

**GOOD LIBATIONS**

# A WINE FOR EVERY TWIST ON THE HOLIDAY TABLE



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"It's time for me to write that dreaded column about wine and Thanksgiving," I announced to my wife, my voice burdened with fake ennui.

My little ruse worked. She took pity on me and immediately came up with six great ideas (her creative brain skates impish circles around my old gray matter).

I'm saving the other five; they should last me through retirement. But here's one I think you'll enjoy: what wine to pair with Thanksgiving foods, no matter what their flavor. It's more of a challenge now than in grandma's time: tradition vies with innovation and disparate cultural influences at many Thanksgiving tables.

In keeping with the homey nature of the feast, I've kept the wine recommendations mostly Californian. I have sampled all of them over the past few months. Prices are the ones I found online, listed lowest to highest.

**PRE-DINNER SNACKING**

At our house, that means cheese (often the

stinky kind), smoked oysters, salumi and other big-flavor delicacies. But even if you're serving a simple cheese course, there are four basic cheese worlds: bloomy (creamy, ripe cheese with a soft, edible rind); blue (salty, sharp and pungent, with an immediate bite and a strong aftertaste); fresh (soft, mild, spreadable, ranging from mild to tangy); and hard (aged, often salty and faintly nutty, and at Thanksgiving sometimes sharp).

In the bloomy world, sparkling wine and Southern Californian chardonnay are good choices – the former is ideal with Camembert, the latter with brie.

**Recommendations:**

- Byron 2011 Santa Barbara County Chardonnay (\$16)
- Argyle 10 Brut sparkling wine (\$20)
- Babcock 2011 Santa Barbara County Chardonnay (\$25)
- Étoile NV sparkling wine by Domaine Chandon (\$40)

Blue cheeses can pair with Old World port (Gorgonzola) or sauterne (Stilton).

**Recommendations:**

- Six Grapes Graham's Reserve Port (\$13 for 375 ml)

In the fresh-cheese spectrum, ricotta and mozzarella can go with sauvignon blanc or pinot grigio;

pinot gris is good with ricotta, too. Chenin blanc, California's once-trendy, now maligned varietal, pairs nicely with goat cheese. Beaujolais, the light French red wine best served chilled, can work with goat and feta.

**Recommendations:**

- Veladora 2012 Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc by Orin Swift Cellars (\$27)

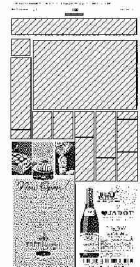
Hard cheeses pair best with big-bodied reds. Gouda and cheddar are perfect for cabernet sauvignon or merlot. A sharp cheddar or spiced cheese would be a sensible match for zinfandel. For more subtly flavored hard cheese such as Gruyère, a sauvignon blanc or a dry riesling would do.

**Recommendations:**

- Trigone Vineyards & Winery 2011 Russian River Valley River Road Ranch Sauvignon Blanc (\$23)
- Smith Madrone 2010 Napa Valley Riesling (\$27)
- Shafer 2010 Napa Valley Stag's Leap District One Point Five cabernet sauvignon (\$80)

**THE MAIN EVENT**

These days, the humble Thanksgiving turkey often absorbs the flavors of the subculture it serves. My wife's Mexican-American family likes their bird with a spicy cornbread stuffing; they've even been known to serve it with a rich mole sauce in addition to gravy. Our Asian friends cook a zesty bird with a Sichuan



tang and black bean sauce. In my family the flavorings are savory and Yankee traditional, with sage and rosemary dominating. The white-bread dressing is rich and sometimes seeded with tender walnuts and plump bits of smoked oysters. We have even tried brined, deep-fried and rotisserie turkey. I would recommend only the last preparation as Thanksgiving-worthy.

**Recommendations for spicy turkey:**

- Tablas Creek 2011 Pate-lin Rouge Proprietary Red (\$17)
  - Turley 2010 Juvenile Zinfandel (\$25)
- Recommendations for savory turkey:**
- Belle Glos 2011 Clark & Telephone Vineyard pinot noir (\$44)
  - Shea Wine Cellars 2010 Willamette Valley pinot noir Block 33 Sea Vineyard (\$55)
  - Byron 2010 Monument pinot noir (\$60)

**DESSERT**

That usually means pies, dominated by the classics, pumpkin and pecan. We like to pair them with appropriately sweet drinks.

**Recommendations:**

- Warre's Otima 10 (10-Year Tawny Port) \$26
- Prager Wine & Port Works 2008 Sweet Claire Late Harvest Riesling (\$20)

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FILE PHOTO: ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Wine selection can be tricky when Thanksgiving tastes stretch beyond old-school turkey, stuffing and mashed potatoes. Luckily, we can help.