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DRINKS



Christmas, Hanukkah, Boxing Day, New Year's — it's peak party season, whether you're bringing a bottle or hosting the bash.

Very good, moderately priced wines abound to fuel the festivities. Many wines from Spain and Australia, as well as Italy and France, are great deals. But there are bargains all over the map.

Australia: A knockout shiraz is the 2006 Mollydooker The Boxer, remarkably priced at \$20. The 2005 Peter Lehmann Barossa Shiraz (\$15) has good fruit and is a versatile red. Banrock Station offers several satisfying 2006 wines at \$6 each including chardonnay, semillon-chardonnay, shiraz and shiraz-cabernet sauvignon. Peachy and creamy describe the 2006 Penfolds Koonunga Hill Chardonnay (\$11).

Spain: From Murcia, try the 2004 Fincas Omblancas Delain, 2003 Casa de la Ermita Crianza and 2006 Casa de las Especies Joven, a trio of bright red blends, mainly monastrell, at \$13 each.

France: Go French with the plummy 2006 Robert Skalli Pinot Noir (\$20) and refreshing 2006 Domaine du Tariquet Chardonnay (\$13) from the southwest; fruity 2004 Vincent Morgon Charnes (\$19), vibrant Alsatian 2005 Hugel et Fils Muscat Tradition (\$21), uncomplicated Corbieres 2005 Domaine de Fonsainte (\$9), and affordable Bordeaux, including the 2005 Chateau du Bois Chantant (\$22) and 2004 Chateau Haute Mouleyre Blanc (\$20).

Italy: Reliable reds such as the fine 2004 Castello Banfi Chianti Classico Riserva (\$20), 2006 Centine (\$12) and easygoing 2006 Col-di-Sasso (\$10), and the fresh 2006 Le Rime (\$9), a white blend; hearty 2006 Tenuta Rapi-tala Campo Reale Nero d'Avola (\$10), floral 2005 Borgianni Chianti (\$13) and balanced 2004 Castello di Gabbiano Chianti Classico Riserva (\$17).

— PETER M. GIANOTTI