

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE | DELIGHT

The last thing you want at a party is a party wine, the oenological version of airplane movies and beach reading. Why invite the bland and forgettable, when there is a **cast of mostly inexpensive wines** out there that can contribute to the life of the party? These wines don't demand reverential sniffs and swirls or arcane knowledge for their appreciation. They get the conversation flowing, meet the dishes they're fixed up with for the evening and **go on to make a splendid pairing**. I call them aperitif-to-appetiser wines, and right now the wine world is full of such suave characters, flexible and approachable but certainly not one-dimensional. "They tend to come from **small producers who grow their own grapes** and are passionate about making wine with real personality," says importer Robert Kacher. These wines will go with a range of dishes if you play to their strengths, bright acidity and fresh fruit, and sometimes just a hint of sweetness that makes them even more food-friendly. When Pat Dudley, owner of Bethel Heights Vineyard in Oregon, describes her Pinot Noir, her comment is applicable to all of these wines: "It's a perfect wine to **stimulate conversation and appetite**, without dulling the senses." **Price key:** inexpensive—less than \$15; moderate—\$15 to \$25; expensive—\$25 or more.

**MODERATE ROSÉS**  
**2010 Prieuré de Montézargues Tavel**  
 Rosé is very trendy right now, and this Tavel is a top-notch one, displaying Tavel's characteristic robust muscularity but possessing far more refinement than usual. It's the perfect mate for cheese-based hors d'oeuvres.

**INEXPENSIVE WHITES**  
**2010 King Estate Acrobat Pinot Gris**  
 This rare Pinot Gris from Oregon balances crisp, tart minerality with fine ripe fruit. The *sur lie* ageing, meaning the expired yeasts are not removed from the wine, adds just enough



(ENTERTAINING)

# Good Company

Do your next party a favour: Invite a social butterfly. These easygoing wines have plenty of personality and adapt smoothly to all sorts of situations. | By Nick Passmore

substance for the Acrobat to work as an aperitif. It's perfect with two favourite appetisers—smoked salmon and caviar.

**2010 Alois Lageder Pinot Bianco**  
 This Pinot Bianco, the best I've ever tasted, comes from the slopes of Alto Adige in northern Italy, the country's coolest viticultural region. The limestone soil is the other ingredient that brings forth this remarkably concentrated wine. It's great with cheese puffs.

**2010 Altozano Verdejo Sauvignon Blanc**  
 This ultra-modern, experimental winery's forte is growing and sometimes blending traditional Spanish and international varietals. This is my favourite Altozano wine for its juicy succulence and intensity (belied by its rock-bottom price).

**2010 Clean Slate Riesling**  
 The name asks you to ignore your Pavlovian response that German wines are sweet and approach this one with an open mind. But *slate* is also the perfect word for the taste of this mineral-infused treat, although the dryness is nicely moderated by the fruit. The ideal accompaniment for spicy crab cakes.

**2010 E. Guigal Côtes du Rhône Blanc**  
 Delicious, inexpensive and easy to find—this is the all-purpose cocktail-and-finger-food white. (Gallery owners with an impending opening, take note.)

**2009 Josef Weingut Leitz Eins-Zwei-Dry "3" Riesling**  
 I'm going to go out on a limb here and declare this the best white wine in the world for the money. The name is a pun. In German, "eins, zwei, drei" means "one, two, three," meaning the wine is easy to like, with the kicker that it's also dry. Yet it's still a touch exotic, with hints of apricots on the front palate and Granny Smith apples on the finish, making it perfect for Asian appetisers such as spring rolls with sweet-and-sour sauce. >>>

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**2010 S.A. Prum  
 Essence Riesling**

This thoroughly modern German wine is slightly off-dry on the front palate, which means it may taste a bit sweet, but ends with a clean, crisp finish. Which means it's the wine to serve with all but the spiciest Asian food.

**2010 Hugel Gentil**

Hugel, one of Alsace's oldest winemakers, seamlessly blends six varietals (Gewürztraminer, Muscat, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling and Sylvaner) to make this beauty, which is so versatile that it would be my choice were I serving tapas for appetisers.

**2010 Jacob's Creek Reserve  
 Barossa Dry Riesling**

Jacob's Creek achieves a feat that's rare in the wine world: It produces large quantities of well-made, delightful wines and sells them at very reasonable prices. This Riesling from Australia's Barossa Valley is one of its best efforts, an uncomplicated combination of sweet and tart that cries out for chicken saté.

**2010 Bollini Pinot  
 Grigio Trentino**

It couldn't be more different from the run-of-the-mill anemic Pinot Grigio. It's pure, clean and packed with deliciously seductive fruit, the essence of oranges, peaches, pears, tart apples and grapefruit. Perfect with shrimp.

**2009 Toad Hollow  
 Francine's Selection  
 Unoaked Chardonnay**

When you strip out the oak from Chardonnay, you'd better have good grapes because there's nowhere to hide. This wonderful Chardonnay from Mendocino County demonstrates.

**MODERATE WHITES  
 2010 Heritage  
 Sauvignon Blanc**

After 39 years at California's Clos du Val, French-born Bernard Portet has lost none of his European approach to winemaking. His lean, elegant style is finely displayed in this wine, which is perfect for sushi, especially tuna and yellowtail.



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**2010 Alain Assadet Menetou-Salon Sauvignon Blanc**

Menetou-Salon is a small appellation, but its reputation is growing fast. Buy it while it's still inexpensive. This wine's razor focus (white peaches in mid-summer) makes it perfect for bay scallops wrapped in pancetta.

**EXPENSIVE WHITES  
 2009 Duckhorn  
 Migration Chardonnay**

The cool climate of Sonoma's Russian River Valley yields a wine with a lot of personality and a lot of finesse—an elegant, white-gloved lady in a world of chorus-girl Chards.

**2009 Domaine Cordier Père et Fils Pouilly-Fuissé**

The essence of French Chardonnay, glowing with fresh fruits, honeysuckle aromas and a gravelly minerality on the finish. Serve with a first course of salmon, sole or swordfish.

**MODERATE REDS  
 2008 Vietti Tre Vigne  
 Barbera d'Alba**

Barbera works splendidly as an aperitif as well as with lighter foods. It's not complex, but in good vintages like '08 it bursts with bright red fruit that makes it the perfect foil for goat-cheese-stuffed mushrooms.

**2008 Antinori Peppoli  
 Chianti Classico**

This wine exemplifies everything Chianti should be: fresh, lively and made with minimal ageing in new oak. The 10% Syrah and Merlot added to the Sangiovese gives it just the right amount of weight to stand up to slices of pizza or even filet mignon.

**EXPENSIVE REDS  
 2009 Bethel Heights  
 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir**

The perfect red for a fancy reception. Bright and lively, packed with strawberries and summer cherries, it has none of the ponderous oak of California Pinots. It's a match made in heaven for pork appetisers. **AS**

*Nick Passmore writes regularly about wine, food and spirits.*