

SIPPING THANKS

Regional wines are fine for Thanksgiving

Seems like only a minute ago we were sweating BBs in 104 degrees, high heat in high summer. A minute later, our granddaughter Meagan is donning her Katniss Everdeen *Hunger Games* costume for Halloween. Then we're suddenly into the feast days, fussing about wines to serve, as Mole would say, "wit' da boid." He means turkey. I'm pretty sure.

Reminder, if needed: There is no "perfect" Thanksgiving wine — unless it's whichever wine you like best. That said, we do have our preferences: Mole and the lovely Molly both like dry gewürztraminers from France's Alsace region. Many are excellent, so I have no comeback. But being the shameless locavore I am, I look first to Oregon and the Northwest.

But let's be clear: There's no sacrifice on quality in insisting on our neighbors' wines; the only sacrifice might be prices because most local producers are small family operations just scraping by, whereas some imports come from countries that subsidize their wine industry. For just one example, several local producers are bottling really good sparkling wines, a very expensive proposition — grow the grapes, harvest, press, etc., then buy a heavy bottle (strong enough to hold liquid under 6 atmospheres of pressure), heavy cork, wire cage, water-resistant label, cap, etc. Depending on the methods used: one, the "Italian" or *Charmat* or "bulk" process in which the bubbles are produced in the barrels, before bottling,

slightly less expensive than, two, the *methode Champenoise* or "traditional" method in which secondary fermentation occurs in the bottles, just the first step in a labor-intensive process that, after years, yields fine wines with tiny bubbles and, vintners hope, great flavors.

Then sell the wine to distributors, who sell to retailers, who sell to consumers. Everyone (except the last) takes a cut out of the retail price.

So how does **Torre Oria Cava Brut Reserve** (produced in the traditional method) — admittedly superb wine — retail at about 10 bux, even after the cost (presumably) of a long journey on a ship from Spain to our shores? Local vintners — **Capitello, King Estate, J. Albin, Sarver** and others — make delicious, high-quality sparkling wines in the traditional method, retailing in the \$30 to \$45 range, actually bargains, considering the fact that a bottle of "real" French Champagne like great **Dom Pérignon** wears a \$200 ticket. For a single bottle.

You might ask, "A'right, so what's all that gotta do with Thanksgiving?" Lots, 'cause good bubbles can be the single wine you serve through dinner. Guests will be tickled; foods taste just fine. On the other hand, you could try some other matches.

Start with bubbly, sure, to pop the party. Then white wines for early courses, building to the mains. Remember always, if you want peace at the table, avoid arguments about religion, politics and taste in wines; if Uncle Artie wants a monster-big red, give him one (see below).

Now, if "da boid" is your main, we think your bird will like **Tyee 2014 Gewürztraminer** (\$18.50), dry but with round, forward citrus fruit flavors, nicely balanced with acidity that'll stand up to butter basting.

A gentler white, still dry but versatile in matches calls for **Brigadoon 2014 Pinot Blanc** (\$18), really tasty, flavors of ripe autumnal pears dominating, not at all flabby. We like all the wines from this family — the Showns — from philosophy to farming to winemaking.

Uncle Artie's Big Red? **Sineann Abondante** (any year — ca. \$20), one of the best Oregon reds to emerge from the Columbia Valley, a rich, bold blend of five grapes: mind-boggling complexity and long, satisfying finish.

Of course, any good **Oregon pinot noir** is always a fine Thanksgiving match — or any occasion.

Quick reminder: Almost all Oregon wineries are open for visitors during Thanksgiving weekend (and often the weekend before). Some offer nibbles, access to food carts or encourage picnics. Music or other entertainments are common. Many offer free tasting; some even guide guests to barrel rooms to taste the first wines of this year's vintage, often with opportunities to buy "futures," discounted prices on wines that'll be delivered at scheduled times next year (Note: The 2015 vintage seems, based on early reports, very promising, perhaps one of the "greats").

Touring at this time of year can be a soul-satisfying way of getting out into beautiful countryside and entertaining out-of-town guests. Warning: If you're going to taste, designate a driver; even if you spit, tasting a lot of wines can result in impairment. Also remember that limos and guided tours (with drivers) are available. For a full schedule, use the web — *all* the wineries have websites. ■



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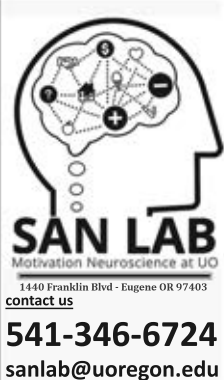
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