

## Value in Winery Direct Wines



Last week, I wrote an online column recommending wine pairings for Thanksgiving. Many of my well-thought out wine recommendations were in the \$15 per bottle price range. However, after reading some of the online comments, I came to two conclusions; first, I have a thick skin. Second, many people would like to see recommendations for wines in the \$10-or-less range.

The latter is a tall order. All of the fixed costs that go in to producing an average "weekday" bottle of wine - grape growing or acquisition, labor, equipment, legal resources, storage, shipping and distribution - adds up to around \$9 per bottle. That does not leave a lot of wiggle room if you're wine shop is only charging \$10 per bottle. But it also depends on the quality of the juice going into the product. Massed produced wines can get their costs down another one or two dollars per bottle, but the quality of the wine might suffer. So, what other costs can be trimmed in order to get a decent bottle of wine for \$10 or less?

Distribution. Ever since the repeal of Prohibition, there has been a three-tier system of alcohol distribution in the United States. The three tiers are producers, distributors, and retailers - i.e. the wine shop. The basic structure of the system is that wine producers can sell their products only to wholesale distributors who then sell the wine to retailers, who, in turn, may sell to consumers.

Some states have become their own alcoholic beverage control jurisdictions. In these states, part or all of the distribution tier, and sometimes also the retailing tier, are operated by the state government itself. Think Utah and Pennsylvania to name a few. These states may also appoint contractors to operate under their authority.

Washington State does not require any form of three-tier system is the State of Washington. In Washington, retailers may purchase alcoholic beverages directly from producers, may negotiate volume discounts, and may warehouse their inventory themselves. The wine shops in the District of Columbia can sole-source wines directly from wineries if - and only if - the wines are not currently provided by a local distributor.

But it does not take a lot of imagination to conclude that wines that are sourced directly from the winery - cutting out the proverbial middle man - and can be offered at a more competitive price than if they went through the normal three tier system. The relationships that wine shops develop with certain wineries provide consumers with some unique wines for less money, resulting in truly exceptional values.

Here are a few exceptional values to keep on hand during the holidays::

**Non-vintage Rondel Brut Cava from Spain.**

This light-bodied bubbly from Spain is more fruity than dry, but this "extreme brut" is full of floral scents of white lilies and filled with soft peach, nectarine and roasted nut flavors. Briny and fresh it would be fantastic with shrimp or scallops. **Total Wine, McLean, VA \$9**

**2013 Chardonnay 'Della Venezie' by Allegrini**

Here is a great value for a delicious un-oaked Chardonnay from northern Italy. It's made by Allegrini, the famous Amarone producer. The ripeness of the fruit comes through with an intense aroma of apple and pear, enlivened by a subtle citrus boost. Graceful and harmonious, it is striking for its clear-cut, pristine palate. It has considerable body, supported by a crisp acidity. **Available at MacArthur Beverages in DC \$10**

**2012 Chanarmuyo Estate Malbec from Argentina.**

This lovely Malbec offers up soft tannins supporting flavors of velvety plum and blackberry fruit. Just a hint of smoke finds its way onto the medium-based finish. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill in DC \$10**

**2013 Legado Munoz Tempranillo from Spain.**

This Tempranillo has firm tannins and offers up a flavorful profile of dark berry fruit, earthy spices and just a little pepper. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill in DC \$10**

**Cloud Break Pinot Noir** from California. The Cloud Break Pinot Noir has charming aromas of raspberry and strawberry with notes of vanilla. Oak aging rounds out the wine and gives it body. Flavors of fresh strawberry, cherry, and raspberry fill the palate. The wine is elegant and crowd pleasing. Great with Salmon. **Available at MacArthur Beverages in DC \$9**

**Ropiteau Pinot Noir Vin de Pays** from Vin de Pays, Southern France. Established in 1848, Ropiteau Freres has a long history of making great Pinot Noir. This super value is proof positive. Bright cherry and berry fruit is complemented by earth tones and a smooth soft finish. Excellent with a Lamb Stew. **Available at Total Wine, McLean, VA \$10**

**Radius Cabernet Sauvignon** from Washington State. Fresh, Black Cherry, Chocolate, Medium-bodied Washington- Aromas and flavors of currant, black cherry and red jammy fruit. Hints of toasty oak lead to a long finish in this bold wine. Enjoy with red meats, game, sharp cheeses and dark chocolate. **Available at Total Wine, McLean, VA \$10**

**2013 Las Lilas Vinho Verde from Portugal.**

A bright, refreshing, young Portuguese white, tinted with lime zest and tropical fruit and accented by effervescence. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill \$10**

**2012 Legado Munoz Grenache From Spain.**

The Legado Munoz Grenache is light to medium bodied with notes of red and black berries, and a hint of spice. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill \$10**

**2012 Chanarmuyo Estate Cabernet Sauvignon/Cabernet Franc from Argentina.**

This is the perfect burger wine, a ripe red berry Cabernet with silky tannins and a long finish. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill \$10**

**2013 Merum Monastrell from Spain.**

Peppery tannins, raspberries and earth, a perfect food pair for BBQ, stew, anything meat. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill \$10**

**2010 Ma Gini Toscano Rosso Sangiovese from Italy.**

A young Sangiovese with fairly strong tannins, notes of anise, sun-dried tomatoes, and herbs. **Available at Schneider's of Capitol Hill \$10**

And in case you want to splurge...

**2012 Cotes du Rhone rouge by Domaine de Mourchon from France**

This is a blend of 60% Grenache and 40% Syrah. This Cotes du Rhone offers vibrant black raspberry, toasted spice, licorice and hints of violets to go with a medium-bodied, supple and seamless profile on the palate. Possessing excellent ripeness, as well as an excellent mid-palate, it's a rock-solid bottle of wine to drink over the coming 5-7 years. **Available at MacArthur Beverages \$12**