The 2026 Holiday Wine Guide: Exceptional Bottles For Every Occasion

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There is something particularly satisfying about giving a great bottle of wine during the holidays. Unlike another gadget destined for a drawer or a gift card that will inevitably disappear into someone's wallet, a thoughtfully selected wine invites its recipient to enjoy an experience. It might accompany Christmas dinner, mark an anniversary, or simply provide an excuse to gather a few friends around the table.

Of course, choosing the right bottle can be intimidating. California alone produces an extraordinary range of wines, from approachable whites made for immediate enjoyment to collectible Cabernet Sauvignons that can spend years in the cellar.

For our 2026 Holiday Wine Guide, we've assembled a selection of wines from Napa Valley, Sonoma County, Santa Barbara County, and Paso Robles. They span a range of styles and price points, with something for the casual wine drinker, the enthusiastic home chef, and the serious collector. Whether you're shopping for a holiday host, looking for the perfect accompaniment to a Christmas roast, or selecting a memorable bottle for someone who already seems to have everything, these California wines offer plenty of reasons to raise a glass.

Larkmead Vineyards 2023 Napa Valley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon
A Gift for the Serious Napa Valley Enthusiast



Few wineries embody the history of Napa Valley quite like Larkmead Vineyards, which has become one of my favorites despite being harder to come by in Texas. Established in 1895, the historic estate near Calistoga has witnessed the remarkable transformation of Napa Valley into one of the world's most celebrated wine regions.

Larkmead's 2023 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon represents that legacy while demonstrating the advantages of thoughtful contemporary winemaking. Produced entirely from estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon, the wine draws on the property's diverse soils and is aged in French oak to develop complexity without losing its distinctive vineyard character.

The 2023 vintage has attracted considerable critical attention, including a 96-point rating from Decanter and 95 points from James Suckling. For a collector, a bottle from an established estate with this kind of history is a particularly compelling holiday gift.

Tasting Notes: Deep plum, black cherry, cassis, and dark berries mingle with cedar, graphite, black pepper, cocoa, and subtle dried herbs. The palate is generous yet composed, featuring refined tannins, balanced acidity, and a long finish.

Holiday Pairing: Beef Wellington, prime rib, dry-aged steak, rack of lamb, or a substantial mushroom dish.

Price: $125 per bottle.

Where to Buy: Larkmead Vineyards, 2023 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon