

Holiday Wine-Buying Guide From the Experts

Marilen Cawad

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NEW YORK ([TheStreet](#)) -- Wines have become a significant part of every holiday celebration. We serve them at dinner parties and give them away as gifts. As the holidays are upon us, we offer up some wine-buying tips from the experts -- those who make, buy and sell wines.

Greg Majors, wine director at [Craft](#) in Manhattan, says whether you're looking for the perfect pours for your holiday parties or wine gifts, you should always begin by determining how much you are willing to spend.

For intimate dinners of up to five people, Majors says he would be willing to spend up to \$40 per bottle. For larger parties, he looks for good-value wines that cost less than \$25.

How does he find good-value wines? These days, when almost everything -- including the price of wines and wine reviews -- is searchable online, Majors says the best place to start is still the local wine store.

"If you are a wine novice and you don't know what to serve your guests, choose from the staff picks section of your wine shop," Majors says. "Those tend to be more value-oriented."

What to Bring to a Holiday Party

Giving a bottle of wine as a holiday gift can be tricky. Once you've figured out how much you're willing to spend, the next question becomes: What is the appropriate wine to give?

Roberto Paris, wine director at [Il Buco](#) in Manhattan, says that if you're invited to a holiday dinner, a good bottle of sparkling rose is the safest bet.

As an alternative to champagne, Paris recommends **Ferrari Rose NV** (\$37) and the **Cavalleri Rose** (\$58).

"Some people prefer reds, others whites. But a good bubbly will satisfy anyone," Paris says. "Sparkling wines are also very versatile. You can drink them before, during and after dinner."

For the wine collector, he suggests the **Giulio Ferrari**, which retails for around \$100.

"If you are aiming to impress, Giulio Ferrari is a good choice. It can compare with any vintage champagne at a fraction of the price," Paris says.

Your Wine and the Environment

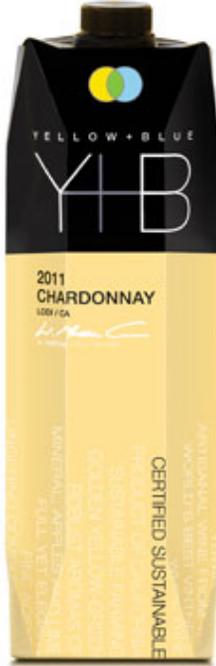
When searching for the perfect wine to serve or give away, it also helps to think "inside the box." Majors says depending on the producer, you may be able to find some really good boxed wines. "In some cases, we've found boxed wines to be in no way different from bottled wines," he says.

For a good holiday boxed wine, Majors recommends **Yellow+Blue**, which he says not only tastes good, but is economical. One box yields a full liter of wine at approximately \$12.

"If we shipped in a traditional glass bottle, our wine would be \$18 instead of \$12, with twice the carbon footprint for a third less wine," says Matthew Cain, president and founder of Yellow+Blue.

The name speaks for itself: When you mix Yellow and Blue, you get green -- as in environmentally conscious, which makes for an interesting talking point at holiday parties. You can discuss whether packaging really makes wine good or bad.

If environmental conservation is the theme of your holiday party or holiday gifting, consider wines that give back. **10SPAN** -- the name reflects the wingspan of a California condor -- gives a portion of its sales to the Ventana Wildlife Society and its efforts to reintroduce the California condor back into the wild.



10SPAN is sold at restaurants, but can also be bought online at [Underdog Wine and Spirits.com](#). **10SPAN Pinot Noir** retails for \$30, and the **10SPAN Chardonnay** is \$24.

Red vs. White: Holiday Pairings

Whether you choose boxed or bottled wine, it's important to know which wine pairs well with your favorite holiday dishes.

Cain suggests pairing Yellow+Blue Chardonnay with fish and white meat preparations, and the Malbec with beef tenderloin and rack of lamb.

Cupcake Vineyards based in Livermore, Calif. is another good-value holiday wine at less than \$12 per bottle. Served in establishments all over the U.S., including the **W Hotel** in Manhattan, Cupcake Vineyards has recently become [America's No. 1 premium wine](#) based on sales volume.

Cupcake Vineyards' Cabernet Sauvignon pairs well with holiday ham, while the Sauvignon Blanc goes well with roast turkey. "The well-balanced, creamy wine with citrus notes pairs beautifully with almost every dish on the table without overpowering the white meat," says Carolyn Lescher of Cupcake Vineyards.

If your holiday table will have both turkey and ham, Paris at Il Buco advises you to choose wine that is aromatic with a lot of acidity. For red, he likes the

Robert Sinskey Los Carneros Pinot Noir (\$38) and the **Capa Pinot Noir** (\$56). For white, he advocates wines from the Finger Lakes in New York such as **RNC Gewurztraminer** (\$15) and **Tierce Dry Riesling** (\$31).

Even with all of the above wine pairing suggestions, Paris says some would still prefer red over white or vice versa. For holiday parties, he suggests having both red and white at the dinner table and letting guests decide.

Overwhelmed with so many wine varieties to choose from? Paris says trim down the list by going local, especially at Thanksgiving. "It is, after all, a particularly American holiday!"

-- *Written by Marilen Cawad in New York.*

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