

# My Valenwine

Terrific values that say I love you

BY ROBYN JAMES

**Valentine's Day** can be one of those “cha-ching” holidays that strikes dread into the hearts of cost-conscious cupids. Overpriced, crowded restaurants, double digit jumps in floral bouquets and card prices can discourage even the most arduous romantics.

It doesn't have to be that way with your favorite Valentine libation, wine. Here are some value offerings under \$20 a bottle to make your romantic evening affordable, yet memorable.

**Charles Lafitte Rosé Sparkling Brut**, France, \$11

The pretty lavender and wild strawberry notes in this wine make it the perfect aperitif. In front of the fire with some caviar or goat cheese with mild crackers is the perfect beginning of a beautiful evening. The scintillating bubbles heighten the sensitivity of your palate in anticipation of the meal and the evening to come.

**St. Urbans Hof Ockfen Bockstein Kabinett**, Mosel, Germany, \$17

Here is a delicious wine to serve your vegan with his or her meatless meal. An organic Riesling with gorgeous acidity that can stand up to strong, earthy grilled vegetables and spicy couscous with salad.

Light enough in alcohol to justify cracking open more than one bottle.

Offers enticing peach, apricot, lime, and slate of aromas and flavors, with a touch of vanilla cream. Creamy, yet bright and pure, with persistence and a complex finish. Drink now through 2025.

Rated 92 Points, The Wine Spectator's Top 100 Wines Of The Year.

**Waterbrook Reserve Chardonnay**, Washington State, \$14

When I think of choosing Valentine wine, subtlety doesn't come to mind. I think of extreme flavors and richness. This Chardonnay fits the bill and will satisfy the gourmet poached salmon or grilled tuna dish you choose for your loved one. It's big, rich, and mouth filling.

“Beaucoup butter, caramel and toasted nut flavors; 80 percent of this reserve Chardonnay went through malolactic fermentation. It's got plenty of fruit power and acid with French oak barrel flavors.”

Rated 89 Points, The Wine Enthusiast



**Conn Creek Herrick Vineyard Red**, Napa, \$19.99

If a big juicy steak is the ticket for your heart's desire, here's a moo-licious selection. A Bordeaux blend with a dash of syrah, this big red steps up to any beef dish, providing eye-closing satisfaction (a Valentine goal, of course). Drink it over the next 2-3 years.

Rated 87 Points, Robert Parker, The Wine Advocate

**Neirano Brachetto D'aqui Sparkling**, Piedmont, Italy, \$17

OK, now you are bringing out the big guns. No one stands a chance with the wine that Cleopatra used to seduce Marc Antony. Or was that J. Lo?

Anyway, after dinner, break out the chocolate-covered strawberries (I don't care if they aren't in season; they are worth the extra search). Loosely translated in my language, Brachetto means “putty in your hands.”

With its scintillating ruby red color and bouquet of rose petals and raspberries, this delicious, pleasantly sweet, effervescent wine is a natural to begin or end a romantic dinner, or bring out for friends and family to enjoy for holiday parties and New Year's Eve. At only about 5.5% alcohol, Brachetto d'Acqui makes a great afternoon aperitif and pairs well with bitter chocolate, light sweets, fruit tarts, and Italian cookies such as Gli amaretti di Mombaruzzo, a traditional amaretti biscuit indigenous to the area.

**Quinta Do Noval Black Ruby Port**, Portugal, \$19.99

The end of the evening treat that is well worth waiting for. With the headiness of Brachetto still in place, it's time to hit them with the brooding Port for a cerebral finish. A pungent bleu cheese encrusted with roasted buttery walnuts, it can't get much better than this. Maybe.

Black uses top-quality fruit to create a soft, accommodating texture. The aromas are purple-black while the flavors are pure black cherry. Acidity spices it up and adds to the juiciness of the finish. It's plump in the middle and supple all the way through, ending on fruit-skin tannin and a touch of chocolate from oak. At the level of many of the region's best LBVs, this wine may become a staple for a new generation of Port drinkers.

Rated 91 Points, Wine & Spirits Magazine PS



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