

WALL STREET JOURNAL
Wines That Belong on Your Guest List ~ How to Give Holiday Parties
The Right Festive Spirit; The Time to Just Say No
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When the Wall Street Journal's newsroom throws a party, our bosses ask us for wine advice, as you might expect. They're generally looking for simple, tasty wines that are both readily available and -- here's the key -- inexpensive. Sometimes our choices really ring a bell. After one recent party, our colleague Cathy Reynolds said she was enchanted. "After a few mouthfuls, I thought, 'Wow, this is delightful.' It has a light and dry taste, but has that fullness that makes you savor the experience. And it was easy to drink without food. Some wines need something to munch on as a complement." It's flattering when people enjoy a wine that much. How can you make that happen? Because many people and businesses will need exactly that advice over the next few weeks, we thought we'd share with you what we tell our own bosses.

We are looking for wines that will be widely popular. This means that, while we may love Riesling, for instance, we'd avoid it because many people don't love it, or at least don't know they'd love it if they gave it a chance. And because some people only drink white and some only drink red, it's important to have one of each. We suggest wines that simply taste good without explanation and aren't fussy.

Whatever you choose for a party, sample it before you buy it in bulk, if possible. Either buy a bottle and try it yourself first or ask the store to open one so you can taste it (if that's allowed in your state).

We'd guess that many merchants this year will be pushing Australian Chardonnay and Shiraz for parties because there's a glut and stores are probably swimming in them. Just say no. Too often, these are sweet and charmless and won't add to your party. If you really want something from Australia, go with Cabernet Sauvignon (but not the popular Yellow Tail, which didn't show well in our most recent tasting). We'd also guess that wine stores will be pushing inexpensive American Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay because the end of the year is a good time to dump their losers, but we'd avoid them, too, both because many of them don't taste good and because they're so overexposed that people may be bored with them.

There are better bets from around the world. We have tried to focus on wines that cost from about \$10 to around \$15, especially if bought by the case, which should bring at least a 15% discount. Shop around. Especially at this time of year, stores often have big sales. Below, we have listed some specific examples of each wine that have done well in our tastings through the years, but it's impossible to know what labels you might see. As always, if you have a wine merchant whom you trust, that advice is valuable....

Reds

Petite Sirah from California, not to be confused with better-known Syrah, another grape altogether. These are almost black, with earth, spices and great acidity, but the tastes you experience most are juicy blackberries and blueberries. Petite Sirah, sometimes called Petite Syrah, often needs to be opened early to give it enough air to calm down. These tend to be heady, lusty, lively wines. Among the most reliable producers are Parducci, Bogle, Concannon and Guenoc. These are especially good in cold weather.

* Look for our Wine Notes

<<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB116197749931906247.html?mod=Tastings> column in the Pursuits section of the Journal's Weekend Edition. <mailto:wine@wsj.com> .