

THE SIPPING NEWS

Wine, women, and what to drink with pumpkin pie.

Right at the beginning of *Wine for Women: A Guide to Buying, Sharing, and Pairing Wine*, author Leslie Sbrocco, rejects the stereotype that "women sip white while men slurp red." But the subject of wine-like control of the TV remote and asking for directions does expose a gaping sexual divide. Sbrocco says that whereas men focus more on ratings, Vintage charts, and collecting bottles, women (who, according to the Wine Market Council, account for 64 percent of wine consumers) "tend to be interested in personal recommendations, food ideas, and helpful tips on finding wines that simply taste good." O's **Victoria Stein** asked Sbrocco about the "feminine" side of America's favorite party drink.

How many bottles do you buy for a party?

Figure that a bottle of wine will fill about five to six glasses. And over the course of a two- or three-hour party where people drink mostly wine—which is most parties—plan on at least three glasses per person. I know three glasses a person doesn't seem like very much, but some people don't drink at all, or they'll have a cocktail or a beer and then a glass at dinner. Still, you don't want to run out, so always keep some extra bottles on hand.

What do you serve as guests arrive?

When people walk in the door, I love to hand them a glass of sparkling wine. We festive, and you can buy it in all price ranges. You can get a bottle of Prosecco, a great sparkling wine from Italy, for about \$10. It's a tiny dash sweet, which makes it great for an aperitif. You can also find domestic sparkling wines from California, Washington State, and Long Island that can cost anywhere from \$10 to \$25. When you want to serve Champagne the real stuff from France—you'd be hardpressed to find anything under \$20 a bottle. Laurent-Perrier Brut, Pommery Brut Royal, Mœt & Chandon White Star, and Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin Brut Yellow Label are all around \$25 to \$30. A really good tip for brunch is to freeze orange juice in an ice tray and then just plop the cubes in your bubbly. Makes a very easy mimosa. If you want still wines for an aperitif, I think the best thing is Pinot Grigio—you can find one anywhere, and most of it is cheap. A more expensive version of the same grape variety is Pinot Gris, from the Alsace region of France, but there's also great Pinot Gris from Oregon for around \$15. It's perfect for anything from brunch to a formal sit-down dinner party.

For dinner, do you offer both red and white regardless of the food?

Usually. You just never know what people like. What you should look for are wines that won't

overwhelm the food. For white, Pinot Gris or Chardonnay is always nice. For reds, I recommend Washington State Merlots, Pinot Noirs from anywhere (Burgundy, California, Oregon), Syrahs from Chile and Australia, and Cabernet Sauvignons from France, Chile, and California.

What type of glasses do you use?

In a formal situation I'd set out both a white and a red glass, but don't get too hung up on glasses. Reds take a bigger bowl, to give a little more aeration and swirling space. For whites, you're going to want a smaller bowl to keep the wine cooler. But you can certainly use one glass for everything.

What about dessert wines?

No dinner party happens at my house without a dessert wine. The wine should be at least as sweet as the dessert or it will taste thin. You can serve a lightly sweet one—there's a terrific muscat that's very affordable and available from Bonny Doon Vineyard called Vin de Glacière. It's about \$17 for a half bottle, and it's kind of like an ice wine, except those are made with grapes that are picked and pressed when they're frozen, while this one uses grapes that were placed in a freezer, giving the wine a rich, concentrated, sugary flavor. Or you can go for a really sweet wine, like a Sauterne. Port is great too—a tawny port has a lovely nutty flavor and isn't overly sweet, so it's fantastic with nuts, caramels, apple tart, or pumpkin pie. For an easy, lightly sweet dessert that works with most dessert wines, melt some really good chocolate and dip store-bought pecan sandies or shortbread cookies halfway in. If you want to serve a sparkling wine, look for ones that say "demi-sec" because those are sweeter. Domestically, Schramsberg does a lovely demi-sec.

What do you do with the leftover wine?

You can freeze it in an ice cube tray and use it for cooking. Or make vinegar. Just pour the leftover wine into an open jar with a big mouth—one jar for red and another for white. Then pour in equal parts unpasteurized vinegar from the store. Cover it with a piece of cheesecloth or porous cloth held in place with a rubber band and just stash it away in a cabinet. In about three months you'll have fabulous vinegar. Every time you have a little leftover wine, you can just pour it in. I've had a pot going for about ten years. After about three months you get a really scummy-looking layer of mold on top—it's called the mother which looks really gross, but you cut a piece of it off and give it to somebody, and all they have to do is plop it in with leftover wine to start their own vinegar. It's a good hostess gift.

Speaking of hostess gifts, do you have any other suggestions? And how much should you spend?

I think \$15 is ample—you can always find a good bottle of wine for that. Look for an attractive label and a heavy bottle. I'd forget spending \$5 on a bag to put the wine in and instead buy one of those bottle collars that you slip over the neck to prevent drips and spills—you can buy them for \$2 to \$5 each. Or just tie a recipe onto the bottle—for your favorite pasta dish, or for cookies if you're giving a dessert wine—something to give the gift a little flair. Pinot Gris from Oregon or California, Pinot Grigio, and Pinot Noir are all nice choices. When people bring me bottles, I always ask if they want me to open them, because some people are really proud of their gift and want to try it. You could also give a dessert wine. People will love you. •

