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Holiday Wines

story *Alex Eberspaecher*
photos *Judy Eberspaecher*

You can hear the roar of the north winds as they sweep through the large spruce in front of our house. The sun appears for a day or so again, just long enough to make us forget that the holiday season is just around the corner. Nevertheless, this is the season of anticipation that brings with it all the pleasures of Christmas, and of course... some good wines to be shared with family or friends.

As is the case each year, much has been said about wine. Many experts, writers or winemakers describe their

favourite wines, analyzing them in detail and confusing most of us. 'Wet cardboard, blackberries versus raspberries or even elderberries' which few Canadians know, right down to such details as 'hints or nuances of red or black currants' yet rarely do we find a suggestion if the wine is good or should be avoided.

Of course the wine is only good if you like it regardless of its price and, although it is often suggested that the better wines are the more expensive ones, I will disagree. My wine suggestions are based on

value not on price; in fact some of the lower-priced wines are better in my opinion than some wines that would cost you twice as much. All the wines suggested are readily available at your nearby LCBO stores.

Like all holiday suggestions, I too will start with a sparkling wine. Not a Champagne, they are overpriced, and not with an American or Australian sparkling wine but with an Italian Prosecco. Dry and slightly less bubbly than some other sparkling wines, a Prosecco is great to have on hand for those special occasions. It is also a good companion to most foods but superb with seafood and hors d'oeuvre. Look for any Prosecco; one that I enjoy is the Il Presecco from the Marche Region of Italy. CSCP 588053 for \$12.60.

White wines are not as easy to select. It greatly depends on one's personal preference. However, there can be no doubt that a Riesling or Chardonnay



from Canada will be as good as any imported white wine. A Riesling from Ontario may cost slightly more than cheap imports but comparing the quality, and including a bit of loyalty of course, the REIF VQA Riesling (pronounce Reesling and Rife) CSCP 111799 for \$12.05 is an excellent choice. This wine is good with pork roast, turkey or chicken and Asian food. For those of you who prefer Chardonnay, I suggest a wine from California in the Fetzer Sundial Chardonnay, CSCP 291674 for about \$12.00. This is a very decent wine, slightly oak flavoured but with intense fruit.

Some of my readers may be surprised that I am selecting as the top value red wine, the Argentinean Fuzion. It is difficult to argue with success, besides I am in the same corner. I must admit that when the wine was first introduced to Ontario two or three years ago, it was often inconsistent in quality. Perhaps the reason was that the producer didn't foresee the wine's popularity in Ontario. Today, three years later, they are still selling almost a thousand cases a day in Ontario and consistency is no longer an issue. I find the wine of good value, not overly exciting but very honest, good in taste and very drinkable. I know that wine snobs may not agree with me, but I can't

think of a better wine that is so pleasantly ordinary and enjoyable. The Fuzion a Shiraz/Malbec blend, CSCP #83188 sells for \$7.75, and that is real value when you have large gatherings at this time of year!

Something sweet of course will round out the evening. So how about a wine that is not only sweet and rich enough to go with desserts but also with cheese, and, of course, is outstanding on its own? A Port will fit that bill. The Korpe Ruby Port, with 20% alcohol for about \$14.95 is a good start. The wine goes well with cheese, and even better with roasted almonds or walnuts.

I checked with the local LCBO stores and all the brands listed should be readily available in the Mississauga area. Cheers, enjoy the season and if you want to match wines with food, look up my food-and-wine-match page at www.winecop.com. I would love hearing your comments. GL



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