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ON WINE

Let the Wine Do the Talking This Thanksgiving

For this most predictable of meals, our wine columnist selects 10 wines that will surprise, delight and give everyone at the table something to talk about (and nothing to argue over)



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By

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THE MOST PREDICTABLE meal of the year should be matched with equally unpredictable wines. With so many well-rehearsed dishes on the holiday table, let the pairing come as a pleasant surprise. It might be a wine from an unknown grape or an unfamiliar place, or both. The added bonus of a vinous obscurity? After the holiday pleasantries have been exchanged and exhausted, the wine will be a good—not to mention noncontroversial—topic of conversation.

I've chosen the following 10 red, white, rosé and sparkling options partly because they're out-there enough to intrigue everyone at the table, and partly because they pair well with the classic Thanksgiving dishes. They're also delicious. Here's to a holiday filled with excellent food, wine and conversation.

1. 2016 Montalbera Ruchè di Castagnole Monferrato La Tradizione \$24

Nebbiolo, Barbera and Dolcetto are all well known red grapes of Italy's Piedmont. More obscure red grapes grown in the region include the charming Ruchè (pronounced roo-kay), whose beguiling floral nose is reminiscent of violets in a field (but not in an overpowering fashion). The wine also has lots of crisp red fruit and a lively acidity that can take on the turkey, the stuffing and just about anything else.

2. 2016 Guímaro Camiño Real Ribeira Sacra \$25

Is Mencia the Spanish answer to Burgundy's Pinot Noir? The two grapes certainly have some appealing characteristics in common: snappy red fruit, bright acidity and charming fruit and floral aromas. But this Mencia bottling is a much cheaper buy than most Burgundies. The Ribeira Sacra region in the Galician northwest corner of Spain has a cool climate and slate soils that give rise to fresh, vibrant reds like this one, with just the right balance of fruit and acidity to stand up to rich Thanksgiving fare.

3. 2017 Dr. Konstantin Frank Rkatsiteli Finger Lakes \$19

The ancient white grape Rkatsiteli is native to the Republic of Georgia but also grown in the Finger Lakes region of New York thanks to Dr. Konstantin Frank, the man also credited with making Riesling commercially viable in the region. The late Dr. Frank—once denounced as something of a mad man and only later dubbed a genius—felt certain Rkatsiteli would grow well in the Finger Lakes. It's become a signature wine for his winery near Hammondsport, N.Y., along with their Riesling of course. This is a crisp, dry, fairly light bodied white with citrus and herb notes, a bit like a Chablis with the same food-friendly attributes.

4. 2017 Bodegas y Viñedos Ilurce Rio Madre Rosé \$10

Although quite a few drinkers relegate rosé to a single season, summer, certain rosés are equally good or even better in the cool months. That's particularly true of this hearty rosé from the Rioja region of Spain. The dark-hued, nearly red wine is produced from Graciano, a grape rarely vinified on its own and much more commonly blended with other Rioja grape varieties such as Tempranillo or Garnacha. It flies solo in this super juicy, cherry-scented rosé that looks like a red and drinks like a white.

5. Ettore Germano Rosanna Brut Rosé Metodo Classico \$27

A sparkling Nebbiolo made by the same method as Champagne in the Piedmont region of Italy may sound like an unlikely wine for Thanksgiving—perhaps an unlikely wine altogether. But Nebbiolo, the grape better known as the source of great Barolo and Barbaresco reds, is also behind this crisp, dry sparkling rosé marked by bountiful aromas of raspberries and cherries. It's a great apéritif but also makes a strong match for turkey, stuffing and sides.

6. 2016 Sidebar Kerner Mokelumne River \$25

Winemaker David Ramey has won fame and acclaim for his Napa Cabernets and Sonoma Chardonnays, under his own Ramey Wine Cellars label and those of others. But Mr. Ramey has a fun side project with the obscure Kerner grape. The white grape is much better known in its native Germany than it is in the Lodi region of California, where this wine is produced. In fact, the vineyard where Mr. Ramey sources his fruit has the only Kerner planted west of the Mississippi River, the winemaker claims. A cross between Riesling and Trollinger (a red grape), Kerner produces, in this case, a dry wine whose fruity aromas of citrus and pear reveal its Riesling roots. In the mouth, it's textured with a pleasing mineral edge, altogether exuberant and easy to like.

7. 2017 Savage Grace Cabernet Franc Two Blondes Vineyard Yakima Valley \$32

The superstar grapes of Washington state, Merlot and Cabernet, are Bordeaux natives and the usual suspects in just about every other Bordeaux-influenced part of the winemaking world. But another Bordeaux grape, Cabernet Franc, garners the spotlight in this bottling from Washington winemaker Michael Savage, working with fruit from the acclaimed Two Blondes Vineyard planted by winemaker Chris Camarda. This is an elegant, supple, intensely aromatic Cabernet Franc in the Loire style, which means it's a fresh and lively wine, with beguiling aromas and an aptitude for pairing with just about any food, including turkey.

8. 2017 Paumanok Chenin Blanc North Fork of Long Island \$22

The Massoud family of Paumanok Vineyards has had great success with Chenin Blanc, the white grape native to the Loire Valley of France, and yet no other winemaker or winery on the North Fork of Long Island has embraced it in the same way. As a result, the Massouds have the market pretty much cornered. The family is not only fully committed to the grape with 10 acres planted, but they're also planting four more acres this spring. Their 2017 vintage is a tangy, dry, melon-inflected white that's an excellent apéritif; at a mere 11% alcohol, it's easy to enjoy during and after the meal, as well.

9. 2016 Del Fin Del Mundo Reserva Pinot Noir Patagonia Argentina \$16

Malbec, especially Malbec from the Mendoza region, may be the most Argentine grape of all. It's the default red of many wine drinkers, but there are other grapes, too, that thrive in various regions of Argentina. Pinot Noir, for instance, though a native of Burgundy, grows particularly well in Patagonia, at the southern tip of the country, also known as del fin del mundo (the end of

the world). This bottling is a soft, fruity and very reasonably priced take on the grape with pretty aromas of cherry and spice.

10. 2016 Te Mata Estate Gamay Noir Hawke's Bay New Zealand \$20

New Zealand is famous for Sauvignon Blanc, and after that, Pinot Noir. Very few wine drinkers know that Gamay, the grape of Beaujolais, France, is also grown successfully on the north island of New Zealand; even fewer have tasted a Gamay from this part of the world. Te Mata Estate, located on Hawke's Bay, is home to all the standard grape varieties, including Sauvignon Blanc, but a few decades ago the estate also planted Gamay. The wine is partially produced by the same carbonic maceration method as Beaujolais—whole bunches of grapes crushed together—giving the wine a fruity, juicy profile similar to Beaujolais but with a juicy kiwi accent.

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