

THE POUR

Eric Asimov

There's One Thing You Left Out

IT'S the absolute last minute. All your Thanksgiving preparations are in order. Almost. "Oh no! I knew I forgot something . . . the wine!"

No, you are not alone. You may have ignored or overlooked the dutifully creative suggestions for Thanksgiving bottles dispensed by wine writers countrywide last week, but I will not wag an admonishing finger. Now is the time for action, not recriminations. So here are quick, easy solutions to last-minute beverage problems.

It's too late to track down ideal bottles. What can I get that's easy to find and cheap?

When in doubt, think Beaujolais. This is true even in those uncivilized corners of the earth that don't celebrate Thanksgiving. It's a versatile, juicy, joyous red that will go with almost anything. Ordinarily, I gravitate toward the best small producers, like Jean-Paul Brun, Pierre-Marie Chermette, Marcel Lapiere, Jean Foillard, Daniel Bouland and Julien Sunier, just to name a few. But now is not the time for a search.

Instead, Beaujolais-Villages wines from larger-scale négociants like Louis Jadot and Joseph Drouhin should be as easy to find now as pilgrim hats and turkey basters, whether you're shopping at suburban supermarkets or your local bodega wine shop. Wines from the very good 2010 vintage are fresh and energetic. Best of all, they'll only set you back around \$10 a bottle.

But you're talking JUST about red wines. I'm looking for whites.

No problem. The white-wine equivalent of 2010 Beaujolais-Villages is 2010 Mâcon-Villages. In its basic form, from négociants like Drouhin and Jadot, these are crisp, snappy chardonnay wines, also for around \$10 a bottle. If you move up the chardonnay chain a

bit, you could look for Pouilly-Fuissés or even Chablis. Drouhin makes a very creditable basic Chablis, and the 2010 is less than \$20 a bottle. But let's remember, we're in a rush and staying basic. The message is Mâcon-Villages.

Enough with the French wines. This is an American holiday. Where's your patriotism?

No need to bring politics into it. You want American? I got American. Year after year, Marietta Cellars makes Old-Vine Red, a blend both of vintages and grapes, like the old-timers in California used to do it. These wines are labeled by lot numbers rather than vintage years. The last two, 57 and 58, are bright and spicy, usually cost no more than \$12 a bottle and are widely available.

What about zinfandel? Everybody always recommends zinfandel for Thanksgiving.

Not everybody. Thanksgiving is an endurance contest. You have to pace your eating and drinking. That's hard to do with zinfandels that frequently blow past the 15 percent alcohol level. But just so you know, the Marietta blend is largely zinfandel. Here's another really good blend that's mostly zinfandel: Ridge Three Valleys. This wine, too, is widely available, but it'll cost you \$22 or so rather than \$10.

You want something that actually says zinfandel on the label? In the realm of easily accessible, inexpensive wines, I'm sorry to say, finding a good one is not easy. Names that I look for, like Dashe and Nalle, are going to cost \$20 to \$30 at least, and are not everywhere. You could try Ravenswood Old Vine Sonoma County zinfandel for around \$15. The 2009 is dense yet exuberant.

There you go talking only about reds again. How about an American white?

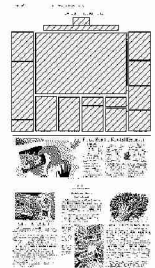
My standby is the \$15 Finger Lakes riesling from Ravines. This is a great wine, but alas not so readily available outside New York. Leo Steen chenin blanc from Dry Creek Valley in California is another great \$15 bottle, likewise not in every shop. Frankly, the mass-market American white-wine pool under \$15 is tough going. Here's a thought: Oregon pinot gris, particularly recent vintages from King Estate, a large producer that makes dry, energetic and reasonably priced wines, generally \$12 to \$15.

Look, I know it's the last minute, but Beaujolais? Zinfandel? These choices are so predictable. Can't you suggest something easy to find yet unexpected?

Please, is anything really new under the Thanksgiving sun? Let me tell you, unexpected and readily available rarely go in the same sentence. But, fine, let's try.

I always like a good barbera from the Piedmont region of Italy. These reds can be fresh, inviting and zesty, particularly when they're not trying too hard to be great. The 2010 Barbera d'Asti Le Orme from Michele Chiarlo is a dense, purplish glass of refreshment, for around \$13. The Vietti Tre Vigne Barbera d'Asti for a few dollars more is a step up, with a little more complexity.

If you want a white, how about a Muscadet? Like barberas, these tangy whites are lively and versatile enough to go with anything you might hazard to place on the Thanksgiving table. In his new book, "Thanksgiving: How to Cook It Well," my colleague Sam Sifton recommends against serving filling preliminary dishes, with one appetizing exception: oysters. If you eat them with Muscadet, you will be in heaven. Look for entry-level bottles from excellent producers like



Domaine de la Pépière, Luneau-Papin or André-Michel Brégeon, which should run \$15 or less. Better yet, see if you can find a few magnums for impressive effect.

Enough already! I just want to have bubbly.

Well, why not? Sparkling wines are superb partners for a huge range of foods. I know I'm going to start my Thanksgiving with Champagne, and I wouldn't hesitate to stick with it throughout the meal. But you're not going to find good Champagne

these days for less than \$35 or so. No worries, though, plenty of inexpensive alternatives exist, and you can confidently buy American if you choose.

Consider Gruet, from the great state of New Mexico, which makes very good Champagne-style sparklers generally costing no more than \$15. Gloria Ferrer bruts and blanc de blancs are crisp, pleasant sparkling wines, and for a few dollars more but still under \$20, Roederer Estate Brut from Mendocino is superb.

I can't bear to think about Thanksgiving anymore. What do I drink afterward?

Try a beer. Or a hot toddy. But if you really need a pick-me-up, remember the words Fernet Branca. It's an Italian digestive, a distinctively bitter blend of many herbs that, in my experience, restores that sense of equilibrium when you've had about all you can take. You'll thank me, and your stomach will thank me.



SUZANNE DeCHILLO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

DON'T FORGET A display at Stew Leonard's Wines on Route 17 in Paramus, N.J., one of many large suburban wine retailers.