

Some gift packages have sparkle

This is the first of at least two columns that offer holiday gift suggestions. It is written before gift boxes and other gift paraphernalia packages have been released. Next column will focus on those. There are reportedly many coming out this year.

This reports some attractive releases that are out of the ordinary, that offer good value and that are attractively packaged. Your recipient will probably not know these wines, always an attribute in the gift-giving marathon to which we all seem to succumb each year about now.

Beginning with sparkling wine suggestions (what else?), there are some fine selections to be had. For \$10 there is a French sparkler in a gift box with two flute glasses called Chantaine Brut. An attractive wine and the glasses, while a bit thick, are pleasantly shaped.

From Touraine there is a bottle under the J.M. Rose label, a Brut, that should sell for about \$18 and looks like a great deal more. Finally, an old favorite is still around, Gratin Brut, a beauty at \$10. All three of these French sparklers are quality wines that look good as well. Throw in the two glasses with the first and you're a winner.

STAYING WITH French wines (though prices on these are going up), there is a lovely Burgundy that is remarkably inexpensive at \$5. This is a Jabet-Vercherre issue called Bourgogne Pinot Noir 1993.

Inquiries into French white wines among several people in the trade brought an almost universal recommendation of Chablis. "Any Chablis. We won't see prices on Chablis like this again until the economy turns another circle. If even then," said Dennis Walsh of the Red Wagon Wine Shoppe (yes, they do spell it that way).

As an example, he pointed to a Grand Cru Valmur, an excellent wine, and said that it will easily cost \$15-\$18 soon. It is now available for \$10, a joy for the lover of steely, crisp chardonnay. The California chardonnays recommended below are all more money and, of course, represent a dramatically different concept of wine style.

For the person who appreciates the subtle, opulent tastes of German wines there is a Burkin-Wolf 1993 Forster Mariengarten Riesling Spatlese worth much more than its \$6.50 price tag. The label is most impressive and wholly Germanic in design, the pedigree of the wine sound.

A caveat should be appended to purchases of some other wines from this land of the VW. Beware of anything called "Liebfraunlich," a historically famous name but one used too frequently to market some most inferior white wine blends.

One should purchase these no more than one would a vin du pays from France as a holiday gift, nor a Chablis from California. And the gift sets with colored glasses are as much to be avoided as are all German wines in earthenware bottles. Ugh!



wine
Richard Watson

GIVING and receiving wines from California involves, increasingly and sadly (though not necessarily), spending \$15-\$30 a bottle to come up with a truly distinguished selection. Our increasingly weakening dollar raises the cost of imports and may in turn encourage California winemakers to do the same as we move into the new year.

However, here are some carefully studied recommendations that are at least unusual and at best fairly priced, considering their high quality.

For chardonnay devotees, three stand out as meeting our criteria. The 1993 Ehlers Lane at \$12 is a beautiful package and wine, while the Chateau Bouche, also a 1993, is an excellent value, on sale now locally for about \$10 (originally about \$14). My personal, and many others' as well, favorite from the 1993 crush is the Folie a Deux, now becoming quite hard to find. It is hard to recommend at \$17 but is a truly monumental and unforgettable wine.

In cabernet sauvignon issues, the 1992 Folie a Deux (again) at \$13 and the 1992 Frog's Leap at \$11 are both estimable and unusual.

Finally, two sauvignon blancs, not because this varietal is normally associated with gift-giving but because of the excellence of these two items. Both are rather subtle, yet full and round without being at all flabby. The Lyeth (rhymes with "teeth") White Wine 1993 is loaded with sauvignon married to semillon, absolutely delicious. The other recommendation, the 1993 Arbor Crest, is one of the grandest of its kind I have ever had. Both are in the \$10-a-bottle range.

FINALLY (for sure), a book. Last year I devoted a whole column to new wine publications. This year, only two merit the investment.

Robert Parker's monumental tome on the wines of "Bordeaux" is as comprehensive as one can imagine. Published at \$18.95, it is an investment to cherish for anyone interested in wines in general but especially, of course, those of Bordeaux.

The second book is a modest, yet thorough volume by Bob Thompson, the "Pocket Encyclopedia of California Wines." Well written, accurate, loaded with sound detail, it would make a fine stocking stuffer.

table talk

Dinner goes wild

Wild Game Autumn Fare, a seven-course gourmet meal, is being planned by Chef Tom McGlone for Tuesday, Dec. 10. Ken Weber, "trout king," will be on hand to talk to customers, and wine expert Paul Mann and his assistants will pour wine. For reservations at \$25 per person, call 626-1900. McGlone said game nights have been featured the last three Saturdays and will continue Dec. 7.

Wild boar, buffalo and braised venison tips are some of the offerings. Monday Nights are Cajun Night, with four Cajun entrees on the menu and five additional ones as specials, continuing Dec. 2 and 9. McGlone sent his assistant to K Paul's in Louisiana and is using that chef's authentic recipe.

WINE AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

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Isabella Rossellini is a Russian translator and Mikhail Baryshnikov is a dancer who has defected but falls into the hands of the KGB in "White Nights."

the movies

Dan Greenberg

Everything meshes in putting together film 'White Nights'

"White Nights" is a rich film, its wealth found in the work of talented actors, dancers, cinematographers, musicians and the director.

Noted Russian dancer Nikolai "Kolya" Rodchenko (Mikhail Baryshnikov) defected 10 years ago and is now an American citizen. As the film opens, he is on a British airline with his manager, Anne Wyatt (Geraldine Page). The plane develops electrical problems and force lands at a Russian military airfield in Siberia.

What greater nightmare could any defector imagine than literally dropping from the air into KGB hands?

The KGB is deftly represented by Colonel Chaiko, played with slick, chilling and ominous sophistication by Jerry Skolimowski, the Polish filmmaker, himself a refugee from East European oppression.

Under Taylor Hackford's ("An Officer and a Gentleman," "Against All Odds") direction, Skolimowski characterizes Chaiko as a smooth and bloodless operator, far removed from the conventional representation of KGB officers as thugs from the provinces.

COLONEL CHAIKO'S mission is to convince Kolya to dance again at the Kirov Ballet where he had starred prior to his defection and where Baryshnikov himself debuted in 1962. To complicate matters, Kolya's former lover, Galina Ivanova (Helen Mirren), is now in a managerial position at the Kirov.

The Colonel uses her and an attractive, but unlikely couple, Raymond Greenwood (Gregory Hines) and his wife, Darya (Isabella Rossellini), a Russian translator, to convert Kolya to "Russianness." Greenwood is an American who defected to Russia to protest our Vietnam tragedy and the black experience in America. Now out of favor, he languishes in Siberian provincial theaters, where the long, maddening Arctic nights give the film its title and a touch of repressive, KGB insanity.

Mr. and Mrs. Greenwood are set to work as watchdog/companions to convince Kolya he must perform. The rehearsal-hall dance sequences with Hines and Baryshnikov are superb. Baryshnikov needs no introduction as a premier ballet dancer. "White Nights" should insure his reputation as a modern jazz dancer and as an actor as well.

Hines performance, equally, is worth the price of admission, as he dances both solo and with Baryshnikov. In particular, while still in Siberia, Hines does a drunken rap/tap number explaining why he, a black, defected. It is a significant expression of the despair blacks suffer and an excellent, expressive performance.

Amidst all these accomplished performances, Isabella Rossellini stands out for her talented acting and for a nostalgic evocation of her mother, Ingrid Bergman. Although her role is overshadowed by the scope of the other characters, the manager, in a supporting role, to shine with the best spirit of humanity as the loving wife, sure of her love.

DIRECTOR OF Photography David Watkin ("Return to Oz," "Vestibule," "Charisma of Fire") filmed rich, well-planned compositions on location in Finland, Portugal and Scotland.

The Finnish locales accurately represent Russian sites obviously out of bounds to Western film makers. The slightly diffused, softened images have an artistic quality associated with the greater density of European composition, much richer than the more pragmatic American image.

The film is an interesting political statement, released in time for the Geneva summit. "White Nights" effectively emphasizes recent agitation to free Russian refuseniks and political prisoners Sarkhov, Scharnsky, Nudel and others.

Add to all this an excellent music score by Michel Colombier, choreography by Twyla Tharp, Hackford's well-paced direction and the sum is a treasure chest of visual and aural treats.

Baryshnikov dances with Gregory Hines, playing a disenchanted American, a performer who has defected to Russia.