

Wine for the holidays

By Rich Mauro

The holiday season presents consumers with such a dizzying array of wine choices that it can be intimidating. This potential problem, however, is an opportunity to be creative in the choices you make. Whether you are planning a holiday dinner or just looking for something for everyday drinking, I have assembled a list of great wines from recent tastings to get you started. Of course, any of these would also make a great gift.

International

Australia. How about a wine with dual appeal? Here is one that combines the popularity of Australian Shiraz with the star power of an international collaboration between Tony Terlato, the respected American wine importer, and Michel Chapoutier, a leader in Rhone Valley. Although this one has a name that may be difficult for Americans to decipher, the 2004 Domaine Terlato & Chapoutier Shiraz "lieu dit Malakoff" delivers quality that should be easy to enjoy.

France. Although the traditionally great wines of the Rhone Valley tend to be prohibitively expensive, a look to some of the lesser-known appellations can pay dividends. Two excellent examples are the 2003 Chapoutier Crozes-Hermitage "Les Meysonniers," made from biodynamic grapes, and the 2003 J.L. Chave "Offerus," made by one of the great Hermitage producers from grapes grown in the lesser known district of St. Joseph.

20 years ago, long before the area was a sought-after growing region. His 2003 Sleepy Hollow Vineyard, 2003 Cuvee Cynthia and 2002 Diamond T are pure expressions of the area's cool climate and mineral-rich soils. Chateau St. Jean is one of the premier wine producers in Sonoma County. They have been making a Robert Young Vineyard (current vintage 2004) and Belle Terre Vineyard (current vintage 2003) ever since 1975. There is also a 2005 Sonoma County that is a consistent value.

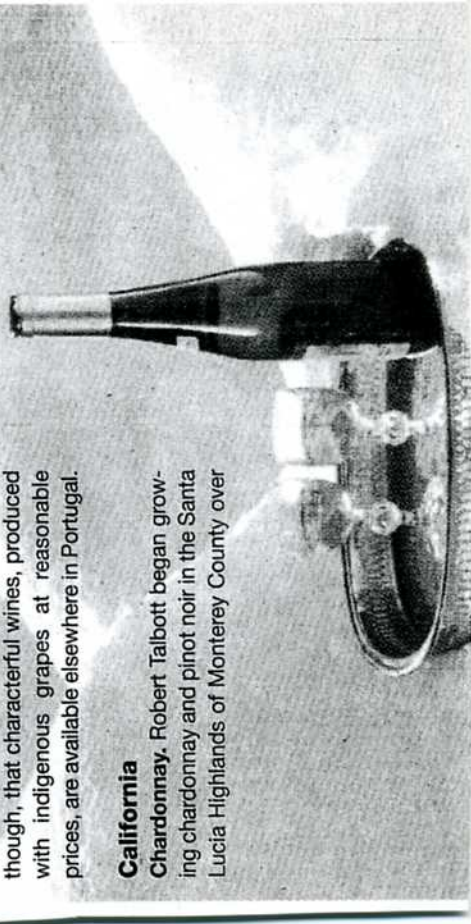
Sauvignon Blanc. Ever since the Dry Creek Vineyard was founded in 1972, the winery has been a leading California Sauvignon Blanc producer. And now there are three different choices: the 2005 Sonoma County Fume Blanc, 2004 Estate Fume Blanc DCV3 from the winery's oldest vineyard, and 2004 Taylor's Vineyard from a unique clone of sauvignon blanc called sauvignon "Musque."

Other Whites. Tangent is a new portfolio of wines from the same family and winemaker responsible for the wines of Baileyana in Santa Barbara. The focus is on "alternative whites," meaning not chardonnay. The initial releases, including the 2005 Pinot Gris Paragon Vineyard and 2005 Albarino, are impressive.

Cabernet Sauvignon. If there is a California style for Cabernet Sauvignon (more flamboyant and fruit-filled), it is exemplified by the Napa Valley. And, to my palate, Beringer Vineyards is the quintessential Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon producer. Although Beringer produces exceptional single vineyard Cabernets, it

Syrah. Rosenblum Cellars may be best known for their multitude of single vineyard Zinfandels, but they also have become one of California's premier producers of Rhone-style wines. Here again, numerous single vineyard bottlings are available. Among the Syrahs, start with the 2004 Rominger and the 2004 Hillside Vineyards.

Other Red. The Phillips family has been farming in California's Lodi area since 1860. Michael and David Phillips now produce wine under seven different labels. In addition to an "Incognito" Viognier and "Earthquake" Syrah, I was impressed with the 2004 "Windmill" Old Vine Zinfandel and 2004 "Incognito" Red Wine. ■



California

Chardonnay. Robert Talbott began growing chardonnay and pinot noir in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey County over

the winery's blends especially the big, rich and concentrated Private Reserve (current vintage 2002) – that I consider the definitive expression of Napa Style.

been making wine in Campania in the shadow of Mt. Vesuvius since 1750, and is a leader in preserving native varieties, such as fiano, aglianico, and the "piedirosso" that is responsible for the 2004 Lacrima Christi del Vesuvio Rosso, famously known as the "tears of Christ."

Portugal. Ever since the days of the British Empire, Port has dominated the Portuguese wine industry. Lately, Port producers have turned their expertise to table wine. Even Bordeaux producers are getting into the act. The Cazes family of Chateau Lynch-Bages and the Roquette family of Quinta do Crasto have entered into a joint venture to produce a Douro red. The 2003 Roquette e Cazes "Xisto" (pronounced shees-too) is a most impressive inaugural release. Keep in mind, though, that characterful wines, produced with indigenous grapes at reasonable prices, are available elsewhere in Portugal.

itary. From north to south, Italy is one of the world's most diverse wine-producing regions. There are many exceptional wines throughout the peninsula. One such wine is Mastroberardino. The family has been making wine in Campania in the shadow of Mt. Vesuvius since 1750, and is a leader in preserving native varieties, such as fiano, aglianico, and the "piedirosso" that is responsible for the 2004 Lacrima Christi del Vesuvio Rosso, famously known as the "tears of Christ."