



Christmas Wined Up

Christmas and drinks go together like elves and pointy ears. **Michael Franco** and some merry helpers round up bottles that are sure to put the holiday glow on every reveler's face this festive season.



Yes, yes, we know Christmas is all about joy to the world and goodwill toward men. But let's face it, with the economy still flatlining, the environment in decline and nations bickering at each other like Mrs. Claus trying to get a little love from super-busy Santa, we can all use a little liquid help. Perhaps more than any other time of year, 'tis the season to drink wine. As a gift, vino is always the right size and (usually) color; and for those tension-filled family gatherings there just might not be any better way to keep your teeth from gritting than to chomp down on a nice pinot.

Here we help simplify the sometimes daunting task of selecting bottles for holiday visits and meals (or for just guzzling by yourself while watching *A Christmas Carol* and bah-humbugging the night away), with a little help from some local winos, erm, we mean experts ...

Be A Wiseman (Or Woman)

Gold, frankincense and myrrh might have been appropriate gifts back in the day, but if you really want to show off your wisdom in modern times, you pretty much can't go wrong bringing a bottle of bubbly along during your holiday visits (what the hell is myrrh, anyway?). Vivian Goh, managing director of Absolute Wine—an innovative wine shop/bar that provides information about every bottle through a technology known as Radio Frequency Identification—suggests the following for your gift-giving needs: "A bottle of sparkling wine is always associated with celebration and holidays. Depending on budget range, the choice varies from a bottle of Cava from Spain or Moscato D'Asti or Prosecco from Italy to a bottle of vintage Champagne from France."



Robert Weil Riesling Trocken Vintage 2008

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Moscato D'Asti or Prosecco

Sarah Mayo, the founder of the TheLocalNose.com, a website that provides tasting notes and information on wines available in Singapore, echoed the sentiment. "The absolute easiest wine to bring anyone is Champagne ... only because it's festive, perceived as a high-value gift, and it goes with so many holiday foods, from starters to desserts," she says. Mayo particularly recommends the **Nicolas Maillart Platine** (\$75 from Artisan Cellars, www.artisan-cellars.com) or **Champagne Moutard Père et Fils Brut Reserve** (\$62 from wines2u, www.wines2u.com.sg). She also says that if champagne is too pricey, a way to impress for less would be with a good quality Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Gris such as the New Zealand **DreamMaker Pinot Gris** (\$36 from Rev Winehouse, www.rev-distrinet.com) or the **Shottesbrooke Sauvignon Blanc** from Adelaide Hills, Australia (\$29.75 from Wine Directions, www.winedirections.com).



Côte de Nuits Villages

Make It A White Christmas

Want to show off your wine smarts? Then consider bringing a Riesling home for the holidays. Most people—if they've heard of it at all—think of Riesling as a sweet dessert wine. That's one side of Rieslings, but they also come in much drier varieties that make them a refreshing way to start a gathering or a good companion to many foods. For an extremely dry option, try the **Robert Weil Riesling Trocken Vintage 2008** (\$55 from Vermilion Wine and Spirits, www.vermilion.com.sg). To be really impressive, you can tell

your family and friends

that Trocken is an official designation meaning dry. For a slightly less-dry option, Weil's **Riesling Kabinett** (\$62 from Vermilion) will do nicely. Both wines go surprisingly well with spicy Asian dishes, so if the gravy you put on your duck is of the chili variety, these will help tame the fire. They're also both relatively low in alcohol, so mom can't help but approve!

Wines To Pair With a Partridge

Well, not really a partridge, but most of us do indulge in another bird on the big day—turkey. It might seem like a daunting task to pick a wine that'll go good with the varied tastes and textures of a big holiday meal but Goh says, "Matching the right wine with a holiday meal can be a lot of fun. Figuring out which combinations work well together is part of the experience of tasting and enjoying wine and food." Her recommendations? "Champagne can be paired with a lighter appetizer such as smoked fish as it has a more mild flavor which can't compete with rich main courses," she says. "For a hearty beef main course, try a full bodied red such as a Shiraz or a Cabernet Sauvignon as both these wines pair nicely with dishes that complement its fruits and spicy qualities."

Mayo keeps it even more simple, saying that "with turkey, beef, lamb or ham—whatever the meat choice—Pinot Noir wines will shine." She adds: "These are a little more expensive than a Shiraz or a Cabernet Sauvignon, but they will compliment almost any festive meal—even Chinese!" When it comes to a new world choice, Mayo favors a **Mahi Pinot Noir** from Marlborough, New Zealand (\$52 from Artisan Cellars, www.artisan-cellars.com). For her old world pick, Mayo looks to Burgundy—the traditional home of pinot—and singles out the highly-affordable **Côte de Nuits Villages, Maison Jolie** (\$35 from Singapore Wine Consulting, 9109 6271).



Shottesbrooke Sauvignon Blanc



The 2Cs

Ring in the New Year with choice concoctions of specialty cocktails and champagne.



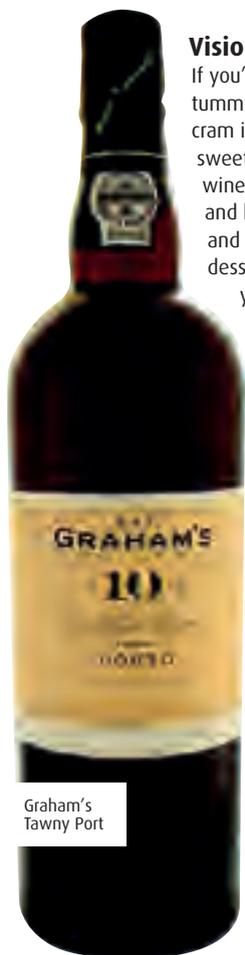
Bob's Bar

There's no better way to mark the festive season than to pop a bottle of champagne. But why not go a step further and enjoy a buffet spread along with that? After all, when you consider the cost of a bottle of champers, it's a pretty good deal to add a little more cash and get some choice sashimi, caviar and lots of other goodies along with it!

The Champagne Brunch Buffet on Christmas Day (\$180+++ at **Checkers Brasserie** (G/F, Hilton Singapore, 581 Orchard Rd., 6730-3332) offers free-flow champagne alongside epicurean meats such as Kurobuta pork roulade with honey glaze as well as sashimi and sushi—certainly naughty but also very nice. Another place to include on your holiday rounds is **mezza9** (1/F, Grand Hyatt Singapore, 10 Scotts Rd., 6732-1234) whose New Year's Day Brunch (Jan 1) not only gets you free flow of Mumm champagne for just \$128+++ , but also wine, Tiger beer, Bloody Marys, mojitos, Belvedere vodka and Havana Club rum ... plus buffet servings of roasted turkey, roasted pork and honey glazed ham. Now that's the way to keep the party going! If you want to up the indulgence factor even more, the Four Seasons New Year's Eve Gala Dinner and Dance (Dec 31, 8:30-11:30pm) at **One Ninety** (G/F, Four Seasons Hotel Singapore, 190 Orchard Blvd., 6831-7250) promises divine food like wagyu beef tartar and slow-cooked roasted veal tenderloin, with free flow of champagne and wine for \$238++.

If you're after specialty cocktails, don't miss out on these cool joints that whip 'em up like good little elves:

Pierside's (#01-01 One Fullerton, 1 Fullerton Rd., 6438-0400) Christmas Jones cocktail is the one to try. A fine, sweet and yummy blend of vodka, pineapple juice, sugar cubes, strawberries and a dash of Sprite, it's also very affordable at just \$12++. But if you need something stronger to put the Fa in your La La La, try **Bedrock Bar & Grill's** (#01-05 Pan Pacific Serviced Suites, 96 Somerset Rd., 6238-0054) Lapland Special (\$18), featuring Pampero rum, egg whites, Frangelico and Kahlua. If you're trying to be a good boy or girl by abstaining from the hard stuff in hopes that Santa will treat you right, the refreshing mocktail, **Santa's Memories** (\$9)—which fuses pink grapefruit, apple juice and Manuka honey—will do the trick. While over at **Bob's Bar** (The Knolls, Capella Singapore, 6591-5016), the drink sleigh runneth over with a slew of premium Christmas cocktails at \$22++ each. Don't miss Pimm's Claus, comprising Pimm's white peach puree, Martini Bianco, Grenadine Syrup and champagne.



Graham's Tawny Port

Visions of Sugar—Yum!

If you're like us, you have precious little room left in your tummy after a big, satisfying feast. So why work extra hard to cram in pies and log cakes when you can take your after dinner sweets in liquid form? Goh says, "A recommended post-dinner wine would be a Port which is a fortified wine; it's very rich and has a strong alcohol content. It is served in small amounts and enjoyed at the end of the meal with a cheese plate or dessert. One big perk to Port is that they don't go bad, so if you don't finish it during the first party, you can take your time drinking what's left." Being port lovers ourselves, we can heartily recommend the beautifully amber-colored **Tawny Port** from Graham's (\$86 from Booze Wine Shop, www.booze.com.sg) or the more ruby red **2003 Late Bottle Vintage of Graham's** (\$62 from Bottles and Bottles in VivoCity, 6376 9759). Ports are declared "vintage" in exceptionally good production years, such as 2003.

Goh also recommends trying the **Lustau Reserva Pedro Ximenez San Emilio Sherry from Spain** (\$102 from Absolute Wine, www.absolutewine.com.sg) which she says is made from sun-dried Pedro Ximenez grapes, and "is so thick that it oozes into the glass like treacle and smells of molasses and Christmas cake." She adds: "It's a handsome Sherry if you're surrendering to the primal delights of rich and complex raisiny flavours." Goh's suggestion is to try it poured over vanilla ice cream or paired with cheeses or traditional fruit mince pies.

For something that also dresses up a dish of vanilla in holiday finery, you might want to consider a bottle of **Crème de Cassis** from Lejay Lagoute (\$50 from Booze Wine Shop)—the original creator of Cassis from Burgundy, a region that famously provides good

growing conditions for the two varieties of blackcurrant berries used to produce the elixir. And, looking ahead to the end-of-year festivities, you can lend your celebrations a touch of class by also picking up a bottle of the company's **Kir Royal** (\$47 from Booze Wine Shop)—basically an intoxicating mixture of cassis and sparkling wine. Cheers! ■



Kir Royal



Crème de Cassis from Lejay Lagoute



Expert Opinion

Need an opinion or two about holiday wine-ing? Curtis Marsh, the founder of the information-packed website TheWanderingPalate.com has got plenty of them. We sat down with the wine wizard to drink from his glass of knowledge.

I'm heading to a friend's house for a holiday visit. What bottle should I bring them?

This is tricky, as gifts always are, but more so in terms of culture; if it is a gift in terms of Chinese culture, there is the overriding issue of "face." One has to convey a feeling of respect to the recipient but at the same time uphold one's own image. This does place a certain focus on the value of the wine—and it is definitely red wine—but you need to have a wine of established value for sure. I personally loathe this but at the same time respect it or understand it. There is also the question of one's nationality—that is, the person giving the gift—as there is always an added message and sense of

pride when giving someone a wine from your home country and the recipient will easily identify with this. I myself usually bring a bottle of New Zealand wine, although depending on the recipient, sometimes something very left field is appropriate if they are wine enthusiasts.

This is all a long-winded way of saying, for a Chinese recipient, I would give Bordeaux Red, from a Grand Cru Classe producer and a good vintage, like 2005. Two of my favourites at present in terms of wines that I feel are punching way above their weight as far as the official Bordeaux classification (that is, if you can appreciate there is a lot of fabulous 2005 Bordeaux to be had) are the **Chateau Malartic Lagraviere Grand Cru Classe Pessac-Leognan 2005**, (\$105 from Wine Culture, www.wineculture.com.sg) and **Chateau La Lagune – Grand Cru Classes Haut-Medoc 3rd Growth** (\$165 from Wine Culture).

As a new world option, and something that would go equally well with the turkey in terms of red, I'd choose a very supple pinot noir from New Zealand. This is one of the best wines one could use to enlighten friends on how well it pairs with many Asian cuisines. The **Neudorf Moutere Pinot Noir** (Nelson 2006) is a great choice. It's normally \$77.50 per bottle but I understand the importer Cellar Door (www.thecellardoor.com.sg), has a Christmas special price of \$62—a bargain!

If I were giving a wine to a connoisseur—that is, someone who really appreciates their wine and has a broad-palate (and is not obsessed with status wines)—I would give something eclectic. A couple of suggestions: A magnum (1.5 litre) of the **Fontodi Riserva Chianti Classico Vigna del Sorbo 2004** at \$189 per bottle (an awesome wine of immeasurable complexity), or Eban Sadie Columella **Shiraz Mourvedre** (Swaartland, South Africa 2006) at \$110 per bottle—an amazing wine from

possibly the most impressive biodynamic wine producer in the new world! Both are available through Singapore wine doyen Dr NK Yong (nkyong@pacific.net.sg, 6474 0076).

We're having a major turkey-based spread for our holiday meal. What should we drink with all that hearty grub?

There are many variables, however I find that to match with the roasting flavours and white meat of turkey, a rich, full-bodied white wine is a very good pairing. This generally calls for a chardonnay with some maturity or a pinot gris, in the more opulent style of Alsace or New Zealand.

On Christmas day, I'll be drinking the **Seresin Pinot Gris** from Marlborough, New Zealand (\$53, exclusively from Huber's Butchery, www.hubers.com.sg) along with my turkey.

But I am also serving up some chardonnay. At our table we like to be wine-adventurous and I also like using big bottles (as in magnums or 1.5 litres), as they always impress and go around a large table. We will be having the benchmark Corton-Charlemagne producer **Bonneau du Martray**. This is Grand Cru white burgundy, so it's 100 per cent chardonnay. The Singapore importer, again, is the estimable Dr NK Yong who has 2002 magnums at \$332 each, and the 1991 and 2001 only in 750ml at \$162 per bottle.

As a new world comparison, I am serving up one of my personal favourite New Zealand chardonnay producers, Kumeu River which finds its way to Singapore through an exporter called Inland Trading, and I believe is available at Crystal Wines (www.crystalwines.com). However you can check with Greg Corra at Inland Trading inland@inlandtrading.com.au who has a regular weekly air freight service. I will be serving up their **Kumeu River Chardonnay 2004** (\$60) alongside the single vineyard Mate's Chardonnay 2004 (\$90).

Christmas is typically thought of as a cold-weather holiday. Any advice on celebrating properly in the tropics?

As for summer holiday drinking, frankly I cannot think of anything better than a rosé—a vastly underrated wine in Singapore for reasons I cannot explain—as it goes so well with the climate and Asian cuisine. I always have a six pack of **Tarrawarra Estate Pinot Noir Rose** at home, with a couple in the fridge, ready to go as it were. This is serious rosé. Well, serious is probably not the right word—perhaps genuine, as it is not made as an afterthought, rather a dedicated pinot noir vineyard that produces it by leaving the skins in contact with the juice briefly. It sings of pinot noir flavour but has all the faculties of a refreshing white. This is available through Wine Directions (www.winedirections.com) at the extremely reasonable price of \$29 a bottle. Buy the six pack!

What about Christmas' signature color—red?

For those who just have to drink red, can I suggest pinot noir as the best variety in which to be indulging as far as elegance, flavour, fruit sweetness, versatility with all cuisines and low tannin which allows you to serve it with a slight chill—making it refreshing drinking in our tropical climate. One of the most impressive examples I have seen this year comes from Tasmania, called **Sugarloaf Ridge** (www.sugarloafridge.com.au); their 2007 an absolute blinder. The owners actually live in Singapore and you can purchase off them directly at very affordable prices—just \$65 per bottle (contact Julian Colville on 6418 1042 or info@sugarloafridge.com).