

Unique Wines for Winter Cuisine

HOOK CUSTOMERS BY TYING IN WINES THEY ALREADY KNOW

by Meg Houston Maker

What makes a wine unique? Old grapes in new places. Native grapes long forgotten. Creative blends, inventive élevage, vinification experiments gone right. When these wines succeed, they offer customers deliciousness plus a sense of the new.

But not too new. “I’m trying to move people ten percent away from their comfort zone, not 50 percent away from their comfort zone,” says Jon McDaniel, Sommelier and Beverage Director for LessLaw Hospitality, which owns

five properties in Chicago, including The Gage and Acanto. “I always pick on Jura. If somebody’s looking for a California-style Chardonnay, a sommelier might say, ‘Oh, you’re really going to love Jura.’ But it’s not the same thing. At all.”

The wine should feel intriguing, not outré. It helps to have a hook, a tie-in to a wine the customer already understands. Rhône-style and Meritage wines follow that idea—they’re classic blends, just from new regions. Flavor connections work, too. Love opulent

Napa Cab? Here’s a red blend with lots of ripeness and spice. Prefer a lighter red, like Beaujolais? This Oregon wine’s a little like that, but with a twist. Want a taste?

Below are ten unusual wines worth exploring this winter. I’ve listed them with a more familiar tie-in, although sometimes the connection is more about temperament than taste. All of these are hand-sells, but they should pay dividends by adding texture to your inventory—and tasty options for your clients. ■



If you like Napa Cab, try:

Hourglass 2014 HG III, Napa Valley (\$50) Opulent and silky, with red and black fruits top-noted by coffee, juniper and spice. Muscular tannins make it a consummate steakhouse staple.



Barolo:

Ktima Gerovassiliou 2012 Avaton, PGI Epanomi, Greece (\$60) A monumental wine shot through with black fruit, filaments of spice and resinous herbs. Its vein of minerality ties it to game, boar, brisket or porcini.

CAVA SPILIADIS



Grenache:

Meinklang 2013 Burgenlandred, Burgenland DAC, Austria (\$16) Peppery, nervy and keen, blazing with tart cherries and forest herbs; it’s a quencher for the charcuterie plate.

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Loire reds:

Anthony Road Wine Company 2014 Cabernet Franc—Lemberger, Finger Lakes (\$22) The fruity charms of Lemberger blend amiably with Cab Franc’s fey violets and greenery. Exceptional with pork loin or poultry.



Red Bordeaux:

Hedges Family Estate 2011 Red Blend, Red Mountain, Washington (\$27) A tapestry of cranberry and wintergreen anchored by graphite-like tannins allows this red blend to pair gracefully with the rich, roasted and robust.



Beaujolais:

Division Wine Company 2015 Division-Villages Béton, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$23) This shimmering Cab Franc—Gamay blend—partly carbonic—is a potpourri of fruity berries with a nip of grassy herbs and pepper. It is utter perfection with pork loin.



New World Merlot:

Donnafugata 2011 Rosso Mille e Una Notte, Sicilia IGP, Italy (\$75) Nero d’Avola plus international grapes yield a saturated, satiny wine redolent of plums, cranberries and crushed anise. Delicious with light meats and poultry.

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California Pinot Noir:

Tenute Rubino 2014 Oltremé, Salento IGT, Italy (\$18) Varietal Susumaniello tingles with raspberries and plums, while its smooth, friendly tannins add substance. A value wine, refreshing and versatile.

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Unoaked Chardonnay:

Matthiasson 2013 White Wine, Napa Valley (\$40) Like field flowers in late summer, with yellow fruits and peels burnished by honey and citrusy green almond. Exquisite with roasted fish, pastas, fowl.



Red Burgundy:

Aphros 2014 Vinhão, Vinho Verde DOP, Portugal (\$17) Vinhão simmers with feral, fleshy earthiness and savage red fruits, but the finish is magically serene and steely. Like Burgundy, this wine requires contemplation—and rare meat.

SKURNIK WINES