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Last Call

Wine advice for the final days of 2007

Think you're a serious procrastinator? Really? Try this test: Four days 'til Christmas and you still haven't started your shopping (you there?). Should you grab your credit cards and run for the car? Choose one:

- A. OMIGAWDOUTTAMYWAY!
- B. Plenty of time, no worries.
- C. Christmas? Already?
- D. What was the question?
- E. Right after we remodel the kitchen.

If you answered with a frantic A, you're a novice-level procrastinator. Thanks for playing. More advanced procrastinators choose B, knowing there's no need to rush. Those who choose C have a special relationship with time, haven't turned their clocks back, probably post last year's calendar on the fridge. D people are among the few who understand Einstein's theory of special relativity. Now E: This is the category of the procrastination prodigy, the Master Procrastinator, the Zen delayer, she who color-codes the spice rack while the house is burning.

Procrastinators pay a price. By the time they shop, the stores' selections are a bit limited, to looters' rejects, and look like the free box at a yard sale. But lucky are procrastinators who have a wine fiend on their list, whether said fiend is a drop-in relative or dearly beloved, 'cause there's still available a wide budget-range of wine-gear and, of course, wine.

Up to \$15

A nice wine tool: Wine-heads can never have too many corkscrews, and the gold standard in screws is French, Laguiole (La-yole), comes in price (and quality) ranges from affordable to silly. Sundance offers a Laguiole opener at \$15.95, in its own little wooden box, wood handle, coated augur, charming.

Wines: With weak dollar and soaring demand, wine prices have jumped in some categories, but we found stellar quality: Vietti Barbera d'Asti 2004 Tre Vigne, on sale at \$14.95; this dark beauty from northern Italy shines with food, all oaky/smoky/plummy complex, a steal

that'll make memories. Or: Ryan Dawe-Stotz, the wine-and-cheese maven at Marché Provisions, claims Domaine de Triennes 2001 St. Auguste is the "best \$15 wine on Earth." OK, then.

Up to \$25

An opener Grandma can use: After de-corking a centillion bottles of wine, I swear by the Screwpull pocket opener. The augur is coated, will slip through even the tightest synthetic cork. The augur is also extra long, grabs firmly the longest corks. Operation is smooth and quick.

Wines: Many fine wines can be had at this price point. Compelled to choose, I'd take Owen Roe 2005 Ex Umbris (\$22.95), a Yakima Valley syrah deep and rich in flavors of dark berries, cherries, woodsmoke, spice — super wine. Or: Brick House 2006 Gamay Noir Ribbon Ridge (\$25), light-bodied but juicy, bursting with pretty flavors.

Up to \$50

Gottahaveit: By consensus, the best wine glasses in the world are made by German Riedel. They design glasses for specific varieties, promising that shape makes all the difference in delivery of flavor. Skeptics, me included, have tested the claims and come away convinced. And Riedel just released the new glass for Oregon pinot noir, \$25/stem, mere \$44.95 a two-pack.

Wines: Half a C-note takes us to top-shelf vinos, tuxedo wines, and being unapologetic buy-local folks, we'd buy Oregon pinots: Beaux

Freres 2005 Willamette Valley (\$44) has drawn raves; any Ken Wright pinot noir; Chehalem 2005 Ribbon Ridge Ridgecrest (\$44) would be superb; any pinot noir from Owen Roe or Sineann; Broadley's 2005 Claudia's Choice.

If you MUST go down the Big Red Road, stay Northwest: Cadence 2004 Tapteil Vineyard from Washington's Red Mountain region; a Bordeaux-style blend, you get deep flavors, complexity, length of finish — jingle bells.

OK, grab this list, get off the recliner, shop! Or deal just one more hand of solitaire. — Lance Sparks



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