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## Make the Holidays Sparkle

by Laura Ness - HerVineNess on December 27, 2010

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### White, Red and Green for the Holidays

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Growing up in the Hudson Valley of New York, my sister and I ardently prayed for snow, and often got it, just as they are getting bloizzard-slammed this year. Then, as now, that beautiful white wonderland maker often wreaked havoc on travel, as my grandparents slogged their way from New Jersey through sleet and ice. There was simply nothing finer than having all the family together on Christmas Eve, looking festive and singing carols around my Mom's piano from an ancient gilt-edged songbook that came out but once a year. Its magnificent illustrations are writ as everlastingly in my mind as the look on my grandmother's face when she discovered my grandfather sneaking another snifter of Wild Turkey. This libation did little to staunch his bellowing rendition of *Joy to the World*, which made the windows in the old homestead rattle the ice right off their panes. My Dad often brought out a special bottle of wine: he was (and still is) partial to Hearty Burgundy from Gallo, which, let's face it, beats Blue Nun and Boone's Farm any day of the year. We are so blessed to be in a fabulous wine region, with so many excellent wines: where my Dad still lives near Rhinebeck, NY, (put on the map by Chelsea Clinton's wedding), he still can't find anything decent from California, yet alone from Monterey. So let's give thanks for all the local winemakers and the bounty of great wines made here, and for all the growers and laborers who produce the crops that make this area such an integral and precious part of the food chain of America.

In the spirit of local, seasonal and festive, how about creating a Red, White and Green holiday breakfast to celebrate this week between Christmas and New Years? Scramble up some farm fresh eggs with sautéed Royal Rose radicchio and thinly sliced local Granny Smith or Gravenstein apples. Sprinkle a touch of cinnamon on top, add some freshly ground white pepper and enjoy with some sparkling wine. Fortunately, you have some great local choices.



**La Rochelle:** Steven Mirassou waited a long time to disgorge

a bubbly under the La Rochelle brand. It's a bit ironic that his family sold all the sparkling equipment to Barry Jackson at Equinox some years back, and here they are, using it again, at long, long last. But heck, what goes around...the 2007 Blanc de Noirs (\$30) sparkling from the Martini clone off the McIntyre estate vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands, is truly one of the prettiest sparklings you can find. Pale as the first pink light of dawn, it sparkles with the thrill of tea rose, bright cinnamon and spritely raspberry-rhubarb punch. As light as air, it dances on your tongue like a snowflake, and practically makes a rainbow of colors in your mouth. It's airily bright and intensely focused with minerally hints of cranberry and Bosc pear, and some subtle rejoinders of edgy raspberry lemonade. (Irvine.com)



**Caraccioli Cellars:** Do you want a real French connection? Look to the Italians, with a French twist. Caraccioli makes Santa Lucia Highlands sparkling in the dry, yeasty, leesy style that delivers aromas and flavors of a French morning on the Left Bank, brimming over with freshly baked brioche and baguette. Their Brut and Brut Rosé, crafted by the true French genius Michel Salgues, previously head winemaker at Roederer Estate in Anderson Valley, would pair nicely with *oefs* done any way you like, or if you must, oysters. Despite the stiff price of nearly \$50 srp (you can find it more reasonably priced at Star Market), you cannot go even remotely wrong with either one of these wines. Rumor has it that the grand opening of the Caraccioli tasting room in Carmel is set for mid January. Do I hear a cork popping?

(Caraccioli Cellars.com)



**McIntyre:** Secret fact: most of the vines originally planted in Monterey appellation were destined for early picking and transporting to the northland to make sparkling for the likes of Schramsberg and Gloria Ferrer. The first sparkling to be made in the Santa Lucia Highlands in modern times, i.e., since Google became a replacement for Webster's, Encyclopedia Britannica and your entire collection of Cliff notes, came from McIntyre. *L'Homme Qui Ris* (\$29) is a mature, yeasty sparkler made from 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay directly from McIntyre's estate-owned vineyard and spends at least 20 months "en tirage." That means it gathers the richness and depth one expects to find in a classic bubbly and also allows for a wine that improves with age, unlike so many sparkling wines made to be consumed immediately upon production. This Grande Duchesse calmly delivers a French boulangerie's more toasty, weighty baked goods, like rum-custard filled pastries or almond croissants. You'll find yourself licking your lips for a taste of rich, buttery crumbs. Now, really, can your iPhone app do that? A few magnums remain. How about some Magnum Merriment for the holidays?

(mcintyrevineyards.com)

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