



Holiday Wines to Pour and Present



10 bottles for stress-free wine shopping this holiday season.

By Andrea Robinson, Master Sommelier, for *EatingWell* November/December 2008

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Hard to imagine the holiday season without a glass of wine in hand, right? A great bottle of wine can bring together all the flavors on your table. But which wine do you choose? What you serve at holiday parties needs to impress at a price that doesn't oppress, plus be food-friendly, given the diversity of flavors on cocktail-party buffets and holiday dinner tables. And if you give a bottle as a gift, it needs to send the "you're special" message without breaking the bank.

To help simplify your life, I've created a list of favorites that encompasses the best, most readily available wines that I've tasted over the years with prices ranging from \$10 to \$45. While it is fun to taste wines from tiny, boutique producers, they're rarely available or affordable. And the fact is, you don't have to spend a lot to get a good bottle of wine, so why would you? Given that, these selections might even become your "go-to" wines year-round.

Best Holiday Wines Under \$15

Castle Rock Pinot Noir, Mendocino 2006 (\$10)

Silky and seductive, this cherry-fragrant beauty is drinkable on its own but also amazingly versatile. This red is delicious with anything from seafood (the Christmas Eve tradition in our house) to a holiday roast. I don't know how they do it for this price, but I'm glad they do!

Suggested Recipe Pairing: [Roasted Pheasant with Wheat Berry Salad](#)

Esser Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, California 2006 (\$10)

Deep blackberry flavor along with complex cedar and vanilla notes at an affordable price. A great bet when you're serving a crowd.

Segura Viudas Aria Estate Cava Brut, Spain NV (\$10)

The gorgeous bottle belies the bargain price. So does the lovely layered, yeasty, baked pear flavor of this

sparkling wine. When you try it with food—it can handle any array of cocktail-party fare or your most traditional Thanksgiving spread— you'll see that sparkling wine is not just for toasts!

Suggested Recipe Pairing: [Lemon-Garlic Roast Turkey & White-Wine Gravy](#)

Saint M Riesling, Germany 2006 (\$12)

This lip-smacking white is lively and crisp. It has loads of peach flavor, and it pairs well with absolutely every food.

Wolf Blass Yellow Label Chardonnay, Australia 2007 (\$13)

Here you'll find luscious pineapple and peach flavors characteristic of the Chardonnay grape, but not so heavy with oakiness or alcohol that it overpowers food. A great solo sipper too.

Suggested Recipe Pairing: [Savory Carrot & Tarragon Tart](#)

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Best Holiday Wines Under \$50

Sanford Pinot Noir, Santa Rita Hills 2006 (\$33)

This silky red has dried cranberry, sassafras and cardamom on the nose and delicious strawberry-rhubarb flavors. A love letter to food, this wine actually enhances anything it's paired with.

Grgich Hills Estate Chardonnay, Napa 2006 (\$35)

Always a winner, this biodynamic wine still manages to get better and better with each vintage. In my blind tastings, its crisp, minerally, richly fruited and lightly oaked style bests Chardonnays that cost twice as much. A bottle to impress wine lovers!

Badia a Coltibuono Sangiovetto, Tuscany 2000 (\$40)

This world-class Super Tuscan is made from Sangiovese, the same grape used to make Chianti, but is much more complex and layered. Delicious after decanting (try it with prime rib or roasted game), but definitely cellar-worthy for at least 10 years too.

Robert Mondavi Reserve To Kalon Vineyard Fumé Blanc, Napa 2006 (\$40)

The 40-year-old vines yield an incredibly sophisticated white. Pineapple, coconut, honey and tarragon notes make it a delicious meal partner. It will age well for at least 5 years.

Two Hands Lily's Garden McLaren Vale Shiraz, Australia 2006 (\$45)

This red is big, beautiful and lusty with spicy fig and chocolate flavors. Pair it with fine cheeses or dark chocolate.

Master Sommelier Andrea Robinson has just published *Andrea Robinson's 2009 Wine Buying Guide for Everyone* (JGR Productions, 2008).

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EatingWell, 823A Ferry Rd. PO Box 1010, Charlotte, VT 05445, USA www.eatingwell.com Tel. (802) 425-5700