



S.C. PANNELL  
WINEMAKER

## Commentary



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# Divine intervention at Christmas

## Sorting your festive wine list is easy after a chat to Matt Skinner, writes Fiona Donnelly

BEGUN thinking about all the lovely bottles that might grace your Christmas dinner table?

Matt Skinner, Australia's grooviest sommelier, already has his shortlist drawn up.

The global head of wine for Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurants, who's now again based in his home town of Melbourne, has published *The Juice 2010* – the updated and fifth edition of his user-friendly round-up of his top 100 wines.

And he has some surprising advice for a wine tragic: Keep it simple.

"I've had Christmases where I've put a number of really great bottles on the table and they've still been three-quarters full at the end of the day," Skinner says.

"Many hosts try to pair amazing wines with everything that's on the table, but they need to remember the real reason everyone is there – and that's to enjoy a get-together."

Skinner, who "religiously" tastes 100 new wines each Monday (pew) for *The Juice* and his various wine-writing gigs, says the first task for advance planners is to decide on a great bottle of bubbles to get everyone in the mood.

"Money is tight this year and there are some great alternatives to champagne, both locally and from abroad," he says.

He suggests sampling Yarra Burn's 2006 sparkling, a blend of pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier which costs about \$30 and he rates as a consistently good product.

"Brown Brothers have just made a prosecco for the first time, too, which costs just \$20. It's clean, fresh and dry enough to spark everyone's appetite," he says.

... Once the bubbles are out of the way,

Skinner says you need to settle on just one good food-friendly white and one good food-friendly red, and then get a few bottles of each.

"Christmas Day means heat so you should avoid full-bodied, high-alcohol reds which tend to suffer in the climate and also heavily wooded whites," he says.

Consider ditching the sauvignon blanc and replacing this with a sauvignon blanc-semillon blend.

Skinner recommends the one from WA's Forester Estate, which is priced about \$18.

"It's a 50:50 blend.

"The semillon adds richness but you still get the lovely aromatics and big nose of the sauvignon blanc," Skinner says.

He's also a fan of rose, especially at this time of year.

"There's a cracking example from Steve Pannell – the SC Pannell Grenache Rose – which costs around \$25," he says.

"It's bone-dry but fruity, with red currant and wild strawberries, and some herbs on the nose.

"It's a great wine which I'd happily drink all day.

"It would go with everything from seafood to baked ham."

And if you do want to quaff a red?

The answer is pinot.

"Pinot is a no-brainer," he says.

"It's lower in tannin and a good, food-friendly wine. It's rarely, if ever, cheap."

But you don't have to part with a fortune, either.

"There's an excellent Red Claw for between \$25-\$26 which comes from the second label of Yabby Lake, a Mornington Peninsula producer," Skinner says.

He also recommends sampling Innocent Bystander's pinot noir, or opting for "the king of good value", De Bortoli.

"Windy Peak is around \$12 and has all Victorian fruit. Gulf Station is \$16 – there's two phenomenal wines," he says.

**Matt Skinner's book *The Juice 2010* is published by Mitchell Beazley, rrp \$23, and includes his top 100 wines of the year.**

*Yarra  
Burn  
Forester*