



## A Vacation Case

By Paul Lukacs

Take the wine with you. Put a case in with the backpacks, boogie boards and fishing rods when you pack up the car for your beach or mountain vacation this summer. Not only will the selection likely prove better (and the prices lower) than at stores where you're going, but why waste valuable vacation time shopping?

The only problem with taking wine on vacation (besides finding room for it in the trunk) is that you won't know exactly what foods the specific bottles you select will be accompanying. Versatility thus has to be an important factor when filling your case.

Here is a sampler, with twelve types of wine selected for twelve common vacation occasions and meals. In each instance, I'm recommending two different wines, at two different price points. The general concept, though, is as important as the specific bottles. You know what you like to do (and eat) on vacation. So choose the wines that suit your preferences.

### A Sparkler:

Summer vacation means relaxation, and bubbles are guaranteed to help you relax. In addition, they make any occasion seem festive. So whether you're sipping the wine on its own before dinner, mixing it with orange juice for a mimosa at brunch, or drinking it with food (no wine goes better with gazpacho in hot weather), sparkling wine is a great vacation choice.

**De Pró Cava NV Brut** (\$11) from northeastern Spain is completely dry, with tart citrus flavors and a bouquet that hints at hay or straw. It has a crisp finish and a firm structure. Equally dry, but richer on the palate, with yeasty undertones and more complexity, **Roederer Estate NV Brut** (\$21) from the Anderson Valley in northern California's Mendocino County consistently outperforms its price point. For nearly twenty years now, it has set the benchmark for American bubbly made in a true Champagne style.

### An Aperitif White:

When choosing a wine to open before dinner, especially in summer, look for one that will seem refreshing--not too rich or lush, but also not too bracing or tart.

Light-bodied Riesling fits this bill perfectly. While good examples used to come almost exclusively from Germany, exciting wines hail these days from a host of different places. **Chateau Ste. Michelle Dry Riesling 2012** (\$10) offers plenty of crisp acidity and juicy fruit flavor. It's a steal at the price. In a similar style but drier still, and with a distinctly lime-scented character, **Pike's "Traditionale" 2013** (\$21) from Australia's Clare Valley shows a bit more complexity. Like any good aperitif white, it feels almost weightless but tastes delicious.

### An Aperitif Red:

More and more people are drinking red wines before dinner these days, even though the tannins in many reds can make them seem tight and astringent when unaccompanied by food. Softness, then, is a key when selecting an aperitif red.

Here's where Merlot, a variety that was wildly popular a decade ago but that often seems déclassé today, can shine. Don't look for structured, supposedly serious (and expensive) Merlots, which in truth often seem indistinguishable from Cabernets, nor thin, green ones that, no matter the price, offer little pleasure. Instead, you want a seductive wine that feels sensuous to sip.

**Stone Cap 2012** (\$10) from Washington State just that. With plum and red berry flavors, it's smooth and satisfying. Deeper and more complex, but equally lush in texture, **Penley Estate "Gryphon" 2009** (\$20) from Coonawarra in South Australia tastes serious but not at all ponderous.

### A White for Shellfish:

This wine needs to be light-bodied but full of flavor, so as to complement the briny taste of the sea. Unoaked, youthful Sauvignon Blanc is exactly that, so it's a great wine to have with shrimp, clams and more.

Coming from the Valle Central in Chile, **Terranoble 2013** (\$10) tastes of fresh grapefruit and complements seafood wonderfully. Equally fresh, but more nuanced, with an herbal undertone in addition to bright citrus flavors, **Saint Clair 2013** (\$19) comes from Marlborough in New Zealand. Wines from this region have become the gold standard for Sauvignon Blanc made in a vibrant style, and this wine provides ample evidence why they have done so.

### A White for Dinner Salads:

Chenin Blanc, with ripe pear and apple flavors and a hint of sweetness, goes wonderfully with fresh summer salads, no matter whether they are made with chicken, turkey, tuna or shrimp.

Some delicious examples of Chenin Blanc in this style (as opposed to the often much sweeter Loire Valley style) come from South Africa. They usually are very fairly priced. **Man Coastal Region 2013** (\$9) provides a fine introduction. Just as fresh and food friendly, but with a subtle floral note that adds interest, **Badenhorst Family "Secateurs" 2013** (\$15) from Swartland is beautifully balanced and very long on the palate. The low price tag is an added bonus.

### A White for Fried Chicken:

Oaky, tropical-flavored Chardonnay can be difficult to pair with food--except if you serve it with fried chicken. California Chardonnay in this opulent style can be this all-American dish's perfect accompaniment, as the rich but bright fruit flavors in the wine marry wonderfully with the equally rich food.

From Monterey, **Hess "Shirt Tail Vineyard" 2012** (\$15) is an excellent choice. Being well structured, it never seems excessive. Richer still and almost overflowing with flavor, **Terlato Family Russian River Valley 2011** (\$25) is also well-balanced so extremely enticing. It's Terlato's best Chardonnay to date.

### A White for Grilled Tuna:

Or swordfish, salmon, or any other meaty, full-flavored, firm fish. The white here needs to be full-flavored and richly textured, so as to hold its own with the dish, but it also needs to display some restraint, so as not to overwhelm your taste buds. Pinot Gris, with its appealing pear-scented fruit and nutty undertones, is a good choice. Be sure, though, not to choose one that tastes too sweet.

From Oregon, **King Estate "Acrobat" 2012** (\$12) offers exceptional value. And from Alsace in France, **Meyer-Fonne "Reserve" 2012** (\$25), with its creamy texture and fragrant bouquet, is downright delicious.

### A Light Red:

Cru Beaujolais is a great wine to drink with roast chicken, pork tenderloin, or any of a host of dishes that call for a flavorful but unobtrusive red. Don't confuse it with fruity but simple Beaujolais nouveau. A cru wine, from one of the region's best sites, invariably tastes more complex and so more satisfying.

Though basic Beaujolais declines rapidly after a year or so in bottle, the crus improve over five years or so. Georges DuBoeuf is the region's most famous producer, and **DuBoeuf Fleurie 2011** (\$17) provides a good introduction to the charms of these wines. Marcel Lapierre works on a much smaller scale, but his wines can be extremely compelling. **Lapierre Morgon 2012** (\$27), with its seductive cherry and strawberry flavors and its leathery undertones, is a case in point.

### A Red for Dogs and Burgers:

A glass of good Italian Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, full of warm, sun-kissed, and above all juicy fruit, is just the wine to accompany everyone's favorite summer family feast. It will taste straightforward but not at all plain or ordinary, and on a hot day can benefit from being served slightly chilled.

Two of my current favorites are **Farnese "Fantini" 2012** (\$12) and **Valle Reale Vigneto di Popoli 2009** (\$19). They both are jam-packed with luscious red fruit flavor--just the thing to drink with cheeseburgers.

### A Red for Steaks and Chops:

Since no one eats more red meat than the Argentineans, it's hardly surprising that Argentinean Malbec pairs nicely with grilled meat, especially beef and lamb. Full of dark, rich fruit flavor, with a violet-scented perfume and an anise-tinged finish, it's a great steak or chop wine.

In my experience, Malbecs priced over \$20 can be a bit too hot and heavy. This is one category, then, in which value and quality go hand in hand. **Alta Vista "Classic" 2012** (\$11) from Mendoza is a fine example. A tad lighter and truly seamless on the palate, **Bodega Norton "Reserva" 2012** (\$15), tastes unexpectedly elegant.

### A Red for Barbecue:

Red California Zinfandel, with its briery character and ripe, almost sweet fruit, proves a great partner for ribs, chicken, pork--anything dripping with spicy, tomato-based barbecue sauce.

**Terra d'Oro 2011** (\$15) from Amador County tastes deep but bright. Hailing from Sonoma County, **Dry Creek Vineyards "Old Vines" 2011** (\$29) tastes more complex, with savory undertones that echo earthy spices. It seems tailor-made for this sort of summer fare.

### After Dinner:

Once the sun has set and the kids have been put to bed, it's time to savor a glass of chilled tawny port. All will seem right with the world--or at least with your small vacation corner of it.

Good tawny port isn't cheap, but a bottle can last a long time since the wine won't spoil when exposed to air. **Warre's 10 Year "Optima"** (\$22 for 500 ml), with its toffee-scented bouquet and nutty, caramel-tinged flavors is a delicious example. More nuanced, with a wonderfully long, evolved finish, **Taylor Fladgate 20 Year** (\$53) is as good as this type of wine gets. Serve it cool but not ice cold, and let it warm slowly in your glass. What a way to spend a summer evening!