

GIFTMAS GIVING 2013

Options abound for wine geeks on your list

I've written so many of these columns (nearly 200 — zot!) that I can properly claim some traditions. This being December, annually I offer suggestions for seasonal winestuff for Giftmas. I've borrowed that term from a prodigy, Taryn Bazurto; it captures the vital thrust of this season without undue damage — I hope — to various religious inclinations among some readers.

Thus, for this Giftmas, we suggest wines and wine-related items. Simply put, if you have a wine-geek on your list, rejoice, for options abound. But we try to remain mindful of budgetary issues, particularly important because of one base rule: When it comes to wine, there seems no upper limit on the amount of money we can spend. But before we consider actual wines, more good gifting news: Wine-geeks accessorize and almost always can gleefully accept new gear, from openers to glassware. (Another rule: the deeper the geekery, the more refined the accessories.) Again, though, prices/costs can swing wildly (all prices quoted here are approximate). For example, a good waiter-style corkscrew (types with hinged levers work best) can vary from a few bucks to \$25 for a fancy handle. The best opener we've used (among many, non-waiter-style) is probably the top-of-the-line Screwpull (around \$170).

Glassware, too, can get goofy. Manufacturers have turned to science for designs of bowl shapes for each varietal. The best (i.e., most expensive) come from Riedel marketed in various lines; the Vinum line is most affordable and commonly stocked in stores. Still, the non-geek can get goosed. Consider pinot noir (our region's most renowned varietal): Not only is there a specific bowl-shape for pinot noir but a very special design for Oregon pinot noir (\$60/pr). And, yes, experienced tasters will argue that shape does make a difference; so does rimlessness. Be warned.

Now, as to wine itself. For just one example, let's say you want to show some love to Aunt Mary and you know she has a serious

mania for merlot (she's not alone). So, a bottle of the best merlot, right? Well, by wine-buff consensus that means the French Bordeaux called Chateau Pétrus. Current price for Ch. Pétrus runs about \$2,000 for a bottle of the 2012 (if buying by the case). See?

Let's assume you're not an arbitrageur who considers your seven-figure bonus just lunch money or mere bitcoins. You might, then, want to shop for a merlot slightly less pricey, like, say, Washington's **L'Ecole No. 41 2008 Merlot** (\$30), a lovely wine, blended with small percentages of cabernet Franc, petit verdot and malbec — juicy, complex and mouth-filling. Again by consensus, the best Northwest merlot is probably Walla Walla's **Leonetti Cellars 2011** (\$95) — super wine, benchmark stuff. For yet more local investment, find **Del Rio Claret 2010 Rogue Valley** (\$20), a classic Bordeaux blend of five grape varieties, with merlot driving the fruit.

Now, if you wanted to run a gag on Aunt Mary, you could serve her Trader Joe's proprietary **Charles Shaw Merlot** (\$3 or less, the legendary Three-Buck-Chuck much honored by *Consumer Reports* — and their tasters aren't wrong, 'cause it's pretty good juice and great value). There's a lesson here about relative values/prices of wines.

If you're strapped for coin, consider a tasting tour of Eugene's urban wineries. You'll encounter superb wines. Start sledding at Capitello's new tasting room (540 Charnelton), go a few blocks to William Rose/Oregon Wine Lab (488 Lincoln) to savor the work of talented Mark Nicholl, curl over to Eugene Wine Cellars (255 Madison), then Territorial (907 W. 3rd). Don't miss J. Scott Cellars (520 Commercial), with Noble Estate's tasting operation just across the parking lot. Any of these would yield yummy wines for gifting. We were quite amazed by **J. Scott 2012 Zinfandel** (\$25); the grapes grew in the Columbia Valley, and Jonathan Scott Oberlander crafted a marvel, with flavors of black cherries, cassis, dash of pepper, on a sturdy frame. Put a bow on it, bring smiles.

For best gifting results, of course, know your geek. Probe. Snoop. Inquire sneakily. Buy carefully. We always rely on the front-line wine pros for good advice.

And have yourselves a merry little Giftmas. ■

Lance Sparks, Ph.D., teaches writing at LCC and can be reached at freelanceandwildkat@comcast.net

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