

With Thanksgiving wine, pretty much anything goes

By Michael Austin

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I knew wine was special long before I ever had my first sip of it.

The stuff had to be special because when I was a kid, it was always served in a carafe — never in its own bottle — and on Thanksgiving, a carafe or two stood among rarely seen china bowls and silver platters on a white tablecloth.

After my first sip of wine, the thing I had known for sure — that wine was special — came into serious question. Only many years later, when I returned to wine as an adult, did I come to appreciate its taste. My initial belief had been right all along — wine was special.

Isn't it a relief to know, despite all of our wine-pairing precision, that on Thanksgiving, pretty much anything goes? There is simply too much flavor and texture to put your wine choices in a box.

Bring the fruit and acidity, do away with harsh tannins and high alcohol, and whatever you pick will do just fine. Have some dessert wines on hand, and don't skimp on the sparkling wine. It's a celebration. Remember that after the feast (at least according to my experience) there

will be lots of random drinking followed by rudderless snacking. Have a good variety of wine on hand for that. Pick American wines on this American holiday, but also save space for some international selections.

Below are some suggestions that might work for you and your family this year. Serve that cranberry sauce straight out of the can for an ironic twist, or arrange it on a crystal dish in a nod to Rockwellian tradition. Either way, it will look great next to your wine bottles.

Start with some bubbles — on Thanksgiving and as often as you can in your life — perhaps with a biscuity and lime-kissed 2014 Argyle Vintage Brut (\$28) from Oregon's Willamette Valley, the chalky and lemony Champagne Vollereaux Blanc de Blancs Brut (\$60), the frothy cherry-strawberry 2014 Frank Family Vineyards Brut Rose (\$55) from Carneros, or the bright and berry-full Gerard Bertrand Thomas Jefferson Cuvee Rose Cremant de Limoux (\$16) from France. They're all appropriate from the first glass of the day to the last.

For white wines, you could try the 2016 Cha-

teau La Freynelle Blanc (\$14) from Bordeaux, a blend of sauvignon blanc, semillon, and muscadelle with gooseberry and melon notes, or the 2016 Chehalem Three Vineyard Pinot Gris (\$20) with its Oregonian spiced-apple, cinnamon and honey notes. If you want bright pear, stone fruit and zingy acidity, go with the 2016 Eroica Riesling (\$20), a joint project by Washington state's Chateau Ste. Michelle and Germany's Dr. Loosen.

Pink wine is always welcome on Thanksgiving, so try the 2017 J. Lohr Gesture Grenache Rose (\$22), which is brimming with peachy crispness, or go straight to the 2017 Bonterra Young Red (\$16) for its bright cherry and floral notes, courtesy of California's Mendocino County. As for reds, the cool-climate 2016 Veramonte Pinot Noir (\$11) from Chile is full of red licorice and raspberry, while California's 2016 Imagery Pinot Noir (\$20) sends up black cherry and silky vanilla. For a bigger red, try the 2016 Vietti Tre Vigne Barbera D'Asti (\$26), which is full of ripe blackberry, tangy cherry, and spice.

If the official dessert wine of Thanksgiving is not a tawny port, it ought to be. Nuttier and less fruity than a ruby port, or even a young vintage port, tawny port matches well with the autumnal flavors of Thanksgiving sweets. Try the fig-and-caramel

goodness of a Taylor Fladgate Reserve Tawny Port (\$60/L). If that seems pricey for a few sips each of dessert wine, consider that the special, antique-style bottle contains a third more wine than a standard bottle, and if you don't finish it on Thanksgiving, it'll last for weeks in the fridge.

The same goes for the rare 2016 Inniskillin Vidal Icewine (\$55/375ml), which is from Canada and offers waves of apricot and mango, with a relentless finish. For more chocolaty desserts, or just on its own, try the 2012 Dow's Late Bottled Vintage Port (\$24/750ml) for its ripe dark fruits and licorice notes. You might consider having a sip of these sweet wines before dessert is served — even while you're still eating dinner. As we have established, this is a day when pretty much anything goes.

Prices may vary depending on market and retailer.

