

EATDRINK

A GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE



ANTHONY GISMONDI
IN THE CELLAR

HOLIDAY PARTIES

How to deliver the perfect hostess gift

BY ANTHONY GISMONDI

Most of you will attend at least one, if not several, holiday parties this month and to make sure you do not arrive empty-handed, we have come up with a number of gift ideas for the host.

Hostess gifts are hardly obligatory, but during the holidays, wrapping up a wine or two should not be a burden.

That said, finding the right wine requires the same due diligence that finding any other gift requires. Planning ahead is the key to success, although few of us ever find the time — which is why I'm suggesting you now cut this column out of the paper (or, if you are online, hit the print button) and head to the nearest specialty wine shop or government liquor store. Get the job done early.

Before you go, ask yourself a few questions about the kind of wine the host really enjoys. Do they prefer red or white? Should it be New World or Old World? Do they like traditional varietal wine like chardonnay or cabernet sauvignon, or perhaps something more edgy like viognier or grüner veltliner or petit sirah? Perhaps a red blend is in order, or an organic, biodynamic, sustainable label, either old or young. It all matters.

Depending upon your budget, you may want to search for a limited edition or special reserve label — but never feel you have to spend a fortune. It is not about the money, it is all about selecting a wine that demonstrates you did a bit of work.

Over the years, I have observed and learned a few things about the hostess gift that may help you with your selection. Most impor-



Sparkling wine makes a good gift.

tantly, the gift is for the host not the people attending the party. Do not expect the host to open the wine you just gave them: in fact, you should insist they put it away to enjoy on a future occasion.

Meanwhile, hosts who suspect the wine they are receiving is particularly meaningful to the gift-giver may consider tagging the bottle with that information and, sometime in the future, share the bottle in question with the gift-giver. Now, if I have managed to convince you that wine will work, here are some suggestions to buy,

wrap and deliver over the holidays. The most important piece of advice is, don't wait until the last minute.

Sparkling wine is the ultimate hostess gift because it's something we seldom buy for ourselves. It is both festive and celebratory and, best of all, everyone should have a bottle of bubble in the house that they can quickly chill and serve whenever required. To make your bottles sparkle, dress them festively in clear or coloured cellophane — perfect to see the bottle — and tie with ribbons of natural or coloured raffia.

Your choices can run the gamut from local sparklers, Spanish cava and Italian Prosecco to French champagne and my suggestion for 2010: a sparkling rose. Our current favourite: **Segura Viudas Cava Brut Rosado**, a Spanish blend of trefpat, garnacha and monastrell grapes. We love its bright raspberry colour, attractive persistent creamy mousse and fresh nutty, cherry, baked pear and citrus flavours; the perfect tapas wine you can pour freely before dinner.

Quirky off-the-beaten-path wines are perfect for the curious wine-lover host. The Austrian grüner veltliner fits this type as does the aromatic torrontés from Argentina, petite sirah, mourvèdre and more. Our choice is a delicious bottle of **Laurenz V. Und Sophie Singing Grüner Veltliner 2007**. The Singing Grüner Veltliner is a cutting-edge white that often beats the world's best in blind tastings because it is so damned fresh and drinkable. Look for a spicy, white pepper character and crunchy fruit flavours flecked with honey and lemon. Oysters, anyone?

For the host who likes wine and

food and who regularly serves them at the table, a "food-friendly" wine is always welcomed. Affordable, balanced red wine that works with a variety of menu items is a great choice, and our pick is **Las Rocas de San Alejandro Garnacha 2006** from Spain. Look for a fresh, supple palate with chocolate, orange, black raspberry, licorice and mineral flavours. It is good value too.

Riesling qualifies as a perfect hostess gift given its intriguing versatility and sheer brilliance in the glass. Not everyone buys riesling, but most love it when they drink it. Our choice is **Gunderloch Fritz's Riesling 2007**. Months down this road this screw cap white remains eminently sip-able with bright minerality and fresh fruit, and is tailor-made for barbecued or pulled pork dishes.

Tawny port is another no-brainer, for the brainy reader types. A glass of **Fonseca 10 Year Old Aged Tawny Port** will cure all that ails you and make reading that book in front of the fire even more enjoyable.

My last pick is actually a wine gadget I've been testing for a few months. As many of you know, I'm not a big wine gadget guy but I'm excited about a new pouring device you easily slide into the neck of any bottle and simply pour the wine directly into your glass. The **Nuance Wine Filter** aerates the wine and removes the sediment with no fuss or muss. I especially recommend it for those big meaty young reds because it helps to clean up the nose and flavours while removing any stray bits of cork or sediment. For a retailer near you, log on to www.winecreator.ca/retailers.htm.

Special To The Sun

HOSTESS GIFTS



Segura Viudas Cava Brut Rosado Trefpat - Garnacha - Monastrell N/V, Penedès, Catalunya, Spain
Price: \$15
UPC: 00033293640004
Score: 88/100
Remarks: Fresh with nutty, cherry, baked pear and citrus flavours.



Laurenz V. Und Sophie Singing Grüner Veltliner 2007, Niederösterreich, Austria
Price: \$22
UPC: 00877397000391
Score: 89/100
Remarks: Elegant, peppery white with crunchy honey-lemon fruit flavours.



Las Rocas de San Alejandro Garnacha 2006, Calatayud, Aragon, Spain
Price: \$17
UPC: 805109270039
Score: 87/100
Remarks: A supple red with black raspberry, licorice, mineral flavours.



Gunderloch Fritz's Riesling 2007, Rhenhessen, Germany
Price: \$17
UPC: 04022642000749
Score: 89/100
Remarks: A go-to value riesling.



Fonseca 10 Year Old Aged Tawny Port, Douro Valley, Portugal
Price: \$20
UPC: 5013521101090
Score: 89/100
Remarks: Round, warm smoky, cedar and tea flavours with a nutty after-taste.



Nuance Wine Filter
Price: \$40 suggested retail price at wineries, VQA and private wine shops.
UPC: N/A
Score: 95/100
Remarks: A nifty little device for aerating pouring and cleaning up young wine.

B.C. WINE OF THE WEEK

Church & State Syrah 2006, Naramata Bench, Okanagan Valley, British Columbia, \$26



Winemaker Bill Dyer continues to raise the bar at Blasted Church as evidenced by this rugged syrah. A bigger-style red than the previous version, it is big on pepper and gamey notes on the nose and palate. The fruit is sweet and ripe with spicy cooked meat, menthol and black licorice flavours in the finish. Just a baby but you could try it now with roast lamb or osso buco.

NEWS & EVENTS

Corazon is the Spanish word for heart. On Tuesday, Dec. 15, Cobre, Gastrow's nuevo Latino restaurant will open its heart and donate 100 per cent of its net food revenues to the Greater Vancouver Food Bank. Co-owner and executive chef Stuart Irving is the man behind the giving and he's challenging other restaurants in Gastrow to join in supporting the food bank hoping to top the seven establishments who participated in 2008.

Irving says, "The food bank can leverage every dollar they receive by three times." To book your seat to support the cause, call Cobre at 604-669-2396.

Sonora Ranch Winery and food banks across Western Canada have joined forces this holiday season to help feed the needy in B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan. Locally the winery will be donating 50 cents per bottle of Sonora Ranch wine sold until Dec. 31 to Food Banks BC (FBBC).

Bangkok Grilled Chicken

The chicken gets a flavour boost from the overnight marinade, but it cooks up in a jiffy. From *Basic Thai Cooking* by Jody Vassallo.

— *Mia Stainsby*
4 chicken legs and thighs
1/4 cup chopped garlic
1/4 cup finely chopped lemon-grass
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh coriander root
2 spring onions, finely chopped

3 tablespoons fish sauce
1 1/2 tablespoons light soy sauce
1 1/2 tablespoons super-fine sugar
3 tablespoons lime juice
1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper
Score the chicken so it will cook evenly. Put the garlic, lemon-grass, coriander root and spring onions into a mortar and pestle and pound to form a paste. Transfer to a bowl, stir in the fish sauce, soy sauce, sugar, lime juice and white pepper and mix well to combine. Pour over the

chicken and rub the marinade in well. Set aside to marinate for four hours or overnight.
Cook the chicken on a lightly oiled barbecue grill, grill pan or under a preheated broiler, turning several times during cooking until tender, about 30 minutes.
Makes 4 servings



MATCH | MAKER

A riesling with acidity is the easy pick here

The easy pick here is a riesling, preferably one with great acidity and a dash of sugar; the rest is history.
— *Anthony Gismondi*

De Bortoli Traminer Riesling Traminer - Riesling 2008, New South Wales, Australia, \$10
Fresh entry with ripe orange, lychee, citrus flavours that finish off-dry. A bargain at \$13 it is now a steal at \$10.

The Magnificent Wine Company Riesling 2007, Columbia Valley, Washington, United States, \$22
Round, fresh, creamy palate with baked red apple, peach, honey, lime flavours. A bit sweet but with fine fruit and acidity. Best with Thai or Indian food.

