



Thank You for This Food and This Wine

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



Lord God, we thank You for this food and this wine which You have given us to nourish our bodies and make glad our hearts ... - from an old Jewish prayer

Those words are often part of the blessing I say before dinner and they will certainly form part of the before-lunch-grace I say on Thanksgiving Day. At this time of year, they are particularly appropriate. I am thankful for food and wine and so much more. I am thankful that, even though the world is in an on-going economic crisis and even though our country is at war, we live in peace and prosperity. I am thankful that I can enjoy my family and friends and that I have a lot of them. That I have a great job. That I enjoy the freedom to live where and as I want. That I enjoy the freedom to worship as I see fit.

I have much to be thankful for and, apparently so do many of my friends and customers. By Halloween, some were already asking me "What wines are you drinking for Thanksgiving?" I didn't have a ready answer then. It seemed like Thanksgiving was still a long way off. There was the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo International Wine Competition (more on which next week) to get through and so much else to do between that "now" and the fast approaching "then" of Thanksgiving Day. Nonetheless, their asking got me thinking. As it turns out, the answer to their question - which is the same question almost every year - is a little different this year. What has changed? Our Thanksgiving guest list has gotten a bit smaller and I've settled on a menu and a method of cooking the bird that produces a wine friendly, consistently juicy turkey. Any and everyone who is coming to lunch can bring appetizers or desserts (and I will have a variety of wines to enjoy with both) but I will control the menu and the wines for the main course. Another thing that has changed is that there are 2009 vintage Beaujolais wines in the market now - but more on that later.

For our Thanksgiving dinner, the bird is now

- 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.
- 3) the cavity is loosely filled with Simon & Garfunkel herbs (parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme - but you knew that) 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 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) Blanched green beans finished with butter and Cajun spices
- 4) Brussels Sprouts seared in butter and finished with white Port and stock with a dash of Worcestershire sauce.

What? - you might ask - No yams or cranberries!?! We'll have both - but the yams will be part of an appetizer-y soup (a spiced yam 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 lovely Miss Carol makes). Our food bases are covered. The dishes are all flavorful but, even though some Cajun spices are used, nothing is overtly spicy or salty or fatty. This menu is VERY wine friendly. I could serve red Bordeaux (I'd lean toward the 2004 vintage which is showing great right now), red Burgundy (lots of great 2007s in the market), Oregon Pinot Noir (I'd go for the under-rated 2007s), California Cabernet (I'd go for 2005s or 2006s and keep the rambunctious 2007s to go with a grilled steak). I could even serve a fine white Burgundy or a great Carneros or Russian River Chardonnay ... but I'm not going to. Instead, this is the year I will return to Beaujolais for Thanksgiving.

When I was much much younger, I used to always serve Beaujolais Nouveau for Thanksgiving. There was something symmetrical about it - a harvest wine served with a harvest feast. But, something happened. I got older and more experienced and became more of a wine geek (and truth to tell maybe just a bit of a wine snob - but don't tell anyone) and I wanted better and fancier wine with that most hallowed of holiday meals. For the last several years, my wine of choice for the Thanksgiving feast has been Pinot Noir from either Burgundy, Oregon, California, or New Zealand. This year, for a couple of reasons, rather than serving a bunch of Pinot Noirs, I plan to offer my family and guests lots of 2009 Beaujolais. Why? As has been noted weeks ago in this space, 2009 is a great vintage for Beaujolais and a number of excellent choices have made it into the market. I will not be serving Beaujolais Nouveau (not that there's anything wrong with it; it just isn't on the program). I will be serving Beaujolais, Beaujolais Villages, and Cru Beaujolais. Don't get me wrong. I never quit drinking Beaujolais. I just switched to fancier wines for Thanksgiving ... but this seems like a good year to invite an old friend back to the feast. Here's a list of what we have available:

Domaine des Trois Valet Beaujolais Durdilly, 2009
12x750ML \$10.79 \$120.93

Tech: 100% Gamay. Purple-violet in color with well-formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and medium phenolics. Sweet, earthy red and black grapey-raspberry fruit. Bight and alive. Rustic and a bit idiosyncratic but quite delicious. Fine. BS: 89+.

Georges Duboeuf Beaujolais Villages, 2009

12x750ML \$7.99 \$87.38

Henri Fessy Beaujolais Villages, 2009

12x750ML \$9.79 \$109.65

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Gamay from 30-50 year-old vines fermented traditional (not carbonic maceration) with native yeasts. Vivid purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with freshly balanced acidity; slightly chewy phenolics. Supple, focused, vivid red berry and some cherry fruit. Spicy and Delicious. Fine. BS: 89+.

Louis Jadot Beaujolais Villages, 2009

12x750ML \$9.09 \$101.05

Louis Latour Beaujolais Villages, 2009

12x750ML \$9.44 \$103.90

Louis Tete "Le Pot" Beaujolais Villages, 2009

12x750ML \$10.99 \$122.98

Georges Duboeuf "Ch. des Capitans" Julienas, 2009*

12x750ML \$17.29 \$194.71

Georges Duboeuf "Tour de Bief" Moulin-a-Vent, 2009*

12x750ML \$16.39 \$184.46

Henri Fessy Moulin-a-Vent, 2009*

12x750ML \$14.99 \$168.65

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Gamay from 50 year-old vines fermented traditional (not carbonic maceration) with native yeasts. Deep purple-violet in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Classic Moulin a Vent with dark red and just a bit of black fruit. Spicy and balanced.

Serious wine. Excellent. BS: 93.

Henri Fessy "Ch. de Reyssières" Regnie, 2009*

12x750ML \$12.69 \$142.30

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Gamay from 50 year-old vines fermented traditional (not carbonic maceration) with native yeasts. Dark purple red in color with well formed legs, dry, medium-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Delicious, supple, lively; juicy with dark red cherry-berry fruit. Hints at raspberry jam. Excellent. BS: 92.

Villa Ponciago Fleurie "La Reserve", 2009*

12x750ML \$16.99 \$190.32

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Gamay fermented traditionally and aged 30% in 1 year old French oak barrels and 70% in small tanks for 5 months. Purple-violet in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Bigger, juicier style cru Beaujolais with lots of ripe raspberry, strawberry, and cherry fruit. Classic and classy from the delicious 2009 vintage. Excellent. BS: 92+VHR.

*These are single village Cru Beaujolais so they do not say "Beaujolais" on the label. Instead, they are sold under the name of their individual villages (i.e. Moulin-s-Vent, Brouilly, Regnie, etc.). The ten villages that make up the Cru of Beaujolais produce richer, even age-worthy, wines than the general Beaujolais and Beaujolais Villages areas.

My plan for aperitif wines includes some bubbles, some Muscadet, some Riesling, and some Pinot Gris.

GRUET Blanc de Noirs, New Mexico, NV

12x750ml \$13.59 \$149.18

Tech: 12% Alcohol. A blend of 75% Pinot Noir with 25% Chardonnay aged 24 months en tirage and dosed to 0.8 residual sugar. Yellow straw in color, bright and clear and fully sparkling. Dry with fresh acidity and very light phenolics. Fine yeasty-toasty, minerally, darker fruit-flavored bubbly with a fine mousse. Long and flavorful with red fruit and citrus. Toasty to the end. Excellent. BS: 91VHR. (I like drinking this but it is not so dear that I would get bothered when my mother-in-law adds orange juice to hers.)

Vignerons du PALLET "Les Roches Blanches"

Muscadet Sevre et Maine Sur Lie, 2009

12x750ml \$8.69 \$96.60

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 100% Muscadet tank-fermented with no ML and aged sur-lie. Pale straw in color with good legs; dry, medium-light-bodied with fresh acidity. Offers mixed ripe citrus with quince and pear perfume but is balanced with stony minerality. Sweet with lemon and lemon drop notes. Fresh and alive. Vibrant in the mouth. Aromatic and succulent but in precise balance. Stunningly good Muscadet. Truly lovely. Excellent. BS: 92VHR.

(How do I give a \$9 bottle of wine a 92 point score? It pushed all my buttons. It may not push all your buttons quite so well but this is an Excellent bottle of Muscadet.)

PONZI Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley, OR, 2009

12x750ml \$14.87 \$167.48

Tech: 13.6% Alcohol. 100% Pinot Gris fermented in stainless steel tanks. Residual sugar is about .8% which is just above the threshold of recognition. Produced from certified sustainable vineyards. Pale straw in color with well formed legs; dry, medium light-bodied with crisp acidity. Delicious, supple but focused with bright pear, lime, and peach fruit. Vibrant and alive. Pure, fresh. Vivid. YUM. Excellent. BS: 91VHR.

DR. LOOSEN "Blue Slate" Riesling Kabinett, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, 2009

12x750ml \$17.19 \$193.25

Tech: 8.5% Alcohol. 100% Riesling (70% Graacher Himmelreich with balance from Wehlen and Bernkastel) from vines planted in 1986. Bottled within 6 months of harvest. Pale-green-straw in color with good legs; slight-bodied sweet but balanced with crisp acidity. Brilliant, juicy, thrilling. Vibrant lime and apple fruit. Delicious. Exciting and vivid. Excellent. BS: 91.

A Thanksgiving Dinner Primer

Thanksgiving is the most American of all our holidays and its attendant feast is likely the most American of all our meals. The holiday comes down to us from the some of our earliest European settlers. The feast is traditionally centered on the turkey (which Ben Franklin thought should have been our national bird) but has, since the beginning, offered a place for new foods from the many cultures feeding into the American melting pot. Every year, this Thanksgiving feast presents lovers of food and wine with a dilemma. Do we dial back the wine and let the traditional foods shine? Or do we dial back some of the tradition to make the meal more wine friendly? Is there middle ground?

For some wine lovers, the holiday is a chance to bring out their best wines and dazzle their friends, whether casual wine drinkers or fellow aficionados. As satisfying as this can be, there is also the potential for real disappointment if the wine and food don't pair well or if the treasured bottle is overwhelmed by a traditional menu.

For many families, the traditional Thanksgiving foods are sacrosanct. Aunt Betty's sweet-and-sour-jalapeno-pickles HAVE to be on the table along with Grandma's buttered-mashed-yams-with-bananas-honey-and-marshmallows. Of course, these accompany Uncle Bubba's Cajun fried turkey ("Kids! Keep your distance from both Uncle Bubba and the turkey fryer.") with oven-baked jalapeno-oyster-cornbread stuffing and a dozen or so other exotic must-have dishes. How do you pair wine with all that?



continues on page 3

In almost every Thanksgiving tradition, the turkey is the centerpiece of the meal. By itself, a properly roasted Turkey doesn't cause any wine pairing problems. It tastes great with almost everything from light fruity whites to the fullest-bodied Chardonnays, and from the lightest, fruitiest reds (such as Beaujolais) to an elegant, perfectly-aged red Bordeaux. Season that simple roast turkey with certain spices or push a typical Italian basil-and-pine-nut-pesto between the skin and the meat and you narrow the wine field a bit. The same is true of that flavor-injected, Cajun-seasoned, deep-fried turkey. Add regional stuffing variations and the typical side dishes that grace many Thanksgiving tables and the difficulties are compounded. Many of the traditional garnishes and relishes include salty, vinegary, and/or pickled flavors. Candied yams and cranberry sauce are each sweet enough to cause lots of wine problems. While I never have figured out which wine goes best with deviled eggs, I still eat 'em.

Add to all-of-the-above the fact that Thanksgiving has become a melting pot holiday. As cultural traditions from family and friends are merged into the traditional Thanksgiving celebration, Cajun, Italian, Mexican, African, and Asian seasonings, flavors, and techniques are finding a place as part of this most American feast. Fish sauce finds its way into the marinade. Mole may appear as a sauce for the turkey. Chiles grace the table and may be included in recipes. Pot-stickers, spring rolls, piroshki, egg rolls, or empanadas are almost as likely as boiled shrimp or deviled eggs to appear as appetizers. Anyone up for Jamaican-jerked-turkey?

Two more challenges to consider: Many who enjoy wine with their Thanksgiving dinner only occasionally drink wine (and may not be used to drinking really dry wines at all). And some (many?) turkeys are, regrettably, a bit dry by the time they're served. It's also good to remember that at this meal, perhaps more than any other, the traditional foods (from whatever traditions) really are the stars. In most cases, the wine - however good it may be - is at best a costar and is more likely playing a supporting role.

So, what's a wine lover to do? The way I see it, we have three choices. A food and wine free-for-all with no real plan is the easiest ... and you might get lucky. In this case, serve the wines you and your family and friends most like to drink on an everyday basis and let the chips fall where they will. Chances are most people will enjoy the food and the wine - but there will be only a limited possibility for the thrill of a great match.

The second choice is for one person to control all the food choices so that everything works well with the sort of wine served. If a treasured bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon or red Bordeaux is the desired accompaniment, a simple roast bird seasoned with olive oil, rosemary, and a hint of garlic and served with a savory bread pudding (in lieu of soggy stuffing), mashed potatoes, turkey gravy, and a simple green bean dish will do admirably. But beware the cranberry sauce, yams, assorted pickles (I love pickled baby corn at Thanksgiving), Cajun spice, or jalapeno cornbread stuffing. This option may work best for a smaller celebration or for another meal besides the Thursday Thanksgiving feast. It is how I plan my normal dinner parties - but Thanksgiving is a bit different.

The third choice is my favorite: Turn everyone loose to contribute and create. Have a bird or two or three at the center of things and combine it all with a range of wines designed to refresh and accompany the broadest possible range of flavors. Pick your pleasure.

To get down to specifics:

Before the feast is served you will be nibbling and cooking and socializing all while watching or ignoring parades and football. For this stage of the day, drink Riesling, Pinots Gris, Muscadet, sparkling wine, or dry rosé.

With the bird and all its attendants, serve your red wines whether Pinot Noir, Beaujolais, Cabernet, Bordeaux, or even Barolo.

Remember, for Thanksgiving dinner, super depth and complexity are not necessary; rather, maximum versatility and an invitingly comfortable, even "glug-able" character with lots of fruit are required. The key to success is lots of fruit and flavor and little, if any, obvious oak character. Fruit and a hint (or more) of sweetness helps offset any spice and makes a better match

with any smoky, sweet, and/or vinegary dishes. As tannic and/or oaky wines generally clash with salt, smoke, peppery spice (other than black pepper), and chilies, I avoid most Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and oak-influenced Chardonnay. Fresh, fruity flavors allow the food to shine and serve to refresh the palate so I generally serve younger wines at Thanksgiving. Young simple, fresh and delicious - that's the way to go.

Beaujolais Basics

Beaujolais is the southernmost region of Burgundy. Located below Macon in the Department of the Rhone, Beaujolais is about thirty-four miles long by seven to nine miles wide. The wines produced there range from very light, fruity AOC Beaujolais through fuller, richer Beaujolais-Villages to ripe, sometimes Pinot Noir-like Cru Beaujolais such as Moulin-a-Vent or Chenas. All are made from one or more clones of the Gamay Noir au Jus Blanc grown in granite based soils.

The soil in the Beaujolais region is granite based. As Pinot Noir - the noble red grape of Burgundy - doesn't take to granite soils, it gives way to a much more prolific performer, Gamay. While there are other types of Gamay; the Gamay of Beaujolais is Gamay Noir au Jus Blanc. The fruit of Beaujolais's Gamay Noir yields juice with good natural fruit flavors and high acidity but little tannin. Fruit character tends toward strawberry and raspberry with floral and fresh spice notes. This refreshing fruity quality may be reinforced in the winery by utilizing the Methode Beaujolais (or Carbonic Maceration).

Uncrushed whole clusters of grapes are loaded into a sealed fermenter in which the air is replaced by carbon dioxide. The weight of the grapes crushes some bunches at the bottom of the tank and the fermentation starts in this juice. The fermentation rapidly spreads to the uncrushed berries and the grapes are partially fermented from the inside. As there is little or no free oxygen in the tank, the fermentation is anaerobic. This anaerobic fermentation yields a more concentrated and slightly "jammy" fruit character as well as a buttery-toasty aroma that is typical of Beaujolais. After several days, the tank is emptied, the grapes are crushed and the fermentation continues until the wine is dry.

Some producers make a more traditionally fermented wine (fermented in open top tanks and punched down as are the vast majority of the wines made in Burgundy. Many of these wines are sold on their own and some are blended with the big companies. Carbonic wines stiffen them up.

The vineyard in Beaujolais is divided into three main areas. Wine from anywhere in the region (except the ten Cru villages) may be called simply "Beaujolais". In the northern third of the area, a number of villages produce a better, fuller wine; the wine from these villages is known as Beaujolais-Villages. North of Beaujolais-Villages is a loose cluster of ten villages that produce the best wines of Beaujolais. Wines from these villages are called Cru Beaujolais. In theory, each village makes a unique and identifiable style of wine and so these wines are marketed under the name of the village. These villages are:

Brouilly	Julienas
Chenas	Morgon
Chiroubles	Moulin-a-Vent
Côte de Brouilly	Regnie
Fleurie	St. Amour

Cru Beaujolais may be sold simply as "Bourgogne Rouge" with no indication that it is made of Gamay instead of Pinot Noir.

Wines labeled BEAUJOLAIS are generally the least expensive of all Beaujolais. They are light, fruity, refreshing wines made for immediate consumption. Though they will hold their flavor a year or more, they generally do not improve with age. BEAUJOLAIS-VILLAGES is higher quality wine with more focused flavors but its charms are the same as straight Beaujolais: light, fruity, and refreshing. CRU BEAUJOLAIS ranges in style from better or more focused Beaujolais-Village (such as most Regnie) to Côte d'Or "wannabes" (some the best Moulin-a-Vent).

Beaujolais Nouveau

Beaujolais Nouveau originated when the restaurants of Paris asked the Beaujolais producers for a product to build a festival around the slack business period in November and December. The Beaujolais producers offered a harvest wine to celebrate the end of the autumn harvest season. The restaurants began to promote the new wine by sponsoring races from Lyon to Paris to see who could get the first cases to Paris after the official release date. Beaujolais Nouveau may be straight Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages Nouveau, or even Cru Beaujolais Nouveau; as in standard Beaujolais wines, the Beaujolais-Villages Nouveau may be a bit higher in quality but costs a dollar or two more per bottle. Cru Beaujolais Nouveau is very rare. As the fame and popularity of Nouveau Beaujolais spread, other countries got into the act. Soon Nouveau was in demand in the United States as both a celebration of the French harvest and as an accompaniment to America's Thanksgiving feast.

Beaujolais & Food

Beaujolais is one of the few wines that works well with both salty and smoky foods. The salty, smoky ham and sometimes smoked turkey that are the centerpiece of America's harvest celebration are well complemented by the soft, fruity flavors of Beaujolais. Because Beaujolais (and especially Beaujolais Nouveau) is a light, refreshing wine that tastes best lightly chilled, it accents the food and quenches holiday thirst without stealing the spotlight away from the traditional Thanksgiving foods. The ability to handle salt and smoke make Beaujolais a good accompaniment to backyard style grilled foods and barbecue. The lack of tannin and fruity flavor allow Beaujolais to work with spicy cuisines such as Chinese, Thai, and Cajun. These same qualities enable Beaujolais to accompany many of the tomato and garlic based dishes common around the northwest crescent of the Mediterranean Sea. Beaujolais's straightforward flavors and cooler serving temperature often make it the ideal wine for people who want a glass of red to go with meatloaf, fried or grilled chicken, or a hamburger.

Serving Beaujolais

Most Beaujolais wines should be served lightly chilled or, at least, cool. Tannin content is the reason red wines are normally served warmer than white wines; at lower temperatures, the tannin masks all other flavors. As Beaujolais has little tannin, it can be served at a temperature that is more refreshing. At cooler temperatures, Beaujolais is more "quaffable." A neat trick for cooling Beaujolais is to pour a room temperature bottle into a heavy glass pitcher that has spent an hour or more in the freezer. Ideal serving temperatures range from a low of 50 degrees for Beaujolais Nouveau to a high of 60 degrees for a fine cru. ✨

