

The Sun

Thursday Sparklers How To Drink On Thanksgiving

November 16, 2005 by Matt Kramer

Everyone in the advice-giving trade — from priests and psychiatrists to wine writers — knows that there are really only a handful of profound truths. The trick is to recycle them in ways that illuminate them or at least make them seem fresh.

So it is with Thanksgiving wine advice. The profound truth of Thanksgiving wine advice is simply this: It's no time to exhume your cherished bottles. Unless your family is enthusiastically and universally devoted to fine wine — and I have yet to meet such an American family — my role as caregiver to your wine wellbeing requires me to warn you against your best instincts of generosity.

The corollary to this is yet another truth: You don't want to serve something lousy, either. After all, your palate is involved, never mind your reputation. (Many families now seem to have a designated wine supplier. I'm assuming that you're it.) So the trick is to choose wines that will please everyone, including, of course, you.

"Smooth" is the operative word in choosing wines, as most Thanksgiving tables typically encompass a range of wine interests, from meek to geek. Turkey is an accommodating bird, so both red and white are equally in order.

HERE'S THE DEAL

MOUNT EDEN VINEYARDS "SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS" CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2002 In a world of ludicrously overpriced California cabernets, there's still the almost too-good-to-be-true Mount Eden Vineyards. This spectacularly sited vineyard, which lies 2,000 feet above Silicon Valley in the Santa Cruz Mountains, is textbook perfect.

Mount Eden's vines are old; its yields are fabulously low (between 1 and 2 tons an acre; Napa Valley crops two or three times that). The soil creates wines that deliver a noticeable mineral character. And the high elevation installs finesse through beautiful acidity.

Not least, co-owner and winemaker Jeffrey Patterson has a deft touch. His wines, red and white, are never too oaky, too tannic or too much of anything. Too good to be true? You can agree for yourself with this just-released 2002 estate-bottled cabernet sauvignon. A blend of cabernet sauvignon (75%), merlot (22%); and cabernet franc (3%), this is a succulent, mineral-inflected red wine of uncommon character and seductive smoothness. You can smell the minerals and taste a berryish (loganberry, raspberry) fruit intensity with very supple, fine-grained tannins.

If this wine hailed from Napa Valley, it would command \$100 a bottle. But Mount Eden Vineyards doesn't have that privilege. Their loss, our gain. This wine asks just \$34.95 a bottle. At that price, it's simply a steal for a great cabernet sauvignon. If you buy just one cabernet this year, get this.