

by Julie Glenn

As one prepares the home for holiday revelry, there are color schemes to consider, textures to tackle and themes to theorize upon. Well, the same holds true when decking out the wine cellar. It's wise to have a color swatch of options in your arsenal of "house" wines which are delicious, but these days it's all about the unusual. The cab/chard/pinot grigio trifecta is passé so here are some adventurous wines from new locations that will make your holiday home the place to be.

SPARKLING

Raventós i Blanc Conca del Riu Anoia; Barcelona, Spain (\$18-21)

This sparkler comes from one of the families that founded Cava just outside of Barcelona, Spain, but they've since parted ways and are establishing their own, more quality focused area with tighter restrictions on vinification and yield. Made in the methode Champenoise, this bubbly is hard not to like, making it an ideal flute-filler to have on hand when guests are hanging out in the kitchen before dinner.

WHITE

Anne Amie Cuvée A Amrita 2015; Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$14-17)

This organic white blend from Oregon completely threw me for a loop because in spite of being filled with flowery grapes known for big round flavors, it is a crisp, refreshing high acid wine that pairs beautifully with antipasto, cheeses, Asian cuisine and seafood. The blend is 30 percent riesling, 23 percent muller-Thurgau, 23 percent pinot blanc, 16 percent viognier, 4 percent gewurztraminer and 1 percent chardonnay. Serve it in place of a boring pinot grigio or too-tart sauvignon blanc and watch people stand in awe of your wine savvy as you rattle off the numerous grapes in the blend. Don't worry, it's printed on the bottle in case you forget.

ROSÉ

The Ned Rosé of Pinot Noir 2015; Waihopai Valley, New Zealand (\$19-22)

If you never really understood why people are into dry rosé, this might be a nice one to try because the bouquet on this version from one of New Zealand's best producers pretty much sums up why rosé is great. Remember Bonnie Bell lip gloss in strawberry? It smells faintly of that with a bright, floral, fresh fig palate that makes it feel like you're consuming perfume.

LIGHT RED

Domaine Sérol "Les Originelles" Côte Roannaise; Loire, France (\$19-22)

While you could get a cheap pinot noir for a lighter house red, there is no need to punish your taste buds with what passes for pinot in the under \$25 price range. Instead, try a bright beautiful gamay. This one is from a small area within the Loire valley called the Côte Roannaise where gamay is produced much like it is in the crus of Beaujolais. A bit of carbonic maceration gives a bright cherry nose and the palate brings fresh raspberry, a pleasing whiff of violet and bright acidity making it perfect alongside olive tapenade or any cheese plate.

MEDIUM RED

Merlot, Waterbrook Estate Canyon Vineyard Ranch 2014; Columbia Valley, Washington (\$13-16)

From one of the early winemaking visionaries of the Columbia valley comes this easy to find and easy to drink merlot. Soft tannins make the black plum and tobacco notes sing while the finish lingers with cocoa and velvety dark fruits. Constantly on best buy lists in wine media, don't be fooled by its affordability at \$16.

HEAVIER RED

Balnaves "The Blend" 2013; Coonawarra, Australia (\$23-24)

Forget what you knew of Australian wine a decade ago – with the high alcohol, fruit-in-your-face, critter label stuff. There's a lot more going on down under than many of us realize and I was happy to learn of this little gem made from 53 percent merlot, 46 percent cabernet sauvignon and 2 percent petit verdot. It's from a cool climate, which means it won't have the hot, overproduction of sugar that leads to high alcohol fruit bomb wines. Instead, this one is more Bordeaux-like in its structure (but thankfully not price). Delicious herbal notes frame the blackberry fruit flavors with a hint of liquorice while firm tannins hold it all together.



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