

Divine Wine

Russian River Valley wines that will hit all the right notes for Thanksgiving dinner

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Thanksgiving is quietly approaching, and it is time for a strategic plan. Which relatives should I invite, how do I keep Uncle George and Aunt Edna apart and, of course, who will eat Brussels sprouts?

After solving these complicated matters, the easiest decision may be the wine. You will need a selection that keeps the conversations lively and leaves a lasting impression. It may be wise to have enough wine on hand to appease the unruly relatives and provide a diversion from the cooking.

Try and narrow down the field to the most versatile wines. Sparkling wines make a great welcoming statement. Even non-bubbly relatives will request a glass, as it conveys a sense of celebration and refinement. A universal favorite is Prosecco. Gianluca Bisol and his brother Desiderio have been on a quest to refine this sparkling style, crafting several tiers from Valdobbiadene in northern Italy.

For offerings to serve alongside a traditional feast, choose domestic reds and whites of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from the cooler reaches of Sonoma's Russian River Valley in California. This region remains one of the front-runners, and these wine may be the darlings at the dinner table. An herb-stuffed turkey or a roasted lamb shank will find a middle ground here. These wines can accentuate the personality of your recipes with their freshness while finding harmony with protein and bountiful flavors.

Don't forget about adding a rosé to the mix. They are remarkably adept at finding a kinship with anything you prepare. Most have veered away from any residual sweetness and have an off-dry, clean style.

Rosé is evolving into a gastronomic wine that should be at every table. Aside from that, their pink overtones have great visual appeal.

Grenache-based blends were popularized in the Rhone region of Southern France and within Spain. Today's renditions from California's North Coast have a new-found identity with consumers. Their medium-bodied, red berry approach has a high affinity for meats and red sauces.

2016 Balletto Sexton Hills Pinot Noir:

Winemaker Anthony Beckman designed this vineyard on steep hillsides of loamy Goldridge soils. It's within the cooler edges of Sebastopol Hills in the Russian River Valley. He says "a vineyard is like a dance partner," and this wine is more of a ballerina than a headbanger. The soft ruby rim opens to aromas of violets and lavender. The velvety spice and upfront black fruit make an exquisite statement.

2017 Balletto Rosé of Pinot Noir: This wine is produced from estate fruit, revealing an understated elegance with delicate tangerine and wild strawberries. The finish is off-dry with a hint of dried rose petals. The fruit comes shining through at the end.

2016 MacRostie Russian River Valley Chardonnay: This winery was founded in 1987 by Steve MacRostie, whose tenure in winemaking dates back to 1974. MacRostie had a fascination of cool-climate Chardonnay and Pinot Noir before it ever became popular. This Chardonnay is sourced from four or five vineyard sites in the Russian River Valley. The expressive fresh floral aromas open to a medium-bodied, textured wine with white melon and baked pears. Its intense flavors are expansive and linger on the palate.

2016 Dutton Estate Katherine's Reserve Chardonnay: There is tremendous respect for the Dutton family and its blue chip, Dutton Ranch fruit. Joe and Tracy Dutton manage 1,200 acres of vineyards. This Chardonnay is dramatic in capturing the essence of the Dutton property. You can immerse yourself in the exotic yellow fruits that are encased in a rich, creamy wonderfully balanced backdrop.

2017 Bisol Crede Prosecco Brut: Gianluca Bisol is passionate and a master at promoting the daily consumption of high-end Prosecco. Made from a dominance of Glera grapes, the lemongrass and bright yellow citrus notes in this wine are refreshing and clean. Roasted almonds and freshly picked apples round out the background.

Hahn GSM Red Blend: Philip Hahn now manages the family's 650 acres in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey, California. Baked black raspberries and red licorice twists are plentiful and enhance this blend. The finish is smooth and silky.



