

Sip the Season: Top Wine Gifts for Holiday Cheer



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The holiday season is a time of warmth, celebration, family time, and thoughtful gift-giving. For me, one of the best ways to elevate the holiday spirit is by gifting a carefully selected bottle of wine. Whether it's bringing a gift to your hosts, expressing thanks to a client or coworker, or finding something special for a family member or friend, wine can be that unique gift that's sure to please.

The expansive world of wine can sometimes be daunting, so let's break it down to some easy categories to help you navigate it more easily.

Whether you are bringing a gift to party hosts, a bottle to share with friends, or you just need something special for a wine lover in your life, these helpful tips will ensure you find a bottle that's sure to bring holiday cheer.

CHAMPAGNE & SPARKLING WINE

Regular readers will not be surprised that I'm starting with bubbles. Why? It's my go-to option for gift-giving! Whether it's a classic champagne or an "Old World" or "New World" sparkling wine, there is always something pleasing to be found within any budget. Let's start by talking about "budget" champagnes. To be clear, by "champagne" I am strictly referring to wines made in Champagne, France. Prices are relative, of course, but I would consider anything in the \$50 range in that category.

Your best option for budget champagne is to look for "house" producers. One of the most readily available is Nicolas Feuillate. Their entry level Brut and Rosé champagnes are very well made and usually under \$50. Other entry level house producers with solid low-priced options are Moët & Chandon, Lanson, Duval-Leroy, and G.H. Mumm. There are also some fantastic grower producers with very affordable options. For those in Texas with a Spec's store nearby, they usually have a nice selection of André Clouet champagnes. Based out of the small village of Bouzy, these are fantastic values. One other grower that has a great lineup of value-priced champagnes is Laherte-Frères. These might be a bit harder to find, but they are delicious.

Premium champagne is always a great gift if you want to up your game. It's hard to go wrong with a *tête de cuvée* or a prestige cuvée from a well-known champagne maker. These wines can range from \$200 to \$300 for current releases. A few of my favorites, and ones I have in my cellar, are any of the Billecart-Salmon vintage wines. A bottle of Rare Champagne (distinct for the metal gold crown on the label) would be magnificent. Other luxury champagnes include Dom Pérignon, Roederer Cristal, Laurent Perrier Grand Siècle, and any bottle from Krug.

When it comes to sparkling wine outside of Champagne, I recently visited the *Raventos i Blanc* winery in the Penedès region near Barcelona. They use the same method to make their wines as they do in Champagne – which means the second fermentation to create the bubbles is in the bottle. The estate, founded in 1497, is rich with history. The wines are

exceptional, and some are priced under \$30. One favorite, the “De Nit Rosat” Rosé, is only \$23 at Art of Cellaring in San Antonio.

In the super value range around \$10-\$15, we must talk about Prosecco. Prosecco is the most produced and bestselling sparkling wine in the world. It’s made from the Glera grape using what’s called the Charmat method (the second fermentation is in a large sealed tank). Keep in mind Prosecco can have varying degrees of sweetness. You may also see Prosecco Rosé, which can only be made using red Pinot Noir for the color (and I’ve had some nice ones). Prosecco is a nice go-to for something simple – and makes a great brunch Mimosa!

WHITE WINE

When it comes to gifting white wine, it’s probably best to stick with the classics – Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. I would pick a Chardonnay for those who might like softer, more balanced white wine. A Sauvignon Blanc works well for people who like a little zip on the palate. These grapes are grown worldwide, but I like to think the French versions add a little luxury factor for a gift. With Chardonnay that places us squarely in Burgundy, where you can find two distinct styles. The wines of Chablis offer a cleaner, more mineral driven version with bright acidity and very little use of oak. A nice Chablis like the Charly Nicolle “Per Aspera” is just under \$30, while a nicer Premier Cru Chablis from Moreau Naudet is just over \$70.

Meanwhile, more traditional White Burgundy typically has noticeable oak notes and a richer mouth feel. The least expensive are usually the Mâcon Villages wines, and some can be found for under \$20. When you see “Bourgogne” on the label, that means the wine may have grapes from multiple appellations. Compared to the appellation bottlings (especially the Premier Cru and Grand Cru), these can be budget friendly. This is particularly true for reliable producers like Joseph Drouhin and Louis Jadot. My preferred appellation-specific wines are Meursault and Puligny-Montrachet. An amazing wine like the Benjamin Leroux Meursault is about \$140, and the Marchand Tawse Puligny Montrachet is about \$100.

With Sauvignon Blanc I always default to the Loire Valley and the region of Sancerre, or I look to Bordeaux where they often blend in a little Semillon. There is an elegance about both these styles of wine I find impossible to resist. Sancerre is readily available in almost any wine

store. There are several wineries in Sancerre where the name Reverdy appears. That is always a good marker, and those wines are usually in the \$30 to \$40 range. For white Bordeaux, there are many excellent white Bordeaux under \$25, and most wine stores will have a nice selection. For the nicer ones starting at about \$50, look for Château Carbonnieux (my favorite), Château Larrivet Haut-Brion, or Château Smith Haut Lafite.

RED WINE

For my red wine recommendations, I am going to stay here in America with a focus on Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. From a value perspective, finding a quality Cabernet under \$30 is tough. They often taste very similar, and a lot of them are mass produced and come across as one-dimensional wines. It's no secret I prefer to support family-owned wineries, and one of the few that has red wines under \$30 is Hess Winery (the Hess Collection and Hess Select lines). Once you step up to the \$50+ range, the options are much better. One of my favorites is the Tether Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon for \$60. Tether is a collaboration between winemaker Anna Monticelli, her husband Mario Monticelli (also a winemaker), and wine broker Kimberly Jones. They joined forces to produce affordable, high-quality Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. They succeeded. Another reasonable option is the Clos du Val Napa Valley Cabernet. When it comes to premium Cabernet, start with Dunn Vineyards if you can find them. Other great options are Spottswoode, Paul Hobbs, Moone Tsai, and Titus.

As we move on to Pinot Noir recommendations, we can take comfort in the fact that great, affordable Pinot Noir wines are easier to find. Whether it's heartier Pinot Noir wines from Sonoma County in California or more robust, fruit-driven wines from Willamette Valley in Oregon, there is always something to please. In the under \$30 category, Schug, a family-owned property in Carneros, has both a Carneros and a Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. Both are well rated and would be great gifts. Higher priced California Pinot Noirs that make great gifts include Merry Edwards, Flowers, Paul Hobbs, and Sanford.

There are so many fantastic Oregon Pinots, but finding the best ones in a retail space can be challenging. Let's look at some you are very likely to spot on the shelves. In the under \$30 category, look for the entry level Elk Cove and Ken Wright Cellars. As you move up the price ladder, look for

wines from Domaine Drouhin Oregon, Beaux Frères, or Cristom. Any of these will bring joy to the palate.

PARTING THOUGHTS

While wine bottles make great individual gifts, they also make fantastic group gifts for clients or coworkers. It's easier than you think. Those of us in the business are always happy to help you sort through the best options. Just ask! The beauty of wine is that each pour can be more than just a taste. It represents a shared moment, a celebration of a connection, and a reminder of life's joys during the holiday season. Choose your bottles with care and let your gift uncork memories that will last long after that final sip. I wish you the merriest holiday season!