The Herald-News

Cellaring is a good idea for some wines

By Bill Garlough For Sun-Times Media Feb 17, 2011 10:06AM

Last month's column discussed how now is a perfect time to either add to an existing wine collection or start one. The combination of worldwide overproduction and a global recession has created a tremendous opportunity to buy wine.

The Wine Spectator recently reported that the $15 value wine segment is the hottest price point in the wine industry.

Today I will recommend an assortment of great value wines to consider buying — wines that will provide a well-rounded starter collection.

We will also offer food pairings with each varietal. Have fun experimenting and collecting wines that suit your palate and budget.

White wines to cellar

While whites are best consumed in two to three years, it is still desirable to have a small selection on hand for everyday entertaining. New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs, South African Chenin Blancs, Loire Valley Sancerres, Alsatian Gewürztraminers, Spanish Albarinos, Italian Pinot Grigios, Rhone Viognier Blends and Chilean Sauvignon Blancs are popular white wines ready to drink now.

The following white wines are must-haves in your cellar:

Rieslings: These wines have the longest aging potential, with quality German Rieslings cellaring for 20-plus years. Most Rieslings can cellar for four to five years without an issue. These wines pair well with food and are refreshing to sip. Rieslings are a great companion with spicy Asian or Cajun cuisine. Favorites include: Ress Kabinett German Riesling for $15; Trimbach Alsatian Riesling for $18; Ch. Ste. Michelle Eroica Washington Riesling for $22 and Weinbach Alsatian Riesling for $23.

Chardonnay: While this varietal suffers from ABC (Anything But Chardonnay), it is a very popular wine, can cellar for four to five years and is not highly acidic like Rieslings. They offer versatility with your collection. California Chardonnays are either aged in oak barrels for depth and complexity or stainless steel vats, which allow the varietal's true character to emerge.

In France, Chardonnay is the primary grape for Chablis and Champagne. Chardonnay pairs well with dishes containing butter, cheese and seafood. Favorites include: Foxglove Central Coast California Chardonnay for $13; William Fevre French Chablis for $19; Rombauer Carneros California Chardonnay for $30; Grgich Hills Napa Chardonnay for $35Moet & Chandon Imperial French Champagne for $39.

Red wines to cellar

Red wine has longer-term aging potential and can add depth and complexity when properly cellared. The key to aging is the presence of tannins, with higher levels offering better cellaring potential. More tannic red wine may need at least five years of aging to allow the tannins to soften, allowing the wine to come into balance. Examples of big tannic wines for cellaring include French Bordeaux, Italian Barolo and Spanish Rioja.

Red wines with lower tannin levels that allow for immediate enjoyment include Italian Barbera, California Merlot, Chilean Carmenere, Spanish Grenache and French Beaujolais.

The following are must haves in your cellar:

Zinfandels, Shiraz and Syrah: These wines are very similar in nature, so you may choose the one that best connects with your palate. They tend to be fruit driven, offer some peppery spice and soft tannins. They are good to keep on hand as their jammy fruit is a good counter to spicy food and barbecue. They can cellar from five to 10 years. Favorites include: 7 Deadly Zins from California for $15; Tait “The Ball Buster” Australian Shiraz for $18; Thorn-Clarke Shotfire Ridge Australian Shiraz for $18; Earthquake Lodi, California Zinfandel for $24 and Orin Swift Saldo California Zinfandel for $26.

Pinot Noir and Malbec: These wines are similar, in that they are medium bodied, have low tannin levels and are very versatile. Both are great cocktail party wines and can be enjoyed with a wide variety of hors d’oeuvres. Pinot Noir is a finicky grape and takes skill to produce a quality wine. However, when done well, it is an outstanding wine. There are two distinct styles in the U.S. — California produces a more fruit forward version and Oregon produces a style that is similar to a French Burgundy, with less fruit and more earthiness. Malbec is Argentina’s claim to fame in the red wine world. Food pairings for these wines include salmon, tuna, chicken, lamb and cheese. Favorites include: A To Z Oregon Pinot Noir for $18; Sean Minor Carneros, California Pinot Noir for $14; Terrazas Argentinean Reserva Malbec for $15; LeClerc Bourgogne (French Burgandy) for $24 and Domaine Carneros California Pinot Noir for $30.

California and Bordeaux Cabs and Cab Blends: These wines are a must for any wine cellar. Most have long term aging potential of 5-10 years, with powerhouse Cabs and Bordeaux able to cellar for 20-plus years. Cabs are the quintessential pairing with grilled steak and lamb, making this a favorite at steakhouse restaurants and backyard barbecues. Favorites include: Rodney Strong Sonoma Cab for $14; Pillar Box Red Australian Shiraz-Cab for $12; Les Gravieres St. Emilion, Bordeaux Merlot Blend for $22; Raymond Reserve Napa Cab for $27 and Frank Family Vineyards Napa Cab for $40.

Whether you’re just starting out collecting some wines or adding to your collection, you will find that this is a great time to stock up to share with family and friends. They’ll be glad you did.

Bill Garlough is the founder and president of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the winner of the 2007 U.S. Chamber’s Small Business of the Year. Bill is a level one master sommelier and pairs food and wine for My Chef’s customers. Visit www.mychef.com.