

Huddle Up

Uncork some sunlight in a bottle this Thanksgiving.

For a guy who spends most of his waking hours staring into the savage, steaming underbelly of contemporary life — that is, the world of food and wine — I'm usually fairly upbeat. But, as my lovely Kat points out, every year around this time I go into this deep muddled state, swinging wildly between manic elation and desperate blue funk.

These wicked gyrations of mood are not caused by drugs or by reading the daily news, though a steady dose of neocon lies does tend to exaggerate the problem, at least to deepening the "slough of despond." But, really, I'm pretty much hardened to the antics of lying politicians and thieving corporations; expecting the worst from them, I'm rarely surprised or disappointed, though I can't escape or prevent the pain I feel when thousands of good people have to suffer for the arrogance and greed of a few self-important oligarchs.

What really races my roller coaster is the simple everyday pace of Time itself. While I try to



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savor every moment of this meager existence, all the moments, in all their increments, fly through my grasp like wishes on a high wind.

Take Thursday: I race home from LCC in the waning afternoon sun, lovely golden low-slanting light, deepening blue skies, crimson and golden leaves clinging on maples and sweetgums. Run into house, toss bookbag at desk, grab vases, fill with warm water, snatch up clippers, dash into garden, clip furiously in purpling dusk, until vases glow with stems of dahlias — lemon yellow, babygirl pink, sunburst orange — plus zinnias, snapdragons, roses, petunias, the effusive glory of Oregon late-summer.

Friday morning, wake to a garden gutted by a killer frost: zinnias zapped, roses ravaged, petunias punched out, dahlias dead as doormats. A whole season lost, another season leaped, winter has come. This is no petty pace creeping in day to day; feels more like a red rocket's glaring ride to oblivion. Gee, my wife is faithful, dog didn't die, truck's not broke, and still I got the blues?

Then, a deep breath, tangy and sweet, and I feel lifted up, elated: The harvest is in, sweet bounty of food and wine. Despite the ravages of war, famine and pestilence, we'll find again reasons to huddle together against the spreading ice, gather with friends and family to pull corks and break bread, light candles, cherish children and dream of peace. Worst of times, best of times, wheels within wheels, we must embrace it all, and still give thanks.

And for this Thanksgiving, let's pour some good wines.

Festive feelings deserve festive wines. There's nothing like effervescence to kick the party up a notch, but please, please, do not pour that nasty six-buck-bubbleguck we find in most supermarkets. For just a few dollars

more, you'll leap a chasm of quality and land on the banks of flavor and zest. And if you're on a buy-Oregon bent, don't forget that our homies make some superb bubbles, often at bargain prices. Look, for example, for **Argyle Brut** (\$19), fine bubbles, light and lively. **St. Innocent Brut** (\$18), from Salem country, is delicious and food-friendly. Our own good neighbors out Veneta way offer **Secret House Northern Silk** (\$15) with round flavors, crisp and clean. Eugene's own, **Discovery Brut** (\$13) is awfully good, especially at this price.

Usually I'll admit only grudgingly to an occasional liking for the wines produced in that weird state south of us. (OK, California; there, I said it. We done?) Sure, they're probably nut-case neocon Republicans, but when it comes to sparkling wines, those guys can sometimes get it right. Affordable and surprisingly good is **Korbel Extra Dry** (\$12), with just a touch of sweetness to give some weight. Of course, **Schramsberg** (\$30) is fine and **Roederer**

Estate (\$20) is a perennial fav, but right now our tasters in the lab really like **Chandon Blanc de Noirs** (\$18), blending pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay, yielding full flavors, really active bubbles. Soho Sandy said it: "This is what sparklers are supposed to taste like."

Serving turkey for the holiday? Thinking of matching with a chardonnay? OK, whatever. But turkey matches up really well with gewurztraminer. **Thomas Fogarty 2001 Monterey Gewurztraminer** (\$16) delivers zesty citrus/grapefruit flavors and pretty spice notes that will bring out the best in the bird and all the trimmings. Life is brief; take a chance.

Something softer but sure to please would be **Jezebel 2002 Willamette Valley Pinot Blanc** (\$14); comes on with aromas of autumnal fruits and white flowers, fills the mouth with flavors of ripe pears, sweet apples, lychee fruit, oh my. This seems to be another label bearing the flavor-loving touch of O'Reilly, and that's a nice message in any bottle.

Think it ain't wine if it ain't red? Understood. If red you must with your feast, whether turkey or any other, you'd be nuts to miss **Broadley 2002 Pinot Noir** (\$14). Almost never do I mention the same wine twice, but this is just *too* good for the money. Want bigger, badder? Find **Alexander Valley Vineyards 2000 Merlot** (\$16), big, full-bodied, lush with dark fruit flavors of blackberry and cassis. One word: Gimmesum.

OK, feeling a lot better now. Skies are pale gray but sun shining, leaves drifting, flock of kinglets pecking at the last of the sunflower heads. Time humbles us all, but it still feels right to lift our faces and our glasses and say our thanks for all we have. **EW**

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