

## \$16 buys mouthfuls of good cheer

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As the season of jingling bells and wandering carolers begins, a sinister sound threatens to drown out the hallmarks of good cheer - the sickening rush of the bottom dropping out of the economy.

But the thought of passing a holiday season without spreading good cheer is just as distressing as the prospect of recession.

With that in mind, I suggest several wines to give or pour, all for \$16 or less. Some are my finds; others are from wine experts. May they help you spend small while giving with the largesse of your heart. After all, no sound lifts the spirits like that of a popping cork.

### **Robert Mondavi Private Selection Pinot Noir**

#### **California, 2007**

Price: \$9.99

If you've been too busy to pick a wine for Thursday's feast, here's one you can add to the last-minute grocery list. Smooth and balanced with mild cranberry and cherry in the nose, it cuts through the richness of dark meat and stuffing without overpowering milder dishes. Consider it the Izod sweater of wines -- a welcome, if not surprising, choice.

### **Adler Fels Gewürztraminer**

#### **Russian River Valley, California, 2007**

Price: \$14.50

This one goes wonderfully with turkey. So says Jason Earnest, co-founder of Raleigh-based Tobacco Road Cellars, which makes upscale California wines targeted to a North Carolina audience. Earnest describes this as a spicy, pale amber wine with fragrances of pear and pineapple. He says it's crisp and viscous, with a touch of residual sugar, nicely balanced by hearty acids.

### **Lockwood Vineyard Syrah**

#### **Monterey, California, 2004**

Price: \$16

Wine expert Barbara Ensrud, author of Metro magazine's "Cork Report" column, calls this syrah one of the best

red wine values she has come across. She describes it as a solid red with lush ripe berry flavors, and offers that the 2005 vintage also is good and maybe a little juicier.

### **Paul Jaboulet Parallele 45**

#### **Cotes du Rhone, France, 2006**

Price: about \$14

This one comes from Scott Luetgenau, head of beverage operations for Urban Food Group, which owns Frazier's, Vivace, Porter's and the new Coquette. Luetgenau applauds the wine's deep color, taste of juicy red fruits, spicy notes and round tannins. Serve it with fall and winter dishes such as pot roast or braised, short-rib pot pie, he suggests.

### **NO sauvignon blanc**

#### **Lake County, California, 2006**

Price: \$11.99

Meal after meal of rich food and red wine can leave the palate exhausted. Freshen things up with a hint of sunshine. This sauvignon blanc reminds me of summer vacation in a faraway place. It tastes of lemon and melon and finishes with notes of cut grass and flint. It's as clean and refreshing as swimming in a rock-bottom mountain lake.

### **McRitchie Pale Rider Dry Rosé Sangiovese**

#### **Yadkin Valley, North Carolina, 2007**

Price: \$16

This is the most exciting North Carolina wine I have tasted this year. Deftly made, it has a bright cheery nose full of fruit and finishes with a subtle dryness. If you want to give a wine lover a taste of North Carolina's best, give this. Get it online at [www.mcritchiewine.com](http://www.mcritchiewine.com).

### **Ferreira White Port Douro**

#### **Portugal, Nonvintage**

Price: \$15.95

This comes from a trusted wine expert, my brother-in-law Dave, who works in a wine shop when he's not busy banging out his dissertation or running marathons. Sweet and fruity with nutty tones, it has a festive alcoholic kick, he says. Even people who don't like port will like it, he promises. Give it to someone who needs a transcendental experience. Ask your favorite wine seller or go to [www.broadbent-wines.com](http://www.broadbent-wines.com).

### **Ramon Canals Cava Brut Reserve**

#### **Penedès, Spain, 2000**

Price: \$14.50

No list of holiday picks is complete without a sparkler. This one comes from Aris Ragouzeos, who teaches a wine appreciation course at Wake Technical Community College and appears on the TV show "Carolina Cooking." He says it could easily pass for a French Champagne, with many of the toasty, yeast flavors found in wines that cost twice as much.

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