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What to Give a Wine Retailer? The Good Stuff

Merchants weigh in on which vintages they would want—and which they wouldn't



By **LETTIE TEAGUE**
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It's the busiest time of the year for New York area wine merchants. They're giving advice and gift-wrapping bottles and restocking—and restocking—their shelves. What wines would these hardworking retailers like to receive themselves? Which bottles will please them and which ones are the vinous equivalent of a stocking full of coal?

For Costas Mouzouras, wine director of Gotham Wines & Liquors on Manhattan's Upper West Side, a Zinfandel from Sonoma's Rockpile vineyard would make him smile. But, Mr. Mouzouras added, "If you are really my friend, you know that a Nebbiolo would steal my

heart.” And for well-wishers thinking of gifting Mr. Mouzouras a bottle of Beaujolais, please don’t. “No Gamay for me,” he said.

One of the best places to buy Champagne in New York is Astor Wines & Spirits, where the selection is large—but the prices are not. Naturally, Champagne is what the store’s head wine buyer Lorena Ascencios would like friends to bring to her house, especially the wines from small growers imported by Terry Theise. And the one bottle that she didn’t want to see under her tree? “Sweet sherry. There’s never enough acid in them for me and I just don’t like drinking them,” Ms. Ascencios said.

Daniel Posner, proprietor of Grapes The Wine Company in White Plains, N.Y., would like “a very large gift certificate” in order to purchase 2015 Bordeaux and Burgundy, but he’d settle for a Napa Cabernet from the great 2013 vintage or a Brunello from 2010—another great vintage where “deals can still be had,” he said.

Mr. Posner would rather not receive a wine aged in a bourbon barrel. He’s been offered a few and turned them down. “It just sounds strange,” he explained.

A wine aged in a bourbon barrel doesn’t sound half as strange as wine combined with chocolate. And yes, they exist—ChocoVine is a combination of Chocolate liqueur and Cabernet. But Gary Fisch, owner of four wine shops in New Jersey bearing his name, wouldn’t like anyone to present him with one. The easy-to-please Mr. Fisch would be happy to receive “anything else,” but would be particularly happy to get a bottle of Champagne. Apparently there isn’t nearly enough Champagne in this wine merchant’s house.

Damien Graef, owner of Bibber & Bell in Brooklyn, would also like Champagne, preferably magnum-size, maybe from Pierre Gimmonet. But well-wishers would be advised not to downsize. “No half bottles,” noted Mr. Graef. “Save those for a Tuesday in January,” he said.

Matt Franco of MCF Rare Wine in the West Village would also like a magnum, but he’s hoping for Beaujolais, specifically the 2014 Fleurie or 2014 Morgon from Yvon Metras. But woe betide the bearer of a Champagne with an “orangey-yellow label.” That’s exactly the kind of “mass market” wine that Mr. Franco would prefer not to receive.

When I asked Jeff Zacharia, president of Zachy’s Wine and Liquor in Scarsdale, N.Y., what he would like to receive, he sent me a very long and very detailed wish list. There were paragraphs describing his reasons, or what made each wine special. Mr. Zacharia covered the globe. He’d like some Rioja—not just any Rioja, of course, but the 2001 La Rioja Gran Reserva Seleccion Especial 125th Anniversary bottling. He would also be happy with either or both the 1995 and 1996 Chateau Calon Segur, **a sparkling wine from Spain, notably the 2013 Raventos Blanc de Nit, and on and on.**

Fortunately, Mr. Zacharia’s list of undesirables was blessedly short. No Coravin—a tool to preserve an open bottle—and no half bottles. After all, holidays are for sharing, he pointed out, though he seemed to relent just a bit. Perhaps a small bottle could be a handy stocking stuffer, he said.

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