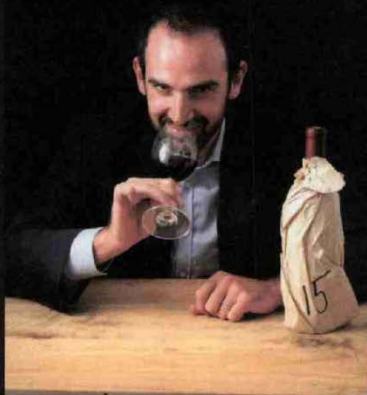




# Wines for the Holiday Table

OUR NYC PANEL'S TAKE ON A WIDE RANGE OF POSSIBLE POURS

by Lana Bortolot / photos by Doug Young  
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Team Captain Mike Madrigale, Head Sommelier at Bar Boulud and Boulud Sud.

COME THE HOLIDAYS, OUT COME THE USUAL SUSPECTS FOR WINE. Whether it's a matter of tradition or training, we all know what customers will gravitate towards: a benign Merlot or Sauvignon Blanc—something safe and that won't alienate at a large dinner.

But what if you could get the decision maker to throw over Merlot for a spicy blend? Or swap out the Sauvignon for Soave? This was a question I posed in our call for submissions for a Quaff Report exploring alternatives to the tried and true, as well as some new takes on old favorites. For this task, team captain Mike Madrigale, Head Sommelier at Bar Boulud and Boulud Sud, recruited four sommeliers from Manhattan's top tier.

Eric Hastings, Chief Sommelier at Jean-Georges; Jeff Kellogg, Wine Director at Maialino; Juliette Pope, Beverage Director at Gramercy Tavern; and Grant Reynolds, Wine Director at Charlie Bird, gave 17 wines the once over, evaluating them for quality and suitability for the holiday table. Vetted from 66 bottles, the final selection considered a variety of wine styles as well as potential aperitifs or food pairings: turkey and all the trimmings, of course, but also brisket and roasts.

For the red group, I considered two perennial favorites: Merlot and Pinot Noir, and chose wines that expressed those varieties in different blends and from different regions. In a New World/

Old World Merlot mashup, two wines overturned assumptions and switched places. The 94-percent Merlot from Lieb Cellars in Long Island was favored over a Right Bank Merlot-based blend for its savory Bordeaux-like qualities, and recommend for roasted game dishes or braised brisket. Whereas the Lieb was earthy and structured, its French cousin (85 percent Merlot) was jammy and sweet, its fruit masked by oak.

## A MIXED BAG OF TREATS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

**Domaine Ostertag 2011 Pinot Gris Fronholz, Alsace (\$50)** Rich and bold, smoky and intense with yellow and green vegetal qualities. Esoteric and exotic.

**Domaine Michel & Stephane Ogier 2010 Condrieu "La Combe de Malleval," France (\$95)** This 100% Viognier was considered too low in acid to pair with food and too high in alcohol as an aperitif. Most felt Viognier just hasn't "come into its own yet."

**Stoller Rose 2013, Dundee Hills, Oregon (\$20)** 100% Pinot Noir was assessed as a crowd-pleasing wine with good acid and fresh fruits. "A wine that sells itself."

**Lieb Cellars 2008 Reserve Merlot, North Fork Long Island (\$22)** An earthy, savory and affordable Bordeaux-style wine that overturned assumptions. "Good grip" and "nice balance between fruit and herbs."

**Château La Pointe 2011 Pomerol, France (\$39)** Though the second bottle from a well-regarded château, this disappointed with its confectionary and fruity profile.

**Matetic 2010 EQ Pinot Noir, San Antonio, Chile (\$39.99)** Spicy aromatics and and less-than-vibrant fruit, it failed to convince the panel that South America can produce a Pinot Noir that rivals other regions.

**J. K. Carriere 2011 Pinot Noir Vespidae, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$45)** "Earthy, evolved aromas," good tannins and fresh bright fruit made this a likely and versatile candidate for holiday meals.

**Santa Rita 2008 Triple C, Maipo Valley, Chile (\$39.99)** An inky, dense Bordeaux-styled wine with very ripe fruit and good structure required an intense grill or roast to offset its intensity.

**Paul Jaboulet Aîné 2010 Hermitage La Chappelle, France (\$320)** Sadly disappointing, especially for the price.

