



# 12 wines to buy now



Shop ahead of time for Christmas and avoid the rush Dec. 24

**T**he season of holiday parties and get-togethers is right around the corner so now is the time to jump on wine “finds” for gift giving and to pad your stash.

I usually focus on champagnes (and other bubbly) and ports (and other sweet wines) when giving Christmas wine advice, but this year I’m looking at great finds you can buy now and store away till you need them later in the season.

Your basement or a cool cupboard will do just fine as a storage location – just make sure you don’t bury them, never to be found again.

First, let’s be clear on what I mean by “finds.” Ontario isn’t the best place in the world to make a “wine find,” not when you compare it with our neighbours in the United States. There, you can walk into a grocery store or specialty shop and find bottles well under \$10 a bottle; they also have two-for-one specials and offer sizeable discounts for multi-purchases, etc.

In Ontario, a bottle goes on sale for a dollar or two off and we are supposed to get super-excited – and we usually do.



Michael  
Pinkus

That’s because we are conditioned that way. It’s also because the LCBO has something called floor pricing, meaning a bottle can’t be sold for less than a certain price, which is between \$7 and \$8.

As we drift closer and closer to December, the LCBO prices (especially in the Vintages section) creep up and up and up because they know you’ll be buying more.

I’m not advising you to cheap-out this holiday season, I’m advising you to buy wines that over-deliver on their value-to-price ratio.

Here are 12 wines of pre-Christmas you can pick up now that will make your friends think you spent a lot and will make you feel great because you didn’t.

**Kim Crawford 2016 Chardonnay** – New Zealand (\$19.95 – #991950)

No surprise that there are plenty of really good Chardonnays out there, but why not go off the beaten path of Ontario or Burgundy and land in a place like New Zealand, where most people think of Sauvignon Blanc. Crawford’s version is juicy and yummy with some oak and vanilla notes along with melon and apple; it’s a great “begin the evening” wine. Rating: Four stars

**Bollini 2016 Pinot Grigio** – Italy (\$17.95 – #951319)

To me, Pinot Gris (Grigio) is as boring as it is popular – I’m not sure why. But in this bottle of Bollini I found something interesting I could actually sit and sip on: fresh and light but with definite notes of lemon pulp and zest that help keep you coming back for another sip. Rating: Three and a half stars

**Trius 2015 Red** – Ontario (\$22.95 – #303800)

A blend of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot – aged in a 60/40 mix of French and American; six months apart and six months together. It has a rich mouth-feel, smoky mid-palate and spicy

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finish. You'll also find vanilla, black cherry, white pepper and cocoa interlaced with well-balanced acidity. Rating: Four and a half stars

**J. Lohr 2014 Los Osos Merlot** – California (\$23.95 – #27516)

This is the California Merlot you expect it to be; juicy, fruit-forward and super smooth, it's just what the doctor ordered: blueberry rules the roosts with more juicy dark and red fruits mixing it up. It's silky, supple and delicious. Uncomplicated never tasted so good. Rating: Four stars

**Kaiken 2015 Malbec, Reserve Especial** – Argentina (\$15.95 – #58339)

Argentina is known for making Malbec these days, but I defy you to find a better value in an everyday drinking Malbec: chocolate, raspberry, smooth and subtle, easy drinking. A real pleasure. Rating: Four stars

**Montes 2014 Alpha Cabernet Sauvignon** – Chile (\$20 – #322586)

Ever since Montes went the dry-farming route with this wine, they improved the depth of flavour immensely. Dry farming just means they don't irrigate, which means they are stressing the vines to make better, more concentrated fruit, and it really shows in the wine. Lots of big, black fruits such as blackberry and black cherry mix it up with mint and mocha leading to a spiced finish that over-delivers at this price point. Rating: Four stars

**Kilikanoon 2015 Killerman's Run Shiraz** – Australia (\$19.95 – #925453)

Kilikanoon is one of those fun-to-say winery names that makes great wines up and down its lineup. The Killerman's Run Shiraz might seem basic with its vanilla, blackberry, plum and black cherry notes, but it's the layering of these flavours that keep popping up sip after sip that makes it such a wonderful wine. Rating: Four stars

**Domaines Perrin 2014 Reserve** – France (\$16.95 – #363457)

Fans of Rhone Valley reds know they're in for a treat when a good one comes along. It's the multiple varieties of grapes that makes it so interesting, they act as seasoning in a stew. This Perrin version is dominated by red fruits and finishes with

delicate spices. Rating: Four stars

**Antinori 2015 Peppoli Chianti Classico** – Italy (\$19.95 – #606541)

The Antinori name should turn heads at the table; they are one of the most well-known Italian wine houses and they make wine all over the country, but Chianti is a specialty of theirs and this Classico is by far one of their best in a while: black fruit kicks things off a la cassis and black cherry then smoke and spice helps to bring it all together. Great complexity and balance. Rating: Four stars


**Monte Antico** – Italy (\$15.95 – #69377)

A Tuscan blend of Sangiovese, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, known as a Super Tuscan in some circles. They usually deliver big tannins and flavours, but this one delivers super-smoothness with blue and black fruit, vanilla and subtle smokiness; not typical but very enjoyable. Rating: Three and a half stars

**Torres 2012 Gran Cornas Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon** – Spain (\$19.95 – #36483)

Torres is like the godfather of Spanish wine and this Cabernet Sauvignon is the second wine of its big gun known as Mas La Plana – sweet dark chocolate, coffee bean and black cherry, plus there's a delightful spiced finish. It's a pleasure to drink and evolves in the glass over the course of an evening. Buy a bunch and age it five-plus years, and you won't be disappointed. Rating: Four stars

**Cave Spring Blanc de Blancs Brut Sparkling** – Ontario (\$29.95 – #213983)

Let's close the list with a beautiful bottle of bubbly that just might fool your champagne-loving friends. This one is made from 100 per cent Chardonnay (hence the Blanc de Blancs – white of white). It has those toasty, biscuit notes we all know and love plus there's some baked apple and a creamy texture in the mouth that helps to add greater depth and complexity. Rating: Four stars out of five 

Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada. Follow him on Twitter at @thegrapeguy.



## Turkey Bacon Sliders



## Brussel Sprout & Bacon Bites

Serves 8-10 Prep Time 15 min Cook Time 15 min

### Ingredients

- 1 LB Ground Turkey
- 1 Stemmler's Smoked Turkey Leg
- 1 Shallot Minced
- 1 Clove Garlic Minced
- 2 Fresh Sage Leaves Chopped
- 1 TBSP Stemmler's Smokin Good Sauce
- 2 TBSP Cranberry Sauce

- 2 TBSP Apple Bacon Butter  
*(see recipe [www.stemmlermeats.ca/Apple-Bacon-Butter.htm](http://www.stemmlermeats.ca/Apple-Bacon-Butter.htm)) \*\*Make ahead\*\**
- 3 oz Sliced Manchego Cheese
- 12 Mini Brioche Buns
- 1 TBSP Olive Oil
- Pinch Salt & Pepper
- Green Leaf Lettuce as Condiment

### Sliders

1. In a bowl, combine the ground turkey, shallot, garlic, sage, Smokin Good Sauce, salt&pepper and 4 oz of chopped turkey leg meat. Mix evenly together and begin forming 2oz patties. Pan sear the patties in olive oil on high heat then remove. Place on Baking sheet and put in 350F oven for 5 minutes. Add the cheese and let bake for 3 more minutes.

2. As the patties are baking, slice the buns, add the apple bacon butter to the bottom. When the burgers are done, place on the bun, top with some cranberry sauce and lettuce. Arrange nicely on a platter and serve.

### Ingredients

- 12 pcs Apple Cinnamon Bacon
- 6 Brussel Sprouts Halved
- 2 oz Stemmler's Caramelized Onion Curds
- Pinch Salt & Pepper
- Toothpicks



### Sprouts

1. Par-cook the bacon in a pan until there is some colour on both sides. Do not make it crispy. Remove and set aside, laying them flat. Half the brussel sprouts and saute in the leftover bacon fat with some salt&pepper. You may add a touch of olive oil if you need to. Let the sprouts turn bright green and become slightly tender. Set aside.

2. Once they are ready, lay the bacon out, take a piece of the cheese curd and begin to wrap it with one halved sprout. Once its entirely wrapped, set them on a baking sheet with parchment paper. You may want to use a toothpick to hold it all in place. When you have all the sprouts wrapped, place in a 400F oven for 7 min. When they are done, the bacon should be crispy, sprout should be tender and the curd should be slightly melted. Arrange nicely on a platter with the sliders and enjoy these tasty treats!



For more information on Chef Scott Yates please visit : [chefscottcooks.com](http://chefscottcooks.com)

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