Don't fret about Thanksgiving wine choices — just about anything goes

Since the food is the focus for the Thanksgiving table, the pressure is off for wine pairing. Nearly anything goes from rosé to white to bubbly to red. (Zbigniew Bzdak / Chicago Tribune)

By Michael Austin
The Pour Man

On Thanksgiving day, two things are more important than the wine you pour. (If you thought “watching football” was No. 1, you might need a re-education on the meaning of Thanksgiving; start with a “Charlie Brown” special.) No. 2 — and I’m sorry to say this, fellow wine lovers — is the food. I’m even sorrier to say that wine is a distant third. Distant.
Even the most passionate wine champions among us can cop to the idea that wine’s role is always to make food
taste better. Then again, we know that wine can be far superior to the food it is paired with. How many times
have we walked away from meals talking more about what was in the glass than what was on the plate? Many
times.

The crazy, disjointed collection of food we expect every Thanksgiving has achieved an identity all its own. You
know exactly what the various Turkey Day dishes are, and you could not conjure up such a clear list for any
other holiday. Easter ham? Sure, but what else does an Easter dinner include? Fourth of July barbeque? All I
can picture is a grill and some coals.

The idea of the entire holiday hinges on eating food. Thanksgiving is not merely a holiday that includes a feast —
it is a celebratory feast that is also a holiday. Pity not the wine. Just be glad that, since the food is the focus, the
pressure is off for wine pairing.

Matching wine to the magnificent hodgepodge of stuffing, gravy, turkey, sweet potatoes and cranberry sauce —
wildly varied flavors and textures — is kind of like matching wine to the people at the table. If it’s a big family,
the people are part of the same collection but also different in many ways, like the foods in a Thanksgiving
dinner. If your table is surrounded by an unrelated group of folks who have come together on this one day for
this one specific reason, well then, that sounds a lot like the foods in a Thanksgiving dinner too.

A wine that is pleasing on its own to Aunt Sarah might not be so pleasing to Uncle Joe. And who knows which of
their Thanksgiving staples they like to swirl together or at least eat in the same bite. The combinations and
calculations are enough to make your head throb. With that in mind, below are notes on some bottles that
would work well with a Thanksgiving dinner.

**Bubbles**

The great thing about Champagne and other styles of sparkling wine is you can drink a glass the minute you
walk through the door and then you can keep drinking it all night with every bite of food. The Forget-Brimont
Brut Premier Cru Champagne ($45) is brightly acidic, while lemony-citrus and green apple notes accompany a
lingering finish that is both nutty and toasty. The 2010 Gloria Ferrer Anniversary Cuvee ($40), from the
Sonoma side of Carneros, is full of pear, red apple, honey, anise and a tiny suggestion of cherry.

**Whites**

These whites range in style from crisp and mineraly — to cut through all of that richness — to more lush and
fruity, to complement that same richness. The 2015 Les Vignes de Bila-Haut Cotes du Roussillon Blanc ($15) is
the wine for those who like a dry, crisp, citrusy white that also offers up minerality and some salinity. For
something a little more decadent but still refreshing, try the 2016 Rombauer Vineyards Napa Valley Sauvignon
Blanc ($24), which offers notes of lemon meringue, lime, grapefruit and a tiny bit of stone fruit, expressed as an
elegant softness.
The 2016 Pine Ridge Vineyards Chenin Blanc + Viognier ($16) has a beautiful balance of brightness and ripeness — grapefruit, lime, apricot and honey — which leads to a lip-smacking finish. From the Finger Lakes region of New York, the 2015 Forge Cellars Classique Dry Riesling ($19) is full of minerality, almond, orange zest, citrus and a whisper of smoke — soft and luscious with bright acidity and a dry finish. Finally, the 2015 Gundlach Bundschu Gewurtztraminer ($25) is bursting with heady floral notes, plus earth, caraway and hazelnuts that lead to luscious pear, tropical fruits and spice.

**Rosés**

Where Thanksgiving rosés are concerned, two good bets are Miraval and Clos Du Val.

The 2016 Miraval Rosé ($22) from Provence offers floral notes along with ripe citrus, stone fruits, fennel, minerality and bright acidity. The 2016 Clos Du Val Estate Pinot Noir Rosé ($30) from the Napa side of Carneros (yep, the region straddles the Napa and Sonoma appellations) is earthy and full of rich, luscious strawberry, mineral notes, spice and a crisp, dry finish.

**Reds**

And now for some reds. The 2014 Wente Vineyards Riva Ranch Pinot Noir ($30) comes from Monterey, Calif., and delivers lush waves of dark cherry, earth, smoke, pomegranate and a touch of toast on the finish. Check out 2015 Ferraton Pere & Fils Samorens Cotes du Rhone ($14) for bright acidity, blackberry, blueberry and herbal notes that finish with black licorice.

For your guests who prefer a bigger red, you could try any of the following three wines. The 2015 Aia Vecchia Lagone ($16) from Tuscany is 60 percent merlot, offering mouth-filling plum, raspberry, vanilla, cherry, earth, leather and a touch of cedar. The 2014 Nimble Hog Red Wine ($30) from Sonoma’s Dry Creek Valley is a zinfandel-based blend with pleasing notes of plum, wet stone, blackberry and cranberry. Finally, the 2011 Santa Rita Pehuen Carmenere ($61) from Chile is a splurge but entirely worth it, with silky blueberry, vanilla, spice and herbs, layers of complexity and mouthwatering acidity.

**Dessert**

For chocolatey dessert, try a vintage port, and for nuttier, more caramel-driven desserts, reach for a tawny port. The 2011 Cockburn’s Vintage Porto ($74) offers candied fruits, dark cherry, cedar and silky chocolate, while the 1989 Burmester Colheita ($52), a tawny, is full of orange zest, caramel and vanilla, with a long, nutty finish.

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