

Only a few holiday gift packages stand out

Last column featured selections of affordable wine gifts appropriate to the holiday season and carried the promise that this one would report on fancy, seasonal gift packages.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the column.

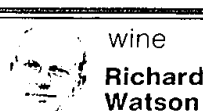
Over the last several days, I have surveyed the available gift assortments, both those prepared commercially and those hand-assembled in local wine stores (a big business around here indeed), duly traveling from store to store.

As gifts for persons who are truly interested in fine wines they, as a whole, were most disappointing.

Some are pretty glibly combining food, spirits and wine, all done up rather attractively. But in general they are populated by slower-moving items, outdated wines of questionable merit and are rather expensive for the quality they afford.

Of course, that's merchandising and it has its place in our world.

However, both kinds of gift packages are usually to be avoided, with a few notable exceptions.



wine
Richard Watson

So that this column does not evolve into one contrary to the spirit of the season, those exceptions where they represent good value are reported. Their limited number makes this a less bountiful report than I had originally anticipated it would be.

THE JOINT owners of Sterling Vineyard and the Monterey Vineyard have come up with attractive, two-bottle packages that each contain previously unissued wines, all of them of high quality and at prices no greater than if the bottles were purchased separately.

With the first, there is a 1981 Cabernet Sauvignon and a 1983 Sauvignon Blanc for \$23. The Monterey issue has their 1983 Chardonnay and 1984 Pinot

Blanc, the latter a wine much too hard to find these days. The pair is \$13.

More attractively packaged, in impractical wooden cases, are two sets from Inglenook. The smaller of them contains a bottle of 1981 Zinfandel and its 1984 issue of Sauvignon Blanc. The larger box, a half case, boasts three bottles of the same 1981 Zinfandel and three bottles of 1983 Chardonnay.

Priced at \$14 and \$40 respectively, both cost less than the bottle-alone price would be. The fine wooden cases make this appear a most elegant choice of gifts.

The more ingenious recipients of these will doubtless find many uses for them. To market these, the Inglenook people are making quite a bold step; those boxes do not come without considerable cost to the marketing people. Most impressive!

Mouton-Cadet offers a three-bottle, boxed set, two bottles of its fine red (1983) and one of its blanc (1984). Always dependable wines, this is an attractive collection at \$20.

Also from France, there is a delightful box that has a bottle of estimable

Gratin Brut sparkling wine, flanked on either side by an imprinted Champagne glass. Anyone should be thoroughly cheered to receive anything by Gratin, makers of fine sparkling wines, and the glasses are attractive and serviceable. At \$14, you are paying a couple of dollars for each of the glasses: reasonable.

AND, WHILE dealing with the Gratin name, mention should also be made of a release I have not seen in the past, the true Champagne (Epernay) of Alfred Gratin. Not in a gift box, it would still make a fine presentation. At only \$20 for the Real Thing, it would be a fine choice for someone who appreciates those fine bubbles from the Motherland.

A final unqualified domestic recommendation is the most expensive of all, but such a choice!

Buenos Vista Vineyards of Sonoma has assembled four of its reserve wines in a carton and sells the whole thing for

about what the wines would cost separately, and this is the only way to get the first of them. That is, their Merlot, never previously released.

Accompanying this are a reserve Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon.

At \$70, it is no small investment in the pleasure of someone else, but Buenos Vista has been making such excellent wines of late under the guidance of winemaker Jill Davis that it is hard not

to recommend this as a Best Buy.

For the true wine-oriented person, avoid the tins of unimaginative Bolla wines, the Paul Masson sparkling wine, with two glasses at \$15.00 and, especially the store-made packages.

Eschew (don't use that one often) the glitter for the substance. If the single, premium bottle won't serve your style, at least be selective. This is no time of the year to part with precious dollars frivolously.

DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

ON THE TOWN

DON'T COOK CHRISTMAS EVE!

Kingsley Inn offers carry out service for your Christmas Eve dinner. Choose either a Whole Roasted Turkey or a Boned Prime Rib of Beef as the entree. Each offering is accompanied by a complementing potato, vegetable, rolls and butter and dessert. Orders must be placed by Friday, December 20, noon.

Please call our catering office
644-1400 ext. 501, 502

Kingsley Inn

Woodward at Long Lake Road • Bloomfield Hills
Dining room open Christmas Eve for dinner,
closed Christmas Day.

table talk

Contest winner

Kimberly Thomas of the Machus Red Fox in Birmingham won fourth place for her creation called the Foxtail. In the contest for non-alcoholic holiday drinks sponsored by AAA Michigan.

She is one of two Birmingham bartenders whose recipes for "cocktails" are among those included in the Great Pretenders Party Guide. The booklet is available free at AAA Michigan's 60 offices statewide.

Fred Saputo of the Birmingham

Country Club offers his recipe for a drink he named Almonds Jubilee.

This year for the first time the contest also was open to non-bartenders. Shirley Travonala of Troy, a non-professional bartender, was a finalist with Pink Elephant Fizz. Peter Salina of Mio, who writes for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, made the finals with Nun-Rum Boogie.

Sweet home

Daane Christ from the Baker's Loft

in Southfield received honorable mention in the first annual Gingerbread House Competition, open to area chefs, for the recent Festival of Trees at Cobo Hall in Detroit. His entry was "Home Sweet Home."

Honored for decorating a festival tree were Linda Bruce and Laurie Burt of the Curiosity Shoppe in Franklin for their entry, "To Grandmother's House," which received the "Holiday Christmas" Award. The "Best of Festival" Award went to Harold and Bruce of Breathe of Spring Florists in Birmingham for

"Breathe of Spring Fantasy."

Holiday menu

Chief Doug Gretch will offer his extensive dinner menu, rather than his chicken menu, 1-5 p.m. Monday, Dec. 23 at Restaurant Daughters in Southfield. The award-winning Millford Choir will sing for the diners. Afterward, the Wilbert Peagler Quartet will provide music for easy listening and ballroom dancing. For reservations, call 424-9244.

save energy

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Free picture taken with Santa for children under 4. We'll be serving up smiles with our extravagant Holiday Buffet in a Winter Wonderland Setting.

From 10:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Cream of Mushroom Soup, Northfield Salad Bar including Waldorf Salad, Pasta Primavera, Cucumber Salad, Potato Salad, Fresh Fruit Mignon, Crustless and Dip, Mixed Greens with over 20 toppings and four dressings, Fresh Baked Bread, Muffins, and Biscuits with assorted Fruit Butters. Roast Spring Leg of Lamb with Tarragon-Mint Sauce, Roast Beef and Glazed Ham carved by our chefs, Breast of Duckling in Orange-Walnut Sauce, Sauteed Breast of Chicken in Sauce Crevette, and Baked Cold Almondine. Rice Pilaf, Broccoli Au Gratin, Baby Belgian Carrots, and Sesame Red-Skin Potatoes. Smoked Salmon and Sable, garni.

Assorted Cookies, Brownies, Mousse, Truffles, Pastries, Pudding and Custards, Tortes, Egg Nog, AND MUCH, MUCH MORE!

Adults \$12.95 / Children \$7.95

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