

## Wine, etc.: Some cabernet sauvignons to pair with your Valentine's Day meal



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Next week is Valentine's Day, guys. It's one of those days that most men dread because the expectation of a romantic gesture is intimidating. A dozen roses? Cha-ching. A dinner at a fancy restaurant with strangers and a fixed menu? Cha-ching. An engagement ring? CHA-CHING.

If both of you are working and having someone else do the cooking and cleaning is more convenient, there is a reservation waiting for you. But if a home-cooked meal is more appealing and you have the time, create your own celebration and save some money.

Except for a few occasions, we traditionally opt for a private dinner at home with our wives where we can escape the throngs of restaurant diners, play a little Frank Sinatra, set an inviting table, grill a couple of steaks or lobster, light candles and open a nice bottle of wine.

Sometimes we have done it all and sometimes our spouses share the fun. The relatively minimal effort is more heartfelt than a restaurant experience because we invested the effort.

Of course, for us the wine is the centerpiece of any fancy dinner. We like to start with a glass of Champagne — next week's column — and then follow with a nice cabernet sauvignon. We spend more for wine on this occasion, justifying the cost by knowing a bottle of wine is still cheaper than a night on the town. If you have a glass of Champagne, you don't have to finish a bottle of red wine. Good news — it will be there the next day!

Here are some very nice cabernet sauvignons we recommend for a dinner at home:

**Heitz Cellars Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2013** (\$54). As wine producers come and go, it's nice to see an old friend like Heitz still around. Founded in 1961, the winery turned a corner this year when the family passed on the operation to the Lawrence family. This gem has the quintessential Napa Valley and Heitz character we have grown to love. The acidity and oak are balanced and the dark fruit flavors are joined by fine tannins. Forward yet elegant.

**Acumen PEAK Edcora Vineyard 2015** (\$150). Denis Malbec joined Henrik Poulsen in making some great wines from mountain-grown grapes on Atlas Peak, but sadly the 2015 are his last as Malbec died in 2016. Acumen's stellar portfolio of premium red wines reveals the greatness that comes from mountainside grapes. This one — a blend of cabernet sauvignon (90 percent), petite verdot and cabernet franc — is deep, complex and layered with expressive aromas of violets and espresso. Black cherries and wild blackberries are cloaked in promising tannins. Acumen makes a 2015 Mountainside Cabernet Sauvignon (\$60) that uses less new oak and more merlot and malbec for a delicious and more approachable blend.

**Freemark Abbey Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon 2013** (\$70). Drinking this delicious and well-balanced wine reminded us of why Rutherford is not only one of the most historic districts for cabernet sauvignon but also the best. With a legacy dating back to 1886, Freemark Abbey has been producing top cabernets year after year. The 2013 has bottle age (and with some sediment), layered fruit flavors, firm tannins and a bit of that famous “Rutherford dust.” Blackberry notes with a hint of cloves, cedar and olive.

**Arrowood Winery Knights Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2014** (\$35). This is a lot of wine for the money. Bold plum and black cherry flavors with good concentration, texture, and hints of clove and cocoa powder.

**Rutherford Ranch Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2016** (\$32). When we last met with this producer’s new winemaker, Jay Turnipseed, he was talking about wines made by his predecessor. Now he can talk about his wine — the 2016 cabernet sauvignon. Blended with a bit of malbec, merlot, petite sirah and petit verdot, it is full-bodied and fruit-forward. Ripe, dark fruit flavors with a long finish and fine tannins.

**Spottswoode Lydenhurst Cabernet Sauvignon 2015** (\$85). Cabernet sauvignon from the Napa Valley forms the foundation for this luxurious bordeaux-grape blend. Generous aromas with rich, opulent flavors of plum, black cherries and red currants. Hints of cedar, leather and black pepper.

**Robert Mondavi Oakville District Cabernet Sauvignon 2014** (\$63). The name of the producer is enough to set the tone for a special Valentine’s Day dinner. One of the most iconic names in Napa Valley, Mondavi continues to make exquisite yet powerful blends like this one. All five noble Bordeaux grape varieties go into this classic Oakville vine. A proverbial iron fist in a velvet glove, it has complexity, balance and layered fruit. Juicy black cherries, cassis, vanilla dominate the palate. Mondavi also makes a special 2015 cabernet franc (\$65) that is very floral and firm.

## **Wine picks**

**Bonterra Organic Vineyards The McNab 2014** (\$50). Bonterra is one of the vineyards featured in the Amazon Prime docu-series “It Starts with Wine.” Noted for its long-standing commitment to organic farming, Bonterra’s wines are excellent across the

board. This blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, petite sirah, cabernet franc and malbec is loaded with beguiling aromas and mouth-filling raspberry and cassis flavors. Its cousin, “The Butler” (\$50), is a generous and tasty blend of syrah, petite sirah, grenache and viognier. Two great wines that can be enjoyed now.

**Vietti Roero Arneis 2017 (\$23).** We were impressed with the delicious qualities of this top-drawer arneis from Italy’s Piedmont region. This is a grape variety worth exploring from a family producer that is five generations deep. Its producer, Alfredo Currado is credited for bringing back this local varietal in the Roero region. General floral aromas with stainless-steel purity and loads of melon and citrus flavors.

**Steele Santa Barbara Pinot Blanc 2017 (\$20).** Peach and melon flavors dominate this delicious pinot blanc that is worthy of a search. It is a good sipper or a wine that can be paired with seafood.

**Aslina Sauvignon Blanc Stellenbosch South Africa 2015 (\$20).** Aslina is founded by Ntsiki Biyela, the first black female winemaker from South Africa. A very different take on sauvignon blanc, it is citrus-driven instead of herbal- and grapefruit-driven with some interesting smoke notes.

**Ryder Estate Syrah Central Coast 2016 (\$15).** A terrific syrah at a great price. This very complete wine exhibits ripe blueberry, blackberry and spice notes in an enticing example of the potential of Central Coast syrah.