

# Pour Decisions

By Brett Chappell

## Quenching your Thanksgiving thirst

Selecting wine for Thanksgiving dinner is fraught with much more angst than it should be. By using some simple rules, the job can be effortless. The food is a matter of umami, sweetness and weight. The wine needs to compare or contrast except in one aspect—there must be acid.

Food wise, turkey and mashed potatoes are a blank canvas. Almost any wine will work with these beige foods. No matter how you cook your turkey, you will have a (mainly) white-fleshed poultry. Any wine is great with any poultry. All wines taste great next to a roasted chicken, so the meat and potatoes of the Thanksgiving table do not seriously count in the great formula of wine pairing.

The side dishes, however, make or break the perfect wine pairing. The earthy, substantial flavors of fall have replaced the refreshing, vibrant, tart flavors of summer. Thanksgiving dishes fall into two main flavor categories, sweet or umami. The sweet dishes on the table are sweet potatoes, carrots and corn. The umami dishes are squashes, root vegetables and anything with mushrooms. None of these foods is particularly light on the palate.

Here are the three concepts to use in pairing this meal. Thanksgiving wine must have a certain gravitas—weighty whites and robust reds. The wine should add what is missing in the menu. Fall produce is lacking in acid. High acid wines give a lift to the substantial food. Cranberries are a pairing linchpin. They are tart, weighty and have noticeable tannins. These berries are what the wine should be. With all that why, here is the what.

Riffing on the idea of cranberries, try a full-bodied, dry, bubbly, red Lambrusco—no sweetness here and enough substantial fruit to take on either the corn pudding or pumpkin pie. Lambrusco is a wine made from Lambrusco grapes in Italy's Emilia-Romagna. The variant of the grape used determines the wine's color intensity. They are all made from red grapes, but the color may vary from white to dark purple. Try Villa di Corlo's full red style for \$18.

Pinot blanc from France's Alsace will bring its full weight to the table. The grape makes sturdy whites full of ripe orchard fruits like apple and quince. There is plenty of lift from acid to clean the palate for the next bite of squash. Jean-Luc Mader's Pinot blanc also carries a smokey-honey note that adds complexity and goes for \$21.

If Aunt Sally just has to have a Chardonnay, then pick one with some zip. Full, oaky butter bombs do not work all that well at Thanksgiving. Choose a lightly oaked Chardonnay that shows the brightness this grape is capable of. Aeren's Sonoma County Chardonnay is grown in very cool areas and sees a touch of oak to mellow the wine just a bit. The best of both styles can be had at \$17.

Who doesn't love an Oregon Pinot noir on Thanksgiving? Pinot noir's subtle fruit and earthiness will bring out the nuances of earth found on the table. The grape has a refreshing acidity that will highlight and not overwhelm dinner. Montinore Estate, planted in 1982, was an early-established winery in the Willamette Valley. Their Pinot noir bears hints of raspberry, cranberry, cherry, star anise, a whiff of smoke and runs \$21.

The bright, abundant fruit in Beaujolais makes it a shoo-in for a fun get together. No one can be unhappy drinking this Gamay-based wine. Just try it; you will smile. Promise. The wine is raucous. Kermit Lynch, America's premier

Beaujolais importer, brings in an entry-level Beaujolais from Domaine Depeuble. This wine hits on all cylinders with a bowl of mixed berries, cinnamon, cherry pit, flowers, currants and graham crackers. That's quite a wine for \$17.

After the nap, come back for a piece of pecan, apple, or pumpkin pie and pair it with port. The wine's intensity will match the dessert's richness. Most port or Oporto is made in Portugal, but put a twist on it by trying a quality American version. Barnard Griffin from Washington State makes a stunner out of Syrah grapes. This wine shows ripe cherry and raspberry with a long finish of bittersweet chocolate and orange zest at \$17.

*Brett Chappell is a certified sommelier and wine educator with 30-plus years of experience in all aspects of the wine and restaurant industries. He and his wife, Jen, who is a Wine and Spirits Education Trust Level Two, escaped from Northern Virginia to Pine Knoll Shores to "retire" by opening MF Chappell Wine Merchant in the midst of COVID-19. MF Chappell Wine Merchant is located at 407 Atlantic Beach Causeway in Atlantic Beach, and the phone number is 252-773-4016. If you have a wine question, email [brett@mfchappell.com](mailto:brett@mfchappell.com).*

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