

WINE & SPIRITS

Champagne and assorted sparklers

Gord Stimmell

A gigantic Vintages release on Saturday is weighted toward holiday entertaining and wines to mate with festive food.

Naturally, there's a big outpouring of sparkling wines for New Year's Eve. Ignoring the outrageously priced champers such as Dom (\$249 for regular and \$329 for the Metamorphosis Rosé), the best true Champagne is **Taittinger Nocturne** (#385195, \$73.95, 92+) with toasty poached apple and baked biscuits refinement.

However, a couple of more affordable but refined sleepers are **Flat Rock Cellars Riddled 2009 Sparkling** (#383315, \$29.95, 90+) with toasty ginger, lime, lemon and roast apple elegance from Niagara; and a terrific Tasmanian, **Josef Chromy 2008 Sparkling** (#393629, \$29.95, 91) with spiced apple, biscuits, lime zest and opulent roast pear elegance.

My five top still white selections represent affordable excellence.

Beyond these, it is a matter of comparing top picks in a Chardonnay sweepstakes.

Climbing up the price ladder, Ontario offers **Southbrook Triomphe 2013 Chardonnay** (#172338, \$22.95, 90+) with bold golden apple richness, nutty ca-

shews, pear and apple parings notes and a lemony finish.

It slightly edged out the classy **Cave Spring Estate 2012 Chardonnay** (#256552, \$18.95, 90) with its lightly buttery smoked-apple finesse.

If you like big smoke and a hint of tar in your chard, the **Wolf Blass Gold Label 2013 Chardonnay** (#606186, \$24.95, 91) dishes up wide-bodied toasted oak, nutty pecans and tarry roast-apple potency from Down Under.

My top-rated white turned out to be a Chardonnay from Burgundy, the **Pierre André 2011 Meursault** (#732792, \$49.95, 93) with lavish butter, smoke, hazelnut, apple, honey and refined oak stylings with a crisp limestone finish.

For those seeking a relief from chard, a fine Sauvignon Blanc is also hitting shelves, **Domaine Chauveau 2013 Pouilly-Fumé** (#390641, \$23.95, 90) with signature grassy grapefruit, herbed pear, gooseberry and crisp apple parings acidity, a very lively antidote to too much oak.

Also this week:

Featherstone 2012 Canadian Oak Chardonnay \$21.95 (Niagara)

Native yeast and oak add complexity to this delicious tongue-coatingly rich chard with notes of butterscotch, fennel, toasted coconut and exotic banana!

LCBO #149302

Food suggestion: Deep fried chicken
Rating: 91

Château Du Trignon Côtes Du Rhone 2013 Vioigner \$18.95 (France)

An impeccably made Vioigner, delivering a refreshing dance of peach, pear, clover blossom, and apricot notes to the nose and palate.

LCBO #394585

Food suggestion: Wine poached mussels

Rating: 90

Loosen Bros. 2013 Dr. L Riesling \$13.95 (Germany)

A gorgeous sweet and sour balance distinguishes today's best-buy white, showing peach, apricot and candied ginger notes with a hint of honey.

LCBO #599274

Food suggestion: Roast pork loin

Rating: 91

Pieropan 2013 Soave Classico \$19.95 (Italy)

A very classy alternative to Pinot Grigio, this Soave struts lovely lemon meringue, spiced yellow apple and a hint of peach in its aromas and flavours.

LCBO #946848

Food suggestion: Boiled or broiled shrimp

Rating: 90

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