



T.G.I. Thanksgiving

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



Thank goodness it's almost Thanksgiving. It seemed like this summer would go on forever but it is now autumn (or at least what passes for autumn in Texas) both in fact and temperature. It's finally cooled off enough so that I can enjoy big red wines again and that

is something for which I am truly thankful. So thankful in fact that I have reconsidered this year's Thanksgiving wine question.

Most years, about the end of September, we have our first campfire and the richer reds come back into play after a summer off. This year, that first campfire has yet to come and it is only now cool enough to enjoy the bigger (non-Pinot Noir and Gamay) reds. Still, Thanksgiving is Thanksgiving and that means certain foods. Turkey (whether the Pilgrims had it or not) and stuffing. Sweet potatoes. Cranberries. Mashed potatoes and gravy. Pumpkin pie and mincemeat pie. And a lot of other things that make up different family traditions. In our family, deviled eggs and boiled shrimp and guacamole (this goes back generations) make up part of the appetizer mix and sometimes we even have potstickers (a newer but popular addition). This year, our dinner will reflect the lessons of 22 years of hosting Thanksgiving. In years past, our food and wine matchups were more luck of the draw. Last year was and this year will be different. I'll leave the appetizers and the desserts to others but I will keep control of the sitting-at-the-table part of the meal (the turkey and the sides) and the wine.

Most years, we start with Riesling to sip while cooking and nibbling on appetizers. Once the bird is served, we generally switch to Pinot Noir or Red Burgundy although last year we drank delicious, succulent 2009 Beaujolais wines with Thanksgiving in honor of that spectacular Beaujolais vintage (much of which is still in the market and still drinking great). We will have some Riesling this year as well. Nevertheless, my primary appetizer (and aperitif) wine of choice this year will be Champagne. And when we serve dinner, I'm planning to switch to (drum roll please) Red Bordeaux. This was a hard decision to make both because it goes against my traditions and because there is much fine Beaujolais and Burgundy in the market right now. And Riesling to start with and Pinot Noir (and Red Burgundy is Pinot Noir) with the meal is such an easy pairing with the classic holiday meal. The spicier the meal (and Thanksgiving in Texas can be a spicy affair), the better Riesling and Pinot will work. Nevertheless, this year, I am going with Champagne and Red Bordeaux.

So, you might ask, which Champagne and which Bordeaux? I'm planning on a few of each. For Champagne, we'll drink Some Louis Sacy Brut Original, some Lancelot Royer Blanc de Blancs and some Delamotte Blanc de Blancs. For Bordeaux, we'll have some Ch. Pontac Lynch Margaux 2007, some les Tourelles de Longueville Pauillac 2007, and some Gravette de Certan Pomerol 2007. Why three 2007s? While 2004 is showing a bit richer and some other vintages in the market (notably 2005 and 2008) are thought of as superior to 2007, 2007 is the prettiest and freshest tasting vintage on the market today. If I am going with Champagne and Bordeaux, why not pull out all the stops and serve the very top wines? Well, for two reasons. It is Thanksgiving and the food is the star with the wine playing an important but still supporting role. And I have a budget - which I am already stretching.

A Wine Friendly Thanksgiving Menu

What fights with wine at Thanksgiving dinner? Too much spice, conflicting flavors, too much salt, pickled flavors, too much sugar, and dried out turkey. These can all be avoided by keeping the spice level minimal, eliminating oyster stuffing, not using a lot of prepared foods, not putting a relish tray on the table, not serving cranberry sauce as part of the main event, not serving candied yams and marshmallows, and properly cooking your turkey.

For our Thanksgiving dinner, the bird will be

- 1) brined overnight (water, white wine, salt, sugar, and fish sauce)
- 2) patted dry and rubbed with olive oil and a rub of crushed dried herbs, a little granulated garlic and Cajun spices (Tony Chachere's).
- 3) the cavity loosely filled with Simon & Garfunkel herbs (parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme) and a couple of peeled shallots
- 4) roasted low and slow (225° on the grill's thermometer), in a roasting pan set on the gas grill (we have "Grill-zilla" so there is room for a big turkey) with only two of the six burners turned on (and those set on low) and the lid closed. This can be done in the oven but I like to use the grill as it frees up the oven for other stuff.

The bird starts breast side down and gets turned over about 45 minutes before I think it will be done. At the turn, I loosely tent it with foil to keep the skin from getting too dark. It comes off the grill just before the breast gets to 160° and stays tented with foil while the juices set (20 minutes or so) before carving.

Our wine friendly side dishes will include:

- 1) A savory bread pudding (rustic stale bread with lots of sweated-down celery, shallots and green onions, sage, mushrooms, and crumbled pecans mixed in, all soaked in a scalded milk, turkey stock, and egg mixture and then baked) which serves in lieu of stuffing
- 2) Mashed potatoes and Mom's gravy (made using turkey stock made from a turkey I cooked a week before Thanksgiving for that purpose - and to use in the bread pudding above - married into a medium dark roux.)
- 3) Roasted green beans finished with olive oil and a touch of Cajun spice.
- 4) Brussels Sprouts halved and seared cut-side-down in butter (to caramelize and add texture) and finished over lower heat with White Port and stock with a dash of Worcestershire sauce.

What? - you might ask - No sweet potatoes or cranberries!?! We'll have both - but the sweet potatoes will be part of an appetizer-y soup (a spiced puree with more of that turkey stock garnished with chives, crisped Serrano ham, crisped sage leaves, and a dollop of unsweetened whipped cream) and the cranberries will be part of a dessert (a walnut and cranberry pie that the ever patient Miss Carol makes). Our food bases are covered. The dishes are all flavorful but, even though some spice is used, nothing is overtly spicy or salty or fatty.

This menu is VERY wine friendly.

A Thanksgiving Blessing

Lord God, we bless You and thank You for this food and this wine which You have given us to nourish our bodies and make glad our hearts. We thank You for our families, our friends, and our freedoms. We thank You for this day of rest and reflection. And we thank You for the peace and prosperity that we enjoy in the midst of a chaotic world. Amen.

My 2011 Picks for Thanksgiving

My CHAMPAGNE Picks		Cash Bottle	Cash Case
Delamotte Brut De Mesnil Champagne NV	6x750ML	\$40.84	\$230.58
Lancelot Royer Cuvee De Reserve Champagne NV	12x750ML	\$40.84	\$459.55
Louis De Sacy 67% Brut Original Champagne NV	12x750ML	\$28.49	\$320.62
Value BUBBLY Picks			
Gruet Brut New Mexico - Sparkling NV	12x750ML	\$12.99	\$143.06
Jansz Brut Tasmania NV	6x750ML	\$20.89	\$117.71
Jansz Brut Rose Tasmania NV	6x750ML	\$20.79	\$115.83
My BORDEAUX Picks			
Ch Pontac Lynch Margaux 2007	12x750ML	\$33.24	\$374.20
Les Tourelles De Longueville Pauillac 2007	12x375ML	\$22.69	\$254.88
Les Tourelles De Longueville Pauillac 2007	12x750ML	\$40.84	\$462.04
Ch Vieux Certan 2nd Vin Gravette Certan 2007	6x1.5L	\$84.99	\$478.51
Ch Vieux Certan 2nd Vin Gravette Certan 2007	12x750ML	\$38.94	\$438.03
Ch Vieux Certan 2nd Vin Gravette Certan 2007	24x375ML	\$19.94	\$448.28
Value BORDEAUX Picks			
Ch Bois Martin Pessac Leognan 2007	12x750ML	\$17.79	\$199.40
Ch Cantenac St Emilion Gr Cru 2007	12x750ML	\$23.99	\$271.86
Ch Caronne Ste Gemme Haut Medoc 2007	12x750ML	\$15.89	\$178.75
Ch Corconnac Haut Medoc 2007	6x750ML	\$12.99	\$72.83
Ch La Croix Bonneau Montagne St Emilion 2007	6x750ML	\$19.69	\$110.75
Ch Laplagnotte Bellevue St Emilion 2007	12x750ML	\$25.39	\$285.48
Ch Peyroutas St Emilion 2007	12x750ML	\$19.94	\$225.02
Ch Pontac Phenix Haut Medoc 07/08	12x750ML	\$19.94	\$225.02
Ch Tourteran Haut Medoc 2007	12x750ML	\$15.72	\$177.00
Lascombes Haut Medoc 2007	12x750ML	\$17.79	\$200.28
Madame Cantenac St Emilion 2007	12x750ML	\$19.94	\$225.02 ✱