

The New Year has started and you have resolved to become more adventurous with wine. You have always enjoyed Chardonnay as your drink of choice, but now you would like to break away from the same old, same old, and broaden your horizons. You know that there is more out there besides Chardonnay, so what do you do? Well, I am glad that you asked because I am able to suggest several steps you may want to take to make the hobby of wine more enjoyable.

First of all, do NOT rush out and buy a big bunch of wine. Rather than purchasing wine, go out and find several of the retail stores and restaurants in your area that offer tastings. Become a regular on the tasting scene, take notes, and try to develop a relationship with a retailer that you like who will give you good recommendations. We are fortunate in this area because we have knowledgeable people working at both the retail stores and restaurants.

Just one more thing to consider before you go out and purchase your collection of wine: Who are you buying for besides yourself? You know your friends and their likes and dislikes. It is always a "nice touch" to have what they like on hand.

Now you are ready to spend some money. Take it slow and no need to break the bank. Whatever you choose to start with, make it two of each: one for now and one for several months later, for comparison purposes. First, the Chardonnay. Start with some of the wines that you tried at your tastings. I am sure that you tried Mondavi, Beringer or Clos Du Bois. These are excellent choices at a good price point. Next on the list would be a good California Cabernet Sauvignon from Kendall Jackson, or Gallo. Drink one now and lay the other down for a year. You will notice the aging effect at this second tasting.

Next on the list should be a Pinot Noir. Staying with California, I would choose from the Saintsbury Collection. Saintsbury is a quality house, has excellent choices, and will help you stay within your budget. Pinot Noir is a good accompaniment for just about every kind of food. I have always been a fan of Saintsbury, but there are other excellent choices readily available from California and Oregon.

We jump now to Chianti, the standard to enjoy with Italian food. That being said, we find that Chianti can also be served alone. Without spending a fortune, you should be able to jump from regular Chianti to Chianti Riserva or Chianti Classico. This is one of the benefits of Chianti. For just a few extra dollars, the Riservas or the Classicos offer so much more in the way of flavor

and elegance. Antinori or Ruffino Riserva Ducale Gold Label are very reliable choices and readily available in our area.

Let's try a couple more white wines. Put Riesling at the top of your list. Riesling is the universal crowd pleaser. It is grown all over the world, usually rich with fruit, very food friendly, easy on the wallet, and it even ages well in the bottle.

Your next white should be a Sauvignon Blanc. Sauvignon Blancs can be enjoyed alone or with food. For a real treat try the wine with grilled swordfish. The Sauvignon Blancs on the market today carry flavors of pineapple, lime, grapefruit, and guava. There is a wide acceptance of Sauvignon Blancs in the market, as evidenced by some of the top names producing such as St. Supery, Groth, Cakebread, and Silverado. These wines are competitively priced, readily available and sure to please.

Two more wines and our starter list is put to rest, but by no means finished. The first is Rose. Usually low in alcohol, rose wines can be drunk alone or as an accompaniment with food. Should you add Rose Wines to your collection, you can expect that they will be very popular, especially during the summer months. Not to worry about replenishment! Rose wines are very wallet friendly and widely available.

To finalize our list, I recommend two bottles of Prosecco and one good bottle of Sparkling Wine. Prosecco is enormously popular, partly due to the fact that it is a good product, but also because the producers of Prosecco have been very successful in marketing the product as a suitable substitute for Sparkling Wine or Champagne. Hosts and hostesses all over have found that Prosecco is a terrific aperitif or an excellent accompaniment with food. The price point for Prosecco is very competitive with Sparkling Wine.

I recommend a having a good bottle of Champagne or Sparkling Wine on hand for that unexpected special occasion. Lay it down in a dark corner and wait for the occasion. It will not go bad if you don't open it.

WINESPEAK

To anyone wishing to start a wine collection or to just select a few wines to have on hand, allow me to say that a whole world of wine is out there just waiting for your involvement. Modern techniques in communication have made our planet smaller. As a result, information about any aspect of wine is available at the touch of a finger. A few examples: Who would have thought that China would be one of the hottest areas for wine production and wine sales? Who ever heard of an obscure wine called Tannat? It has been around since 1870 protected by a small winery in Uruguay. Now it is found in France, California and Washington, and it is hot. It can also be found in the Lowcountry.

The most important thing about starting a wine collection is to be patient. Building a wine collection requires time, money and information. And remember, the operative phrase is: Have Fun.