

# Thanksgiving Made Easy

# bon appétit

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EAT WELL / SAVOR LIFE

## 68 RECIPES TO MIX & MATCH

TURKEYS  
STUFFINGS  
POTATOES  
SIDES  
BREADS

HEALTHY  
HOLIDAY  
FOODS  
P. 83

10  
PERFECT  
MENUS

CITRUS ROAST  
TURKEY  
WITH REDEYE  
GRAVY  
P. 106

LEFTOVERS  
DONE  
RIGHT!  
P. 73

ENTERTAINING  
DOs AND  
DON'Ts  
P. 30

## PARTY DESSERTS

PUMPKIN STREUSEL PIE  
BROWN SUGAR-PECAN CUPCAKES  
PEAR GINGER CRISP



# give thanks, drink spanish

Old World earthiness meets New World fruitiness with Spanish reds from Rioja and whites from Rias Baixas. Or, in other words, world peace in your wineglass at the Thanksgiving table. BY HEATHER JOHN



**P**ERHAPS IF THE SPANISH ARMADA HAD HUNG A HARD LEFT AT Brittany, our forefathers would have arrived at Plymouth Rock several decades later to discover that turkey and all the trimmings are best enjoyed with a glass of Spanish wine. I, myself, did not arrive at this conclusion until earlier this year, when I attended several tastings of Rioja reds and Galicia whites at a conference in Madrid. I had pretty much eaten my weight in *jamón* (dry-cured Spanish ham), which is super-rich, fatty, and addictive, and necessitates several glasses of wine to cut through all that fat. It's not unlike the Thanksgiving dinner dilemma, when you're faced with a 2,000-some-calorie plate of food and the added challenge of a cornucopia of flavors and textures so varied that wine pairing is every wine writer's Waterloo. But we're not here to talk about the French.

Instead, think of Spain as the peacemaker at the holiday table. If Old World wines are characterized by earth and New World wines are characterized by fruit, then Spain is where these two worlds happily collide. Consider sparkling Spanish *cava*, which is earthier than Champagne but bright with fruit—a perfect opener to

the holiday meal. Two of my favorites are German Gilabert Cava Reserva, with toasty notes, and the new Elyssia Pinot Noir Brut from Freixenet, which is made from earthy Pinot Noir and features bright raspberry flavors.

In particular, the two regions that best represent the convergence of classic and modern winemaking techniques are Rias Baixas in the Galicia region and the Rioja in northern Spain. The former is known for whites made from Albariño, while the latter particularly shines with Tempranillo-based reds, both of which are complex, balanced, and—thanks to a continental climate—beautifully structured with crisp acid. And when it comes to a dinner as rich as Thanksgiving, believe me, a wine with good acid is *muy bueno*, indeed.

It was while tasting Lusco do Mino winery's 2005 Pazo Piñeiro de Lusco Albariño that it hit me: Albariño is the predominant white grape grown in the area, resulting in wines that are complex, fruity, and nuanced. This particular wine was no exception, with bright lemon and white peach flavors, white floral aromas, and a zippy mineral finish. The wine also had a certain richness to it, one that would complement, say, bacon or sausage in a stuffing but simultaneously cut through the heaviness with beautifully crisp fruit and mineral notes. Sadly, this wine is not imported into the U.S., but subsequent Albariños we tasted continued the theme—notes of apple, citrus, honeysuckle, and almonds, most with mineral nuances—a trait often missing from New World whites.

By the time I got to the Mar de Frades 2005 Albariño, I had mentally already invited the wine to Thanksgiving dinner. Fruity and floral with hints of sea salt and spice, I could imagine how well it would pair with the stuffing, turkey, and braised vegetables.

The next day, I attended a tasting called "Rioja: Smart Buys," in which I tried more than a dozen Tempranillos from the Rioja region. Unlike the super-extracted, powerhouse Tempranillos from Spain's Ribero del Duero and Toro regions, some of the best reds coming »

out of Rioja tend to be medium-bodied Tempranillos (or Tempranillo blends) with fresh berry and sour cherry flavors, earthiness, and hits of peppery spice, thanks to time in oak. These wines are, for example, typically more full-bodied than Pinot Noirs, but nicely acidic and less alcoholic than some of the bigger, bolder Cabernet Sauvignons. As a general rule, Rioja reds with an alcohol content of 13 percent to 13.5 percent are going to be better companions to turkey.

One in particular that struck me as a slam dunk—though, at 14 percent alcohol, it bordered on the heavy side—was a Marqués de Vargas 2004 Reserva, loaded with spice that ranged from anise to black pepper and balanced by elegant black cherry fruit. This was a wine that would play well with my favorite brussels sprout and fennel dish, I thought, while the spice and balanced acidity would work toward cutting

through the richness of a rustic sausage stuffing. Other intriguing notes you're likely to find in a Tempranillo-based Rioja include leather, smoke, and cedar. The Señorío de P. Peciña 2000 Crianza is earthy with hints of tobacco, and it would be excellent with a menu that features wild rice stuffing and root vegetables. The savory notes from this style of wine would also highlight the richness of a pan-juice gravy.

When reading the label of a Rioja red, look for terms like *Crianza*, *Reserva*, and *Gran Reserva* to get an idea of how long the wine has aged. By law, Crianzas must be aged for two years, one of which must be in oak; Reservas see three years of aging, with one in oak; and Gran Reservas age for five years, with two in oak. These reds become silkier and softer as they age, without compromising on fruit. Which is just one more reason to invite them to this year's holiday table. ¡Salud! ■

## hot bottles

BLANCO



**Maio de Mendoza 2008 Sur Lie, \$13**  
Stone-fruit flavors with white flowers and mineral notes.



**Burgás 2008, \$14**  
Mango and papaya flavors balance with subtle smoky notes.



**Martin Códax 2008, \$15**  
Mineral notes with pear and green apple flavors and herbal aromas.



**Serra da Estrela 2007, \$16**  
A crisp, clean wine with apricot flavors and mineral undertones.



**Vionta 2008, \$18**  
Tropical fruit with hints of oregano and pears.



**Don Olegario 2007, \$22**  
Green apple, lemon, and tropical notes with zippy acidity.



**Granbazán 2006 Ambar, \$22**  
Beautifully structured with fruity floral aromas.



**Mar de Frades 2008, \$25**  
White peach and citrus with strong honey aromas and flavors.



**Pazo Señorans 2008, \$25**  
Luscious peach and tropical notes with bright acidity.



**Do Ferreiro 2007, \$27**  
Herbal notes with soft pear, citrus, and spice.

ROJO



**Zuazo Gaston 2006 Vendimia Seleccionada, \$13**  
Blueberry and subtle oak flavors.



**Vaza 2006 Crianza, \$16**  
Blackberry and burnt-orange flavors with smoke and spice.



**Bodegas Bilbainas 2003 "La Vicalanda" Reserva, \$20**  
Cinnamon spice with cherry and chocolate flavors.



**El Coto de Rioja 2004 "Coto de Imaz" Reserva, \$20**  
Cherry flavors with smooth tannins and vanilla.



**Señorio de P. Peciña 2000 Crianza, \$20**  
Earthy with mushroom nuances and raspberry flavors.



**Marqués de Vargas 2004 Reserva, \$24**  
An intense wine with anise, black pepper, and dark cherry fruit.



**Muga 2005 Reserva, \$26**  
A lush, earthy wine with coffee and blackberry notes.



**Faustino 1996 I Gran Reserva, \$36**  
A lighter-style Rioja with plum flavors and a subtle spice finish.



**Conde de la Salceda 2001 Reserva, \$50**  
Dark plum flavors with spice and mineral notes.



**Campillo 1996 Reserva Especial, \$75**  
Cocoa and spice nuances with vanilla and cherry flavors.