

## The Case for a Case just in case



**Dr. Jeff Snow**  
Director of Education  
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Having a wine cellar is a great convenience when unexpected guests “pop” in or just if the urge for a nice glass of well-aged Napa Cab hits me. But even if you are not one to cellar wine, wouldn’t it be handy to have a mixed case in the back of the pantry for when your buddy stops by with a fresh caught Steelhead, or a thick steak to grill together. Ray Isle<sup>1</sup>, a wine writer I enjoy, details his idea of a “Perfect Case of Wine”. Three bottles everyday red, 3 bottles everyday white, 1 everyday sparkling, a special occasion white, a pricy sparkling, a bottle of dessert wine, a good rose’ and a special occasion red. But unless you tap this box often “everyday” whites may age out. Not to mention that whites are typically ready to drink and easy to buy at the corner grocery. And also, what do folks bring when they come over? Well, most likely “a nice little Chardonnay” or a Sauv blanc, right? And while “everyday” reds can last a while, they never make it to my cellar. Going everyday to the “case just in case” would get old fast with me. So if it suits you go with Ray Isle’s case, but here are some suggestions you might consider.

Instead of the four white wines (three everyday and one special) my case would include four “light reds”. Beaujolais (Gamay grape) really fits here. Not Nouveau, and not plain Beaujolais, but Beaujolais-Village which is from the better northern part. Georges Duboeuf Beaujolais-Villages (~\$14) is a reliable choice. And for a “special occasion,” throw in a Cru Beaujolais from one of the best hilltop villages, which include Brouilly, Fleurie, Julienas, Fleuria, Regnie and Moulin-A-Vent. These are widely imported and (seasonally) available in quality wine shops and Costco for \$18 to \$24. Add some variety with N. Italian Bardolino. Grown above Lake Garda on W facing slopes, of the same Corvina grape as Valpolicella (around the hill and S facing slopes) but lighter with strawberry/cherry fruit and floral notes. Zenato Bardolino Superiore (\$10.99). Where others might drink a white, these work for me.



Last month I proclaimed Zinfandel America’s Red. For casual dining with sliders, burgers, steak or chops off the grill there is nothing better. But in the “case just in case,” I would step up from the basic Zins that Ray chose. Go for one Ridge Lytton Springs or Geyserville, a Turley Old Vine and maybe a Martinelli, a Ravenswood Vintners Reserve, or a Rafanelli. These all have lots of complex berry fruit, great balance and enough tannin to last a few years. Then you can pull them proudly when the occasion warrants. So three of these brings us up to seven.

Next our case should have two or three bottles of Bordeaux varietal grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, Petit Verdot, Cabernet franc and some include Carmenete. All are now grown and well produced in the NW, but some may want to include a Napa Cab. Why not a La Jota Howell Mt., or a Mondavi. But right here in Spokane Barrister makes world class Cab franc from Red Mountain. And Robert Karl has a Claret made from a blend of Bordeaux grapes grown in the Horse Heaven Hills which is a steal. Not to mention Spokane’s Winescape Winery on Glenrose Prairie, where Merlot, Cab and Malbec are well made. And in Spokane Valley Natalie at Latah Creek has been making a stunning Petit Verdot. Any two of these bring us to nine bottles.



Then of course, Syrah is always in order, and to many of you that means “The Rocks” in Walla Walla AVA. There are many, but a good one is made by Reynvaan Family Vineyards. But of course Syrah has been growing in rocks on sunny slopes for centuries in the Northern Rhone Valley of France in the villages of Hermitage, Cote Rote’, and Crotzes-Hermitage. Crotzes-Hermitage, being less well known, can be bargain priced, so for a lot less than a Reynvaan, North Berkley Importers has had a delicious Crotzes-Herm from Pierre Gaillard (~\$30). Other favorites of mine are Barrister Bacchus Vineyard Syrah, and in California’s Russian River Valley Mueller makes a particularly lovely one from their “Block 11” vineyard (\$50) which is worth searching out. So lets do one or two Syrah wines to bring us to 10 or 11 wines.



In the past when a leg of lamb stuffed with garlic and wrapped in rosemary required wine I was quick to uncork a Chateauneuf du Pape. Pretty pricy today though. But Washington State GSM blends do the trick. There is a spicy earthy one from Spokane’s Winescape Winery of Columbia Valley grapes. Also consider that in the Southern Rhone Valley Cote du Rhone appellation the top 15% of the vineyards now qualify for the higher designation of Cote du Rhone-Village, and the very best of those have a named village added on. Julie and I recently enjoyed Cote’ du Rhone-Village-Cairanne produced by l’Oratoire St. Martin (\$34), which we felt was as good as some Chateauneuf du Pape. So add one of two and we are at 11 or 12 bottles.

Depending on how fully you have allocated each suggestion there are one or two slots left. Sparkling wine is one option. Korbell winery in Sonoma has a long track record of making great Methode Traditional Sparklers. Theirs are all very good – for me it’s the Blanc de Blanc. Wines like this are festive have good acid, and complex toasted bread and earthy flavors and go with almost any food. Prosecco from N Italy has a crisp clean taste and Costco has a private label one (purple label \$11) which is DOCG and a favorite with many. Or perhaps a dessert wine. My choice here would be a 20 year Tawny Port or if you like a fruity taste an LBV by Graham, Dow, Cockburn, Warre or Quinta de Vesuvio (but not Sandeman). And Ray also mentioned Rose’. One Julie always looks for is Rose’ of Sangiovese by Bernard Griffin Winery in Yakama (\$9.95). Served chilled it’s heavenly with a summer lunch of smoked salmon salad. Or consider a “two birds with one stone” play with the current NV Terres Secretes Cremant de Bourgogne Rose’ (\$21 at N. Berkley Importers) and you have a quality sparkler and an excellent rose’ in one bottle.



With the suggestions here – both ole Ray’s and mine – anyone should find choices to fit their particular tastes and budget and make up a case of wine to put away. With your “case just in case”, like a “good Scout” you will “be prepared”. Mother-in-law shows up unannounced – you have the right wine to deal. Dinner on the table and wife asks “did you forget our anniversary” – you reply “Of course not dear. I got this special sparkling wine just for us to celebrate.” You can surely imagine the many scenarios where the contents of that blessed little case will make your life better. And if no challenge pops up you can just pull out a nice bottle for yourself once a month for an entire year, and it will have been a fun project. Or restock every so often and become a focused wine shopper.

Reference:

- 1) Ray Isle, “Build the Perfect Case of Wine”, Food & Wine, December 2021/January 2022, pp 178-179.