



Sips: Make Thanksgiving a celebration of Pinot Noir

By Jerry Shriver, USA TODAY

Choosing the wines for the Thanksgiving meal presents a delicious challenge for hosts because of the special culinary and emotional components of the gathering.

One school of thought says that because so many contrasting flavors are represented at the feast — from musky Brussels spouts to sweet-sour cranberry jelly — the wine should stay in the background and do its best to harmonize. This sensible approach calls for versatile, light-bodied and refreshing wines such as dry Rieslings, sparklers, Sauvignon Blancs, Pinot Gris, Beaujolais, Cabernet Francs and Chiantis. (And cider and medium-bodied ales, for that matter.)

But some hosts, myself included, believe the best Thanksgiving wines are those that reflect a connection to family and friends or speak to the larger ideals of the holiday.

Over the years, I have recommended serving wines made in your home state, or wines from "the old country" to honor your ancestral heritage or wines from places that hold special meaning for those in attendance.

My advice this time, as we conclude a particularly volatile year: Choose the type of wine that has brought you the greatest pleasure and peace of mind — the one for which you're most thankful.

In my case, that's Pinot Noir.

Over the past 10 months I have sampled hundreds of wines from around the world, popular and obscure alike, during wine competitions, in restaurants and at home, and Pinot Noir consistently has held my interest and stirred my soul.

This is no small thing — I'm a fickle wine drinker who falls in and out of love quickly. But Pinot Noir, no matter where it's grown or in what style it's made, has won my heart and wallet.

If you decide to follow my lead, you'll have to decide which style of wine you prefer. In the case of Pinot Noir, the classic light, delicate and silky versions will pair more successfully with more dishes, while the richer, fruitier, high-alcohol versions will make a statement that may overshadow the food but spark conversation.

Both styles are represented among the examples listed here. This being Thanksgiving, I've listed only American wines.

Consult with a knowledgeable salesperson before you invest (retail prices are approximate).

\$10-\$15

- 2007 A To Z, Oregon
- 2007 Blackstone Winemaker Select, California
- 2006 Cartlidge & Browne, California
- 2007 Hayman & Hill Reserve Selection, Santa Lucia Highlands, Calif.
- 2007 Mandolin, Monterey, Calif.
- 2007 Mark West, California

\$16-\$25

- 2007 Au Bon Climat, Santa Barbara County, Calif.
- 2006 Cambria, Julia's Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley, Calif.
- 2007 Erath, Oregon
- 2007 Fess Parker, Santa Barbara County, Calif.
- 2006 MacMurray Ranch, Sonoma Coast, Calif.
- 2006 Mia's Playground, Russian River Valley, Calif.
- 2006 TAZ, Santa Barbara County, Calif.
- 2006 Willamette Valley Vineyards, Willamette Valley, Ore.

\$26-\$35

- 2006 Alma Rosa, Sta. Rita Hills, Santa Barbara County, Calif.
- 2006 Handley, Anderson Valley, Calif.
- 2006 The Four Graces, Willamette Valley, Ore

\$35-\$55

- 2005 Domaine Drouhin, Willamette Valley, Ore.
- 2006 Dutton-Goldfield, Dutton Ranch-Sanchiotti Vineyard, Russian River Valley, Calif.
- 2005 Lucienne, Santa Lucia Highlands, Calif.
- 2006 Lynmar Estate, Russian River Valley, Calif.

Who's drinking what?

"We have a grilled Kobe beef dish that's prepared with a little green curry and pickled red onions, almost like a beef salad. It's really interesting but almost a nightmare to pair with wine. One wine that works is a Gamay Noir from Oregon, the 2007 Evening Land Vineyards Celebration (about \$20 retail) from the Seven Springs Vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills area. The fruit matches well with the rich beef, and the earth tones are equal to those in the green curry."

—Rajat Parr, wine director, Michael Mina restaurant, San Francisco

Cheers

Beverages that won't break the bank

2007 Lindemans Bin 75 Riesling, South Eastern Australia: About \$9. Abundant citrus flavors, zesty acidity and minerals on the aftertaste make this dry Riesling a natural mate for light seafood dishes and spicy appetizers (lindemans.com).

2007 Sonoma Vineyards Syrah: About \$15. The quality of domestic Syrah in this price range tends to be all over the map, but this burger-worthy version offers dense, bold black-fruit flavors and an exceptionally smooth texture (svwines.com).

Redhook Double Black Stout with Coffee: About \$5 for 22 ounces. Redhook, which produces craft brews on both coasts, is launching a limited-release series by reviving this super-robust beer. It was last produced a decade ago. It's made to accompany beef dishes or even dark chocolate desserts, and it makes a great base for stews if you're cooking at home (redhook.com).