

## Champagne: to celebrate holidays, life

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'Tis the season! What are you pouring this holiday?

Here is what I suggest: Drink Champagne. It is the drink of celebration and it celebrates life.

Lily Bollinger said it best: "I only drink champagne when I'm happy and when I'm sad. Sometimes I drink it when I'm alone.

When I have company I consider it obligatory. I trifle with it if I'm not in a hurry and drink it when I am, otherwise I never touch the stuff unless I am thirsty." Sage advice.

My favorites are Bollinger, Laurent-Perrier, Pol Roger.

And if you are in the mood to treat yourself you might try the following:

Champagne Barons de Rothschild Rosé (\$100): Oh my! The color! A rich saturated "onion skin"! And the wine is so dry and structured that each sip is akin to chewing ice. The flavor is all kumquat and rhubarb. Amazing.

Crowd pleasers (that won't break the bank) include Grooner Gruner Veltliner, Austria (\$10) The label is hideous, but the wine is great. And you can't beat the price. It's a snappy little number full of arugula and sugar snap peas. Just tantalizing.

Montebuena Cuvée KPF, Rioja, Spain 2010 (\$10) This toothsome red is deep and rich with pomegranate fruit laced with dusty cocoa. There are hints of leather and sun-baked terra cotta too. Earthy, fragrant, smooth and savory. Fabulous at a fabulous price.

Also good to the last drop is Joseph Drouhin Chablis Grand Cru Les Clos 2008 (\$65). This chardonnay delivers a fascinating combination of "fat and skinny" on the palate. There is a rich brown butter character laced with quince and beeswax coupled with a vibrant acidity that hints of lemon and flint. Think of a curvaceous lady in a corset!

There is a lot of moxy squeezed into this tight little package, just eye-popping contained voluptuousness.

Domaine Faiveley Nuits-Saint-Georges 2009 (\$55) is a huge, pterodactyl Pinot Noir! The fruit is rich, ripe and explosive. There is a kiss of sweet oak and a touch of saddle leather. The wine, although massive in size, still has lift. Delicious!

To ramp it up a bit I recommend Fleur de Lyeth 2010, California (\$13) This is a huge, gutsy red full of power and spice. It's a take-no-prisoners, knife and fork wine that delivers a delicious package of dark berry fruit, chocolate and herb. The ample tannins are soft yet texturous, and the

finish long and spicy. A delicious blend of cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot and malbec. Very impressive.

Also impressive Ravenswood Sonoma County Old Vine Zinfandel 2009 (\$16) This tangy little number is built like a linebacker. The tannins are suede-like — soft but firm. The Bing cherry fruit is dusted with cinnamon and coupled with a four-square minerality that gives both backbone and character.

It's a winning combination of balance and muscle, and grace and power.

A wine that is beautiful with brunch is the absolutely delicious Biltmore Pas de Deux Sparkling Muscat Canelli (\$19). It tastes "exuberant" ... a fruit cocktail in a glass. Although sweet (2.2 percent residual sugar), it is balanced by a piquant acidity that makes the wine just dance across the palate. The perfect accompaniment to brunch!

