

Wines for the Season

By Andre Mendoza

With the arrival of fall and the coming of winter, wine lovers everywhere are wondering what wines they can enjoy and stock up on through the colder seasons.

No absolute definitions are possible in a wine-world governed by subjectivity. However, the seasonal changes reflected on our tables for produce, should also be reflected in our wine buying habits.

The wines of this fall and winter are lively and luscious, both red and white.

I will describe some of my picks from around the

world starting with France.

French reds are deep with medium to full tannins and worth aging five to 15 years. The 1999 Chateau Leoville Las Cases - Grand Vin de Leoville du Marquis de las Cases, St Julien is a Bordeaux displaying layers of currant and tobacco, which tend to linger. The Chateau Dauzac 1999 (third Grand Cru Classe), Margaux AOC has plenty of tannins and cassis and is a great wine for a third growth. Pair these two wines with steaks, ribs or game accompanied by heavier sauces such as Bordelaise.

If you're thinking of buying a bottle of Rothschild, Latour, Margaux or Haut Brion, do so now. The 1999 vintage has depth, plenty of fruit and is worth aging. The coming 2000 vintage is the best in a long time in Bordeaux and prices will reflect this. The actual price for a bottle of Chateau Haut Brion 1999 varies from \$150 to \$250, while those of 2000 will see numbers over \$300.

Italy's Barolo Brunate 1997 can excite even the most

stubborn of palates, with notes of raspberries and cassis. If money is not an object, at around the same high price, Gaja Barbaresco 1999 is another proud aristocrat of the house of Piedmont in Northern Italy. If you're into those super Tuscans try a 1998 Sassicaia or a 1997 Solaia. Pair them with grilled salmon or a heavier seafood dish.

I couldn't leave the Italian varieties without mentioning one of the best Nebbiolo based wines in the world, the 1999 Barbourville Nebbiolo Reserve. It's from Virginia (yes, right here in the U.S.). Enjoy it now or age it another four years. A great pairing for a veal dish with morels or portabella mushrooms.

Hailing from Victoria, Australia is the 1996 Tahbilla Shiraz, which is smoky, fruity and satisfying. A friendly pairing with duck confit.

From Chile, Almaviva 1999, a Baron Philippe de Rothschild and Concha y Toro venture. It provides a strong argument for the quality of the vineyards and wine making there. Drink it now or hold for five to 10 years.

Primitivo, the parent grape of American Zinfandel displays ripe fruit and palatability. The 1998 Apollonio Primitivo from Apulia, Italy can be served when you would Zinfandel, such as with spit-roasted pork, garlic lamb chops or game dishes with light greens.

Ravenswood Teldeschi, 1999 Zinfandel is a delightful Sonoma Zin with plenty of cherries, black peppers and herbs. Ditto for a 1998 Edmendes Mendocino Ridge Zinfandel. Enhance your chicken or lamb stew with either one of these marvelous wines.

From Burgundy, a 1999 Robert Amoux Grand Cru Echezeaux, a Domaine de la Romanee Contee: 1999 or La Tache 1999 (expect to pay top dollar). If you drink them now the tannins will play out with the heavier fare of the season, though you might also age them for the next five to 10 years. Rochioli 2000 is a rich Pinot Noir from Southern California with hints of smoked cherries and cassis. If you're looking for a bargain then try Oak Knoll Pinot Noir 2000, Willamette Valley, Oregon.

The Burgunian Pinot Noirs will pair well with grilled salmon, and the Californians, with roasted or grilled chicken accompanied by baked potatoes or vegetables.

continued on page 30

The concentrated 1999 Domaine des Grands Fers Fleurie, Beaujolais will do it for that burger or pizza with cheese or pepperoni. Who said simple food can't be enjoyed with a glass of wine? Chill the bottle to around 55 degrees before serving.

Whites

The fading colors of the season resemble the color of our seasonal wines, diverse like nature and darker hued; our autumn and winter wines are heavier in body than those of the preceding season.

White wines with these characteristics can be boldly paired with game or steak if you don't drink red. Riesling is the first choice for cooler times and considered the most food-friendly wine of them all.

My first Riesling pick is the 2000 F.X. Pidler Amaragd Kellerberg from Wachau-Austria, one of the best ever, worldwide. At a more affordable price is the 1999 Frankland Estate Isolation Ridge from Western Australia. Try either one of these Rieslings along with Thai food; even boar or venison.

The 2000 Chalone Chenin Blanc, a fabulous Chenin can stand up to red meats. Why? It's rich with balanced fruit and dryness, cutting through the fat of steak while enhancing its flavor. Chalone's best pairing is a lean grilled fish dish with a rich sauce; veal and lamb can match up well too.

While the Rhone Valley in Southern France has produced the best quality Viognier-based wines over the years, Virginia is demonstrating its potential as a producer of high quality Rhone-style wines. The 1999 Horton Vineyard Viognier is an outstanding achievement in Virginia's winemaking. The Horton Viognier 1999 is dry with an exotic perfume. Try with a turkey dish.

continued from page 30

or baked fish with herbs.

For Chardonnay lovers, the 1998 Mer Soleil Barrel Fermented, Central Coast is full bodied, oaky and buttery with exuberant fruit. Pair it with veal, grilled salmon or pork accompanied by fruity sauces.

A step between white and red: Rosé. Try the 1999 Domaines Ott Chateau Romassan Cuvée Marine Rose, Bandol, from Provence, France. Enjoy it with fish accompanied by garlic, tomato and olives, or if you prefer, broiled chicken or roasted ham.

Champagne

For a perfect celebration companion, try the 1994 Lenz Cuvée from the North Fork of Long Island. It's a dry, full-bodied wine to be served along with shellfish or chicken with creamy sauces. One of the best wines of the year: Millesime 1985 is a fabulous champagne with honey, candied fruit and rich scents. Pair it with spicy Asian cuisine or hors d'oeuvres. At a lower price point, Pommery Grand Cru Brut 1995 has medium body with a delicate finish.

I believe in finishing dinner with a glass of dessert wine either in substitution of dessert, or as a complement to fruit. My pick to accompany apple pie or a pear dessert is the 1998 Inniskilin Oak Aged Vidal Ice wine, from Niagara Peninsula, Canada. You'll experience notes of orange, apple and tropical fruit, with a touch of spice at the end.

Keep your wine selection simple, but focused on the meals you'll have this season. Remember: price is relative. You can find great food-pairing wines at price points below \$30. Enjoy the holidays with a glass of wine. Saluda! 🍷

Andre Mendoza is an independent sommelier. He can be reached at andr525@aol.com.