

A Christmas Wish List

As my farmer friends would say, “we’re down to the short rows” when it comes to preparing for your Christmas celebration. I don’t know about you but my last few weeks have flown by and there’s still an awful lot to get done.

Did you write a letter to Santa as a child to keep him advised of what was hot for you that Christmas? The kids today are probably text messaging that information along with digital photos but the motivation is the same. I think it still may be a great idea to provide the “list” to someone who loves you or even better just happen to let them come across the list as if by accident. You’ve got to be a master of subtlety to pull that one off. I casually tape my list on the bathroom mirror and have had pretty good results.

I warn you married men out there that this is not an opportunity to divulge to your wife just any wish. I hope you know what I mean. You still have to survive the holidays. When I told my wife about this weeks column she chuckled and asked me if one of my wishes was to trade in my 50-years-old wife for two 25-year-olds. Now guys if you have not figured it out...she was baiting me. Never go for the bait; don’t even joke about it.

I decided that I wanted to put together my own “foodie” wish list this year made up of things that make my day when it comes to food and wine enjoyment. (This figures to be a much safer list.) Now some of my selections are not really things I actually expect to get but after all, it is a *wish* list.

Wish #1 – Marcona Almonds – These plump lovelies are produced in Spain and dangerously addictive. You’ll note a very delicate flavor, pleasant sweetness and just a touch of oil. They are lightly fried, salted and packed into small tubs. I’ve found them in Cincy at Jungle Jim’s.

Wish #2 – Graber Olives – These delectable olives have been produced by California’s Graber family for 110 years and one taste will tell you that you’ve hit on something very special. All olives are tree-ripened in the family’s orchards in the Sierra Foothills of California then processed and cured at their facility in Ontario, California. The mellow, slightly buttery character of the olives makes them probably the best produced in the United States. You can find them online and stocked by better specialty stores.

Wish #3 – Ankima – Some of you will roll your eyes on this pick and I don’t blame you. I would have agreed that this one is waaaay out there except for the fact that I’ve tasted it. Ankima is sometimes called the Foie Gras of the Sea. It is the pate-like livers of Monkfish, which have been formed into a log and steamed. The flavor is of the style of great goose foie gras of Perigord in France but more delicate and perhaps a bit finer in texture. I’ve found it online and at better sushi establishments.

Wish #4 – Cavailon Melons – Driving through the countryside of Provence in sunny southern France during August don’t be surprised if you begin to become overwhelmed with the fragrance of ultra-ripe melon, even with your windows closed and the ac on.

They are that unctuous and a treat beyond belief. Unfortunately, the only way I've found to enjoy these wonderful fruits is to go to the source. So next year tough out August in southern France!

Wish #5 – **Summer Produce** – Some of you would probably agree that there would be nothing greater than to enjoy garden ripened Ohio tomatoes and Silver Queen corn during the winter. I have not figured out how this is possible but if you have any ideas you can share with the rest of us I'd love to hear them. One of those big, knobby German heirloom tomatoes thick sliced and doused with sea salt in February would be my idea of a really great culinary moment.

Wish #6 – **Enstrom Toffee** – There is toffee and then there is Enstrom. If you take a moment to get your first tin of this unbelievable product from the Enstrom Toffee Company you will be hooked for life. An assortment of types and size packages can be ordered directly from the company at entrom.com and they are one of the fastest shipping companies I've ever done business with. Their almond toffee is available in both "high test" and sugar free and I think it is the best of the products they produce.

Wish #7 – **Sea Salt** – As some of you may have noticed, many of the recipes that I have offered over this past year call specifically for sea salt and there's a great reason for that. Salt has been one of the world's most important seasonings and preservatives for centuries and sea salt offers taste and characteristics not to be found in mined salt that has been extensively processed. Take the time to experiment with sea salt and you'll definitely notice the difference.



Wish #8 –

Chehalem Oregon 2003 Willamette Valley 3 Vineyards Pinot noir - I taste a large number of wines in the course of the year and every year I try to recognize what proved to best the stand out in my search for great wines to write about and offer clients. This year I was stunned by this Pinot and that was in a year that provided the opportunity to taste a large number of great Pinot noirs! The taste was huge, round and complex with massive levels of dark cherry fruit and over ripe flavors of plum and blackberry. The

finish was satin and offered the lingering styles that make great wines even greater in retrospect.

This is a magnificent red wine and one of the greatest tasting experiences of the last several years for me personally.

We want to thank all of you for the support over this past year and some of the great calls and emails you've provided us. It is such a thrill to know there are great people out there who have had a bit of fun with the things we place in the paper.

As always, if you have questions or comments please let us know at 888-288-0668 or visit us online at www.winedog.com. Have a very Merry Christmas! Cheers.