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PROUDLY CALGARY SINCE 1883

Good-value wines for holiday parties

BY SHELLEY BOETTCHER, FOR THE CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 21, 2010

The holiday season is underway, and that means good times and lots of family and friends. With that in mind, I've picked out some wines that don't cost a ton, but are perfect for parties.

Cameron Hughes Lot 176 Pinot Noir, 2006 (Los Carneros, Calif.)

Cameron Hughes started working in the wine industry just as a way to make some cash during university, then realized there was a place in the market for someone that perhaps didn't own a winery, but could buy excess wines from other (very good) wineries. Cameron Hughes Wine was created.

While others were hurt from the recession, Hughes benefited, buying fantastic wines from high-end wineries, then renting winery space and bottling the wines. Or, in some cases, he simply re-labels the already-bottled wines. He has become a very successful negociant, who now offers wines from around the world.

While early lot numbers are no longer available, you'll find some classy wines in the higher digits. Lot 179, for instance, is a Cabernet Sauvignon-Syrah blend from Havens Wine Cellars, a small Napa winery that went out of business last year; Cameron bought up the Havens Black and Blue -- which originally sold for close to \$100 a bottle -- then relabelled it and is now selling it in Calgary for less than \$40.

I especially enjoyed the Lot 176. It also offers very good value and is very typical Pinot Noir -- a light-to medium-bodied, juicy red wine that offers aromas of cherries, wild strawberries, subtle spice and soft tannins. Easy to drink.

Price: About \$24, at Aspen Wine & Spirits, Bin 905, Crowfoot Liquor Store (main location), select Calgary Co-op Wines & Spirits, Highlander Wine and Spirits, and Willow Park Wines & Spirits.

Drink: Now, with roast chicken, roast turkey, grilled salmon or pork tenderloin. Extremely food friendly. Or cellar it for another year or two. Cork closure.

Yellow Tail Reserve Shiraz, 2009 (Australia)

You may be surprised to see a Yellow Tail wine here, but I've said it before and I've said it again: I'm not a wine snob. I just like to drink good wine. I recently had the opportunity to attend a blind wine tasting hosted by John Casella, the winemaker for Yellow Tail. We tried four Shiraz wines and four Cabernet Sauvignons and we didn't find out what we were drinking until after we'd tried them all -- and shared our opinions, too.

My favourite of the bunch? This Reserve Shiraz. It's not the jammy fruit bomb you may be expecting. Rather, it's a full-bodied red that tastes of mocha, cherry and spice. It's good, plus it's a fair

price and it's easy to find. Wine snobs, get over

yourselves. And beware: I just may serve this to you the next time you come for dinner.

Price: About \$16. Widely available, including Calgary Co-op Wine & Spirits, Crowfoot Liquor Store, Liquor Depot, Solo Liquor, Spirits of Kensington, as well as Willow Park Wines & Spirits.

Drink: Now, any time you're serving pizza, stew, steak or burgers. Or any time you simply need a reliable red for less than 20 bucks. Cork closure.