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Arts & Dining

Wine Guys: Warming Winter Reds

Romance: Valentine's Dining

Art and the City

Theater: With and Without Words

At the Movies / by Mike Canning

The Literary Hill / by Karen Lyon

The Jazz Project / by Jean-Keith Fagon

Warming Winter Reds

BY JON GENDERSON

Winter has come to Washington with a vengeance. Even the snowmen the neighborhood kids made last month want to come inside and warm up. I usually look forward to the cold weather each year so I can break out big red wines, but this winter, I think I'll have to dig just a little deeper and find some really big red wines – the thermal underwear equivalent – to keep me company through this frigid frosting.

What is it about cold nights that beg for the company of big red wines? They just seem to go together. Like Simon and Garfunkel (am I dating myself?), they tend to make each other a little better for pairing. Personally, cold nights give me an excuse to hunker down and enjoy leisurely dinners with friends featuring hearty fare, warm crusty bread and long, stimulating conversations energized by bottles of red wine. I am convinced most of the world's problems could be solved if people took time to sit down and share a glass – or two – of red wine and a plate of beef bourguignon.

However, finding the right big red takes a little bit of thought. After all – and no offense to the beauty and grace of pinot noir – most warm-

your-toes reds need to have a little “chewiness” to them. Some of the essential qualities that I look for in winter reds include depth, structure and power. Big, full-bodied black fruit – such as blackberry, dark plum and cassis – usually supplies the power. Tannins provide structure while acidity keeps the wine balanced. Most “winter reds” will benefit from an hour or two in a decanter in order to soften the tannins and bring out the fruit. If you are in a big hurry to have that first glass, try the “Vinturi” Wine Aerator (\$40). It is one of the few such devices on the market that really works in opening up a young wine.

One other trick, if you don't have the time or patience to wait for the wine to soften, is to pair it with soft cheeses with a high fat content – such as brie or camembert – and bread. The milk fat in the cheese will soften the tannins and provide a rounder mouthfeel to the wine. All wine seems to taste better when paired with food.

Here are several big red wines that will warm your palate without melting your wallet.

Acon Crianza 2004, Ribera del Duero, Spain (\$30)



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| | |
|--|---------------------------|
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| Schumann Nagler Christopher Philip Riesling QBA 2007 | Reg:\$14.99/Sale:\$7.99 |
| Wunsch & Mann Riesling 2005 | Reg:\$19.99/Sale:\$9.99 |
| Pazzo Napa 2006 | Reg:\$39.99/Sale:\$19.99 |
| Craneford Petit Verdot 2003 | Reg:\$29.99/Sale:\$14.99 |
| Hewitson Miss Harry GSM 2006 | Reg:\$24.99/Sale:\$19.99 |
| X Winery Cabernet Napa 2006 | Reg:\$24.99/Sale:\$19.99 |
| Dominus 2005 | Reg:\$149.99/Sale:\$99.99 |
| Legado Munoz Macabeo 2006 | Reg:\$9.99/Sale:\$4.99 |

Spirits:

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Giori Moscato Grappa 750ml | Reg:\$29.99/Sale:\$14.99 |
| Dos Manos Agave Anejo Tequila 1.75L | Reg:\$69.99/Sale:\$44.99 |
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This delicious 100 percent tem-
pranillo has notes of cedar, minerals,
leather and blackberry fruit. The fla-
vors are multi-layered with black fruit
influences and balanced vanilla oak. It
is lush, round and perfect with meats
and cheeses.

Alta Marca 2007, Madrid, Spain (\$14)

A unique blend of cabernet, syrah,
tempranillo and merlot, it offers plen-
ty of black currants, strawberry and
spice on the nose. On the palate, cur-
rant and spice flavors have excellent
depth and a supple texture. There is a
lot of wine here for the money.

Anciano Tinto Gran Reserva 1999, Valdepenas, Spain (\$12)

This unique tempranillo is aged
10 years before release. It is a classic
old style tempranillo that offers up an
expressive bouquet of vanilla, earth
notes, leather, spice box and blackber-
ry. This leads to an elegant wine with
notes of licorice, espresso and black
fruit on the palate. Quite rich and
full-flavored, this wine is delicious.

Carodorum Issos 2005, Toro, Spain (\$24)

The massive, brooding 2005 Isos
was sourced from Tinta de Toro
(tempranillo) vines over 25 years old
and aged for 9 months in French oak.
Dark ruby-colored, it offers a fragrant
bouquet of cedar, violet, plum, blue-
berry and blackberry. It is rich, full
bodied and deeply textured; perfect
for a cold night in front of the fire.

Vagabond 2005, Napa (\$60)

This is a huge mouthfilling blend
of syrah and cabernet from the Napa
Valley. It is a dark, intriguing, full-
blown blend, enigmatic in its nature.
It possesses coffee, hazelnut, chocolate
and cassis flavors all layered and bal-
anced. Although Vagabond provides
instant gratification, it will continue to
be pleasurable for many, many years.

Black Pearl Oro 2006, Paarl, South Africa (\$17)

A delightful cabernet shiraz blend
with peppery dark fruits, licorice,
herbs and bitter chocolate on the nose.
It is surprisingly sweet on the palate,
with a liqueur-like note to the black
fruit flavors, and offers good volume
and length finishing with rather fine-
grained, ripe tannins.

Bogle Petite Sirah 2007, California (\$12)

One of the few large production
wines I enjoy is this petite sirah – the
flagship wine of Bogle. Blackberries
and plums are prevalent on both the
nose and palate of this wine. Sur-
prisingly inky and jammy for such a
low-priced petite sirah it offers lots of
black fruit and spice. Notes of supple
leather and toasty oak envelop the fla-
vors through the finish.

Brokenwood Shiraz 2006, Australia (\$27)

A blend of fruit: 81 percent
McLaren Vale – SA; 10 percent
Hunter Valley – NSW; 9 percent
Beechworth – VIC. Being mostly
from McLaren Vale, there is plenty
of dark berry aromas with sweet oak.
The palate is rich and long with cherry
fruit, oak in the background and some
vanilla. The tannins are quite soft and
ripe with great complexity and finesse.
Enjoy this chewy shiraz with grilled
lamb.

Cascina Adelaide Barbera Amablin 2006, Piedmonte, Italy (\$40)

Toast and caramel highlight the
nose along with loads of sweet baking
spice, cocoa and coffee aromas. It has
good oak with tons of sweet, jammy
fruit underneath. This is big and dense
in the mouth with an old-vines feel
to it. It is chewy yet balanced with a
lot of power. There are lovely herbal
and spice nuances to the solid core of
red fruits. On the finish, lively notes
of sour cherry lead to good, balanced
acidity.

Coudolet de Beaucastel Cotes-du-Rhone 2007, Rhône Valley, France (\$30)

There is a lot of hype about the
2007 vintage in the Southern Rhone
and the better Chateauneuf-du-
Papes are selling for well over \$60 a
bottle. This wine has all the richness
of Chateauneuf at half the price. It is
incredibly opulent and rich, with sen-
sational notes of black currants, lico-
rice, smoked herbs, and meat juices, a
full-bodied mouthfeel, savory tannins,
and good acidity as well as length. I
think this may become my winter
house-wine.

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