp acidity, vibrant fruit flavors and intense aromatics, so it created Dashwood, which blends grapes from the Wairau Valley for their fruit character and grapes from the Ataware Valley for their flinty, mineral character.

Dashwood Marlborough 2010 (\$14, SRP): Aromas and flavors of pineapple, melon, white peach, citrus and mango. An excellent value.

Martinborough, at the south end of the North Island, and Marlborough, right across the Cook Strait, are similar to each other in soil profile and climate. But **Craggy Range** (<http://www.craggyrange.com>) believes that the small differences are critical. It opted for Martinborough, generally thought of as Pinot Noir territory, for its Sauvignon Blanc because it believes that the wines are more extracted, complex and structured, with more subtle aromatics and greater elegance. Try them side by side with some Marlborough wines to see if you agree.

Craggy Range Te Muna Road Martinborough 2010 (\$22 SRP): Aromas and flavors of lime, passion fruit and herbs. This wine is fermented in French oak barriques and stainless steel tanks.

Foods that pair especially well with New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc: Tomatoes, salads, vegetarian soups, vegetarian dishes; goat and many other cheeses; seafood, shellfish; light chicken, veal and turkey dishes; Indian, Thai, Chinese and Japanese dishes, including spicy ones; dishes with herbs and garlic

*Note: Wines can usually be found for less money—sometimes considerably less—than their SRP. Check out wine-searcher.com to get an idea of discounted prices.

Tags: [aromatic wines](#), [Marlborough](#), [New Zealand](#), [Sauvignon Blanc](#)

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“Unquenchable: A Tippy Quest for the World’s Best Bargain Wines” by Natalie MacLean

1 Nov

On her journey searching for some of the planet’s best bargain wines, Natalie MacLean sampled an astounding 15,267 wines at 312 wineries in 8 countries on 5 continents so you don’t have to. You can just sit back in your favorite chair and read her book and learn and enjoy and laugh. The only drawback: You’ll have to supply your own wine.

MacLean’s an accredited sommelier, a “lover of both bargains and grapes.” She’s extraordinarily accomplished. Among her citations: four James Beard Foundation Journalism awards, six Bert Green Awards for excellence in food journalism and the 2009 Louis Roederer International Wine Writing Award. She was named the World’s Best Drink Writer by the World Food Media Awards.

I think of her as the Energizer Bunny of the wine world. As she says in her video promoting her book, “I’m always eating and drinking for the sake of my readers.” Afterwards, she writes books, magazine articles, and print wine columns that reach more than 5 million readers. She’s got a website, a blog, an e-newsletter, a Wine Picks and Pairings mobile app (and other apps, of course) for smart phones. And naturally she tweets and has a gazillion Facebook friends.

In *Unquenchable: A Tippy Quest for the World’s Best Bargain Wines* (Perigee, \$24, 344 pp.), which is part memoir, part travelogue and part wine guide, MacLean shares her adventures at wineries in Australia, Germany, Canada (where she lives), South Africa, Italy, Argentina, Portugal and France. And, to wrap things up, she makes a stop at the famed bar in New York City’s Algonquin Hotel.

In each chapter, she recounts her visits with several winemakers and paints colorful portraits of them. They come to life, and you feel privileged to accompany MacLean on her rounds. Ernst Loosen of Germany’s Dr. Loosen wine estate, for example, expounds on what makes Mosel Riesling special: “When I drink Mosel riesling, I want to *smell* the blue slate soil that formed the fruit. I want to *taste* the memory of the old vines, and I want to *feel* the rain and the sun that year. Without all of this, wine is just another drink.” Loosen extols the virtues of riesling: “Many wines are big and fat and that’s it, you know, but riesling is strong and delicate at the same time. It has many facets, like a diamond, depending on when and where you taste it and what you’re looking for.”

The wines she devotes the most time to are Shiraz, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc, Nero d’Avola, Malbec, Port and Provence rosés. The end of each chapter features “Field Notes from a Wine Cheapskate,” which includes insider tips, the websites of the wineries she concentrated on, the best value wines, top-value producers, special pairings and resource suggestions.

MacLean suggests you “read the book for the adventure stories,” and then visit her website, www.nataliemaclean.com, for recipes, photos, website addresses, wines she liked that are in stores now and much, much more. There’s plenty that will capture your interest.

Bottom Line: *Unquenchable* will undoubtedly inspire you to undertake your own wine journeys—whether to the supermarket or to faraway continents.

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Embedded Generosity: Buy Flipflop Wines, Do Good, Drink Well—Very Inexpensively

22 Sep

Americans’ love for shopping and their penchant for giving can easily be gratified in one fell swoop these days. Because buying for yourself and helping others at the same time is a very appealing proposition, especially in times of economic hardship, it’s been gaining ground as a marketing strategy.

Embedded generosity, as it’s called, seamlessly incorporates charitable donations into the price of merchandise. You buy the item; the producer donates to charity. Giving doesn’t get any easier. The concept was featured by trendwatching.com, a self-described “independent and opinionated trend firm,” on its list of 10 Crucial Consumer Trends for 2010.

Several wine producers have partnered with charities to join the movement. One brand that has created an exceptional deal is **flipflop** wines (www.flipflopwines.com), which launched this year. In addition to giving to charity, they offer very good value, with a suggested retail price of just \$7—and the wines can often be found for \$5 or \$6.

The producer of these seven award-winning screw-capped wines, meant for casual everyday drinking, has partnered with Soles4Souls, which distributes slightly used and new shoes to needy people in 127 countries. Since 2004, Soles4Souls has given away more than 13 million pairs of shoes, currently distributing a pair every seven seconds. flipflop will donate a pair of flip-flop sandals, up to 100,000 pairs in 2011, for each bottle of wine purchased.

The seven varietals include Pinot Grigio, Riesling, Chardonnay, Moscato, Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The quality is excellent for the price, and most of the wines have already been declared Best Buys by print wine magazines. Winemaker David Georges pointed out that “it’s harder to make good inexpensive wine than good expensive wine,” which after he says it seems obvious. These wines are a testament to his skill.

Georges adheres to the “recycle, reduce, reuse” philosophy, so this arrangement especially suits him. However, the label’s name refers not to the shoe charity but to Georges’ proclivity to work in the vineyards wearing his favorite flip-flops. Whatever, it’s certainly the beginning of a beautiful partnership.

Recommended Wines (I received samples of these wines)

NOTE: flipflop's informative back labels include tasting notes, food-matching suggestions, storage information and a dryness-sweetness scale

2010 Pinot Grigio: Light bodied, refreshing, good acidity, flavors and aromas of citrus, apple and pear (more flavorful than most Pinot Grigios), medium dry to medium sweet

2010 Riesling: Medium bodied, flavors and aromas of peach, apricot and melon, medium sweet to sweet

2010 Moscato: Light bodied, good acidity, delightful floral and fruity aromas, medium sweet to sweet, good with Asian food or dessert

2010 Pinot Noir: Light to medium bodied, aromas and flavors of cherry, spice and vanilla, dry to medium dry, exceptional bargain

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