

Gift-giving made easy

There's a special bottle for almost everyone on the list

By Michael Pinkus

IT'S ALMOST that time of year when you have to do more than just think of that perfect gift: you'll actually have to go get it.

Now, you could pick up something crocheted for your Aunt Milly, find the perfect scarf for Uncle Tom and buy a beautiful bobble for niece Betty, and have them all say the same thing: "This is lovely. Where did you get it?" But what they really mean is: "Did you put the gift receipt in the box or do I have to go through the motions of asking for it?"

You can avoid that embarrassing interaction with what I consider the perfect gift — booze.

The recipient doesn't have to use it right away; in fact, they can keep it for while



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without it spoiling or going out of fashion. When they drink it, they'll think of you. And if they don't drink it till the next time you're over, you get a bonus.

Finding that perfect bottle is the hard part. That's where I come in.

The LCBO brings in all kinds of special bottles and gift packages throughout the gift-giving months, but they also have a section within their Vintages branch called "Essentials." These products are available year round and should be in stock at every Vintages outlet. So, while I am recommending wines for the holidays, they are good for occasions throughout the year.



For the dessert-wine lover:

Nothing seems to satisfy like Port after a good meal (and served alongside blue cheese and a good cigar), and the Taylor Fladgate 10-year-old Tawny Port (\$34.95 – #121749) perfectly mixes woody character with spice, dried cherry and orange peel.

For something to marry with the actual dessert, check out the Inniskillin 2008 Vidal Icewine (\$49.95 / 375ml – #551085). It features peach and apricot mixed with honeyed apple sauce – no wonder it's a delicacy around the world.

For the white wine lover:

Thirty Bench makes three great single-vineyard Rieslings, and the 2012 Thirty Bench Riesling (\$18.95 – #24133) blends elements from all three into a beauty: peach and lemon come together across the palate with mineral notes and great acidity.

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is always a fan favourite, and this year I found the Oyster Bay 2012 (\$18.95 – #316570) was the best of the Essentials bunch.

Both of the previous wines are fairly light, and great appetizer wines.

If you're looking for something a little richer (and for the Chardonnay lover on your list), there's the Toasted Head 2011 Chardonnay (\$17.95 – #59434). This wine is not shy when it comes to showing off its oak home. It's there in name and in the glass: toasty and spicy with the right amount of fruit as a backdrop.

For the red wine lover:

California's cabernet sauvignon is the one wine that seems to get people's hearts a flutter, but it can be pricey. However, Liberty School Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 (\$19.95 – #738823) delivers without breaking your budget.

Argentina also has quite a bit of cachet these days, and one of the reasons is Malbec. One of the best and oldest producers of the grape is Catena. Catena Malbec 2010 (\$19.95 – #478727) is a perfect introduction to the variety and one where you should use the one-for-them-two-for-me rule when buying.

When considering French wines for gifts, most people think of Champagne or Bordeaux. Move south to the Rhone Valley for a really good value in the E. Guigal Côte du Rhône 2010 (\$16.95 – #259721). It has lots of fruit, lots of spice and is well-balanced. (This wine has so much going for it, you'll want to apply the buying rule set out above.)

Something special:

So far, I have stuck to wine around the \$20 mark, but there will be some of you looking for a little more. A great place to start is California with a juicy and fruit-laden Merlot from Sterling (\$27.95 – #330241). Or how about the 2010 Beringer 2010 Knights Valley Cabernet (\$34.95 – #352583).

Those looking to give a real treat, though, might have to do some "splaining" when giving the 7 Deadly Zins Old Vine Zinfandel 2010 (\$24.95 – #59311). This is not the pink stuff, it's the big bruiser full of fruit and great with barbecue.

Now for the bubbies:

At a recent sampling of 78 sparkling wines from around the world, my tastebuds jangled when tasting the Louis Roederer Brut Premier (\$68.95 – #268771). It just hit all the right notes with bready, biscuit, hazelnut and baked apple.

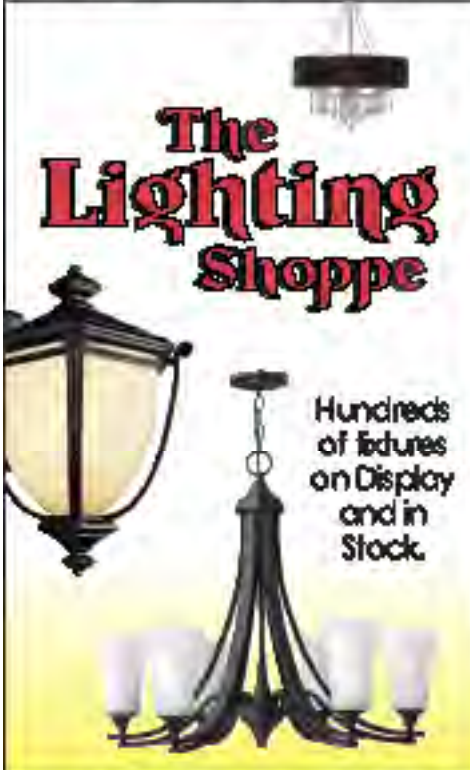
Then there's the Cono Sur Sparkling Brut (\$13.95 – #215079) from Chile. This is a sparkling to have on hand for any and all occasions (including making it through another Monday). The value is amazing and the wine is delicious.

There are also some awesome bubbies being made in our own backyard. Cave Spring Blanc de Blancs Brut (\$29.95 – #213983) has amazing acidity and could be mistaken for Champagne, at half the price.

The Henry of Pelham Cuvée Catharine Rosé Brut (\$29.95 – #217505) puts raspberry and strawberry on the tip of the tongue and gives it just the right amount of fizz — go geous.

Happy holidays, party responsibly and we'll talk again next year. 🍷

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