

FOOD & WINE

Be the Hero of the Party With These 8 Wines That Will Impress Any Gathering

It's tough to know what to bring to the party, unless you have this cheat sheet of editor-approved wine winners.

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Published on December 22, 2025



When the guest list is unpredictable, the personalities and palates diverse, and the drinks knowledge varied, the smart host knows to let the wine do the heavy lifting.

Great wine can elevate even the most chaotic gathering. It smooths rough edges and gives you something — anything — to talk about besides your friends' questionable life choices or the latest family drama.

And thankfully, great doesn't necessarily mean expensive, either. In these situations, deliciousness is priority No. 1, but the more budget-friendly the bottle, the better.

These eight guaranteed crowd-pleasers are the go-tos of our F&W pros: expressive, generous, and impressive without the need to scream for attention or break the bank. Whether you're pouring for connoisseurs, skeptics, or the hard-to-please, each of these wines brings something special and ensures you'll be remembered as the one with impeccable taste.



Raventós i Blanc Blanc de Blancs Cava 2023 (\$28)

Year in and year out, [this Spanish sparkling wine](#) from the Penedès region is one of the best deals in sparkling wine. Made from biodynamically farmed 40-year-old vines, it's subtly complex and full of bright citrus, green apple, and fresh brioche aromas and flavors.

Is it a [Cava](#)? Not technically. Proprietors Manuel Ranentós and son Pepe left the Cava appellation a number of years ago, dismayed at the amount of mass-

produced, industrial wines being made. They created their own geographical designation: Conca del Riu Anoia.

Do you need to remember that? No. Just know is that this is a terrific bubbly for the holidays and beyond, and it's wildly underpriced for the quality you get. —*Ray Isle*



Ameztoi Rubentis Getariako Txakolina 2024 (\$25)

I was recently reminded of how much I love Txakoli (also called Txakolina), a bright, lightly effervescent wine produced in Spain's Basque Country. The style is often high in acid and low in alcohol and extremely food-friendly: a perfect, sessionable sipper for a long meal or pre-dinner stomach opener.

This refreshing rosé with gentle bubbles was part of the lineup served at the recent [Food & Wine Classic in Charleston](#) at a seminar discussing sommeliers' favorite aperitifs.

Bursting with ripe strawberries and zippy citrus, this light sparkler was a crowd favorite. [Ameztoi Txakolina Rosado](#) is also available in a magnum (double the standard 750-milliliter size), so it contains at least 10 servings, a win for any kind of group dinner scenario.

If you really want to get into the Spanish party mood, serve this from a glass porrón, a traditional spouted decanter that aerates the wine as it's poured from a high angle directly into a person's mouth. —*Prairie Rose*



Domaine Renardat-Fâche Bugey Cerdon Méthode Ancestrale (\$30)

This organic, low-alcohol [sparkling rosé](#) is an absolute delight that never fails to impress or meet the needs of a crowd or occasion. I buy it by the case around the holidays. It's that good, that versatile, and that loved, because who doesn't appreciate a great glass of bubbles to feel a little extra festive?

Within the Savoie region of eastern France and south of the Jura mountains, the wine is produced in the Cerdon subappellation of Bugey. The area is dedicated exclusively to the production of standout sparkling rosés made

from [Gamay](#) and Poulsard. It's a méthode ancestrale sparkler, which means that there's no second application of yeasts or sugars during production, like those employed with traditional-method bubbly. It showcases a delicious, just-right hit of natural residual sugar that makes it a perfect partner for nearly any dish or occasion, from brunch fare to decadent desserts and everything in between, not to mention it's a great standalone glass with friends or family.

But don't let the subtle sweetness scare you. It's all pure and pristine flavors of bright, ripe cherries and raspberries with ample acidity and a fine mousse for fantastic overall balance.

Bonus: its brilliant color is a show-stopping conversation piece before you even dive into the tastiness of the glass. —*Lauren Buzzeo*



Mary Taylor Wine Anjou Blanc 2023 (\$17)

Right after my [Chenin Blanc](#) column in the October issue of Food & Wine went to press, I tasted this crisp, peachy steal of a white and thought to myself, "Damn! This would have been perfect for the column."

Well, better late than never.

The Biotteau family in France's Loire Valley makes [this wine](#) for Mary Taylor Wine, a producer and U.S.-based importer with a magician's touch for finding great deals from Europe. It would be an ideal white for any holiday party: it's crisp and bright enough to work as an aperitif, but it has enough substance to pair with dinner, too.

Mary Taylor Wines' other selections — of which there are quite a few — are also worth it to keep an eye out for, including an impressive Douro red made by Filipe Ferreira, and a juicy, wild berry-ish Anjou Rouge, also from the Biotteau family. —*R.I.*



Tiberio Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo Rosato 2024 (\$30)

Is it a red wine or a rosé? Does it even matter? [This Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo](#) rosato, made from 100% Montepulciano that comes from a single block of grapes, lands at such a deep red part of the rosé spectrum that you'd be excused for considering it a light red at a glance. But Tiberio has become my secret weapon for a party-pleasing wine. We served it at the Wine Bar by

Food & Wine and Friends at our [Classic in Aspen](#), and I ended up paying the luggage-check fee just to squirrel a few bottles home with me.

[The Rosé That Drinks Like a Red? Meet Cerasuolo, Italy's Most Misunderstood Wine](#)

It's fresh and tangy, with raspberry, cherry, and wild-berry notes, alongside a nicely floral nose. It comes across as fruit-forward but not shy, and it can pair with just about any dish you throw at it. It's also a crowd pleaser. Even the pickiest, give-me-the-biggest-Cab-you've-got person at the party can't deny this bottle's approachability. It clocks in at a respectable 13.5 to 14% ABV, which provides enough backbone to keep the wine from feeling too light or unable to stand up to a heavy meal. And its solid acidity and minerality work as a palate cleanser with every sip.

At around \$30, it's the perfect option if you want to go a small step above your bottle shop's bottom shelf, yet still overdeliver on quality. —*Dylan Garret*



**Josep Grau Volador Negre Montsant 2023
(\$20)**

Impress your family by saying, “This isn’t a red wine — this is a chilled red.”

The new cool-kid category, chilled reds, now has its very own section on restaurant lists. I poured this chillable Spanish red blend recently at the [Food & Wine Classic in Charleston](#) during my seminar about aperitivo-hour traditions from around the world. It was the first chilled red for many in the audience, and it was an immediate favorite.

[This wine](#) is a blend of Grenache, Carignan, and Syrah, and it has juicy cherry-strawberry flavors with touches of licorice and pepper that add intrigue. When chilled to about 45°F, it sings with fruity-floral aromas and mouthwatering acidity.

Plus, this wine has a cool story, the ultimate way to impress just about anyone. Winemaker Josep Grau left his career as an accountant to return to Priorat, Spain, where he grew up. The Montsant DO (Denominación de Origen) has intense, rugged terrain with vineyards of very old vines. Grau is committed to preserve these vineyards, many of which are owned by growers with no clear successor. He lets the grapes do the talking, as he vinifies with minimal intervention.

Bonus: the label is as fun as the wine. —*Lucy Simon*



Mullineux Swartland Syrah 2023 (\$40)

It's really hard for me to gift or bring a bottle that I'm not into genuinely, enthusiastically, and maybe even a bit obsessively. I want to share not only its deliciousness, but also some of the magic behind it: where it comes from, how it was made, who made it, and why.

Those who know me realize that these bottles often hail from a specific place ([South Africa](#)) and are made from a specific variety ([Chenin Blanc](#)). But when the cold weather hits, as much as I love my Cheninista ways, I gravitate to the country's beautiful bevvy of red wine gems, from Cabernet and Pinotage to Pinot Noir and, yes, Syrah.

And [Mullineux's Swartland Syrah](#) will forever be my go-to grab. I have enjoyed this wine since its beginning in the late 2000s. I met Andrea and Chris Mullineux, the young winemaking-powerhouse couple that started it all (and made killer juice elsewhere before they started their own thing, too). I've watched their remarkable journey since to evolve and expand their beautiful estate and outstanding wine lineup.

Though Mullineux's single-site expressions are wines of wonder, the Swartland Syrah is always fantastic for about one-third of the price, and it cellars like a dream, too. It's an exercise of balance between ripe fruit and savory earth that walks an impeccable tightrope like none other, with fine tannins like crushed velvet and an enduring finish that will never let you forget its name. —*L.B.*



González Byass Leonor 12-Year-Old Palo Cortado (\$20/375 ml)

Part of the joy in providing wines while hosting on Thanksgiving is that the guests are essentially my captives. They're forced to drink whatever I provide them, lest they bring their own bottles. So, each year, it's a great opportunity for me to thrust my love of sherry upon friends who can't say no and show them how they've been missing out.

Palo cortado is one of the rarest styles of sherry, where juice aged under flor (a layer of yeast) is exposed to oxidative aging after the yeast barrier collapses. The result falls between an amontillado and an oloroso, yet it remains distinctly its own. Some palo cortados can reach prices you'd expect of high-end Champagne, but Jerez-based [González Byass](#) somehow manages to offer its Leonor bottling for around \$20. It's a steal for one of the marvels of Spanish wine.

Expect notes of dried orange and apricot alongside a distinctly saline or salted-caramel profile that, at risk of sounding like an overwrought travel writer, tastes like the Iberian coast, with a clean and dry finish. Compared to

some of the more complex palo cortado expressions, Leonor can be considered more of an introductory bottle. But it's one that's sure to impress guests, especially if you break it out after folks start to get fatigued from their usual reds and whites. And if anyone doesn't enjoy it, they don't deserve to. —*D.G.*