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~ Wine ~

Choose Big, Bold American Reds for the Fourth

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Because charcoal grilling imparts such strong smoky flavors to foods, it cries out for a red wine with enough depth and dimension to stand up for itself. This translates into a full-throttle bouquet, lots of ripe fruit and a finishing dollop of vanilla from aging in new oak barrels.

The wine should also be American. Though I'm hardly a chauvinist when it comes to great wine, American wines are better suited to the barbecue precisely because they epitomize the New World style of winemaking, where bigger and bolder are usually better.

... the following are my picks for a festive Fourth of July.

Trentadue 2003 Old Patch Red (\$13; California; DOPS): Loaded with savory red fruit flavors, this traditional California field blend of zinfandel (52.5 percent), carignan (14.4 percent), sangiovese (20.3 percent) and petite sirah (12.8 percent) is a knockout.

Eos 2002 Petite Sirah (\$17; California; NDC): This imposing petite sirah from Paso Robles offers a complex bouquet of mocha and vanilla fruit, followed on the palate by fat, juicy flavors of blueberry and cassis, and a finish of round tannins.

Pedroncelli 2001 Petite Sirah "Dry Creek Valley" (\$14; California; DOPS): A full bouquet of violets, black pepper and plum gives way to a bright shot of smoky blackberry and black cherry fruit on the palate, and smooth tannins on the finish.