

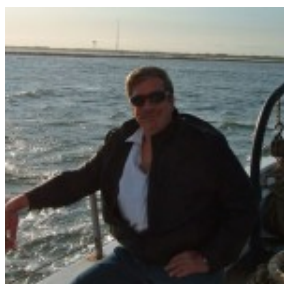
Sipping something French on Thanksgiving

By Peter Arcuri

How did French wines become the traditional American quaff for Thanksgiving? Marketing, that's how.

Every third Thursday of November, France releases a Beaujolais Nouveau. The wine is released just six weeks after the grapes are harvested. The wine is actually a preview of the current vintage. In 1985 France passed a law to have the wines released just after midnight of that third Thursday, it is not coincidental Americans rush to pick up their wines.

The Gamay grape is grown in the Beaujolais region of France, which is actually part of Burgundy. After the initial fermentation, carbonic maceration, which extracts no tannins and retains more sugar, the wine contains a slight fizz or carbonation. The wine is light and fruity with the dominant flavors of raspberry and strawberry, two flavors that would complement most recipes served with Thanksgiving turkey.



The Lake Tahoe Wine Guy on the Atlantic waiting for the Nouveau.

Georges Duboeuf is the largest producer of Beaujolais Nouveau.

A Beaujolais Nouveau shelf life is short, drink and enjoy by New Year's Day. They are about \$25 or so.

Another traditional French wine for Thanksgiving would be Pinot Noir. This wine is also from the Burgundy region of France. You may need a Sherpa, or at least a sommelier to navigate your way through Burgundy.

Burgundy's main growing area is Cote d'Or, [golden slope] which is divided into Cote de Nuits, [newee] and Cote de Beaune, [bone.] There are two main grapes grown here: Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Cote d'Or contains 33 Grand Crus, about 600 vineyards merit the appellation Premier Cru, hundreds of village wines and more a 1,000 producers.

The vines that exist are passed on from generation to generation so many relatives may own the same single grape vine. Pinot Noirs are not sweet like its cousin Gamay. The flavors are more subtle with dark strawberry, sour cherry, tobacco, tar and good old fashion dirt. Some Grand Crus, for instance, Romanee-Conti or Richebourg can cost almost \$1,000 per bottle especially for a vintage year like 2002.

If you would like to keep Thanksgiving American, well sort of, try a California or Oregon Pinot Noir. All West Coast grapes are vitas vinifera. This means their roots are native to France. West Coast Pinots contain more forward fruit flavors, and like the Burgundies they are not sweet. They are not as subtle as the Burgundies, which can contain multiple nuances.

French wines are still preferred in New York City and they are more affordable than West Coast wines. It costs the same, if not less, to ship wines across the Atlantic as it is to ship wines across the country. Domaine Serene Pinots from Oregon are fantastic costing about \$60 a bottle depending on the vineyard appellation and which state you are living in.

How do you overcome the rising costs of wine shipping? There are wineries and retail operations that will ship wine

directly to your home, which will in turn save you money. If you are in New York, California, Oregon or any other state where wine can be legally delivered call Tom Simoneau 800-289-9463 at Vintage Wines in Sonoma County. Simoneau grows his own grapes in Sonoma County's Alexander Valley and he is one of the country's best amateur wine makers. He represents many small wineries and can ship in time for the holidays.

One Pinot Noir that has received a lot of attention lately is the 2007 Sonoma Coast Platinum Series, \$30. The Sonoma Coast is an ideal spot for Pinot to grow. The Pacific's marine influence and foggy conditions add superbly structured acids to the grapes. This wine has deep and dark cherry flavors with an earthy, chocolate-anise finish. The Pinot was aged in 50 percent new and 50 percent old French oak barrels, which create smooth and elegant tannins. The earthiness of the wine is an excellent complement for a roasted turkey.

Peter Arcuri is the Lake Tahoe Wine Guy.