



Holiday Gift Guide for 2015

December 10, 2015

It's the time of year when we're all shopping for Holiday Gifts. I'm a big believer that for most people Wine makes a great gift. If you have someone on your list that's really into one category or another get them something slightly outside their normal drinking zone and help them expand their palate. Here are a 13 delicious ideas. If you need more, head over to my gift Guide for The Daily Meal to read about 21 other suggestions.

Simonsig AVEC Chene Chenin Blanc 2012 (\$34.99)

Made up entirely of Chenin Blanc the fruit is all from Stellenbosch, South Africa. Chenin Blanc is South Africa's signature white, this expression is a benchmark offering. Citrus and hints of linseed oil present on the alluring nose. The palate shows off an inspiring fruitiness that's leans towards dried stone and orchard fruits. White pepper, minerals and sour yellow fruits emerge on the long, crisp and clean finish.

Achaval-Ferrer 2012 Quimera (\$34.99)

This offering is a blend of Malbec (50%), Cabernet Sauvignon (24%), Cabernet Franc (8%), and Petit Verdot (2%). This is a remarkably nice blend year after year. The 2012 is a fine example of Quimera and it offers far more value than the price point might indicate. The Malbec, which comprises half of the blend, really boosts the nose with dark fruit aromas. The palate is filled with fleshy, juicy dark fruit flavors such as blackberry cherry. Minerals, earth and dark chocolate notes all emerge on the

persistent finish. This is an impeccably balanced wine with terrific structure. It's a delicious wine now, but will become more unified and resolved with some bottle age. Quimera is a great bottle to gift to someone whose eyes need to be opened to the terrific wines that are produced in Argentina. They'll think you spent a lot more than \$35 when they taste it.

Tres Sabores 2012 Rutherford Estate Zinfandel (\$38)

The vines had 41 years of them at the time of harvest. They're dry farmed and certified organically grown. This wine is part of the Napa Green program which incorporates "best practices" for both land and wine production. That alone makes this a terrific gift for the environmentally minded wine lover on your list. However all the deliciousness in the bottle is an equally compelling reason. This wine opens with a classic nose of dark jam fruits underscored by bits of peppercorn. The palate is big, rich and mouth-filling without ever straying over the top. Black raspberry and boysenberry flavors are joined by wisps of chocolate sauce. The long, somewhat lusty finish features bits of kirsch liqueur and more berry fruit. This is a classic example of Zinfandel that has lots of depth and complexity. It's an outstanding wine for the price.

Matetic Vineyards 2012 E.Q. Syrah (\$42.99)

This wine is 100% Syrah from Chile's San Antonio Valley. As is so often the case with Chile this is an outstanding value. Syrah is a bit of a sleeper grape in Chile, some very tasty examples have been emerging but they haven't gotten a ton of notice quite yet, so great values abound. This offering is farmed organically and biodynamically. Blackberry and earth aromas dominate the nose with bits of violet present as well. A hit of tar leads the deep, dark and dense palate which is studded with black fruit and spice. Dark dusty chocolate notes and earth are prevalent on the long, firm finish. This complex Syrah has more in common with other old world examples than new world ones. This is a great gift for someone who likes big, beefy reds that retain proportion.

Barone Pizzini 2011 Rosé Franciacorta Brut (\$45)

This offering is composed entirely of Pinot Noir sourced from six vineyard sites. 20,000 bottles were produced. Rich red berry aromas of wild strawberry and cherry inform the nose; an undercurrent of crème fraîche is present as well. The medium bodied palate shows off continued red fruits, spice, bits of biscuit and more. The finish is long, fresh and firm with more fruit, spice and a host of minerals. This beautiful expression will pair with a wide array of foods.

La Voix 2014 Rebel Rebel Pinot Noir (\$45)

This is a single vineyard effort produced from fruit sourced at the Quinta Del Mar Vineyard located at

the southern end of San Luis Obispo County. Fresh Raspberry and bits of forest floor are part of the engaging nose. The palate is stuffed with fresh red fruits, tinged with black, savory herb notes and bits of cinnamon. Earth, pomegranate, sour cherry and more fill out the above average finish. Medium tannins and firm, racy acid provide terrific structure. If there's a California Pinot Noir lover on your list this release from a new project by winemaker Steve Clifton is a great choice. If the recipient is a big music fan even better as the wine was inspired by David Bowie.

Volker Eisele Family Estate 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$50)

This offering is composed of Cabernet Sauvignon (87%), and Merlot (13%). This estate has been organically farmed for over 40 years and they're part of the Napa Green program. The nose is loaded with black cherry and bits of savory herb. The palate is rich and somewhat dense. Lots of black and red fruit flavors are in evidence along with spice and mineral elements. There are hints of sweet dark chocolate and chicory on the long finish. Firm acid and tannins provide excellent structure. This is a delicious Napa Cabernet that will drink well for the next 8 or more years.

La Valle 2009 Naturalis Franciacorta Extra Brut Rosé DOCG (\$55)

This offering is composed entirely of Pinot Noir. It was fermented in stainless steel. This lovely Rosé opens with a vibrant nose stuffed with red berry fruits, bits of vanilla and a hint of yeast. The palate has a bit of firmness to it and is stuffed with red cherry, strawberry and a hint of red raspberry. The long, persistent finish shows off flaky biscuit, continued red fruits and a bit of crème fraîche. This wine will pair with an exceptionally broad range of foods. If you have a friend who loves sparkling wines this is a beautiful and well-priced choice.

Mumm Napa 2008 DVX (\$60)

This is a 50/50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. It spent 56 months en Tirage. Most everyone loves Sparkling Wine, but a lot of us don't drink it often enough. Gift this to someone as a reminder to drink it more often. The name DVX was chosen as an homage to winery founder Guy Duveaux. Stone fruit aromas emerge on the nose with apple if particular note. There is a finesse and elegance to the palate that's apparent and impressive from the first sip you take. Toasted almonds, strawberry, apricot, bits of citrus and lots of spice characteristics are in evidence on the palate. The finish is persistent and impressive in both length and depth. This is a wine that is lovely today but will age well. Mumm DVX is one of the very best Vintage Sparkling wines produced in California.

Cune Rioja Gran Reserva Imperial (\$70)

This wine is composed of Tempranillo (85%), Graciano (10%), and Mazuelo (5%). It was aged in a

combination of French and American oak followed by time in bottle prior to release. Spain's Rioja region remains one of the best to find value in wines that are aged and ready to drink. That applies in various price tiers. For \$70 this wine is a reference quality example of a Gran Reserva. It's ready to go now but it'll age well for another couple of decades at minimum. Leather and red cherry aromas dot the nose. The palate is studded with red berry flavors. Cherry, strawberry and subtle raspberry are all in play. The impossibly long finish shows off sour cherries, cinnamon and a bit of tobacco. It's a perfect gift for the friend who loves great red wine with a bit of age; it's and a stunning example of Rioja.

Pahlmeyer 2012 Merlot (\$85)

This offering is composed of Merlot (95%), Cabernet Sauvignon (4%), and Petit Verdot (1%). Aging took place in French oak of several sizes over 20 months. Bold, black raspberry aromas are joined by toast and vanilla on the welcoming nose of this Merlot. Blackberry leads the charge on the palate which is studded with an avalanche of pure, dark, mountain fruit flavors. Raspberry and dusty dark chocolate notes are apparent on the extremely long finish. Firm tannins and good acid provide excellent structure. This is an excellent example of Merlot from Napa Valley. This is a great gift for a Cabernet lover who needs to be reminded of Merlot's greatness.

Don Melchor 2011 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$125)

This is a single vineyard effort with all of the fruit coming from the Puente Alto vineyard in the Alto Maipo Valley. Conch y Toro has a large portfolio and this is the top entry in the entire thing. Year after year it stands as one of the best Cabernet Sauvignons in the world. I love the dark, inky color this wine leads with. Red and black cherry aromas fill the nose along with a hint of oak and subtle bits of violet. The palate is deep, and layered with intense fruit flavors. Blackberry and black raspberry are present along with continued cherry elements. Copious amounts of red and black fruit flavors continue on the finish along with roasted espresso, earth, sweet dark chocolate, black pepper, and a persistent earthiness. This is an excellent vintage of a wine that delivers year after year. Drink it now or lay it down for 15-20 years.

Stags Leap Collection \$1,899.00

If there's a Cabernet Sauvignon lover on your list, this is the ultimate gift. It features one Cabernet from each producer in the Sags Leap appellation. Some of them are super limited and not available outside of this set. In all it's a stunning collection of Cabernet from a highly praised vintage. Some of the producers are fairly new kids on the block others are long time legends of the region. Styles vary but the quality is high across the board. I recently tasted the entire set and you can read about it all right here.