

New York, NY
November 28, 2007
Circulation: 334,568

amNY.com **EATING WELL 31**
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2007



Light bodied, fruity wines are the best crowd-pleasers at holiday parties. (Stockphoto)

Holiday wines for all budgets

By **Karen Page**
and **Andrew Dornenburg**
The Washington Post

Depending on the crowd, a contrarian attitude doesn't necessarily make for effective cocktail-party conversation. But if you're trying to find wines to complement a range of foods at a holiday get-together, at a price point that won't rob you of the seasonal spirit, that's just the mind-set you need.

The best wines to serve to crowds are lighter-bodied, fruit-forward and food-friendly. And one way to find affordable versions of them is to forget for a moment about the wines that particular reputable regions are known for and investigate their other varietals instead.

Take Gascony, which has traditionally been known for its Armagnac, often made from Ugni Blanc, the most widely planted white grape in France, and Colombard. Three decades ago, Yves Grassa decided to prove its exceptional potential for winemaking, and it clearly has succeeded. The only thing we found lacking in the vibrantly flavored and crisply refreshing 2006 Domaine du Tariquet Ugni-Blanc Colombard Vin de Pays des Cotes de Gascogne (\$8), for instance, is a name that rolls off your tongue.

Two of Grassa's other offerings also provide outstanding quality for the price. The 2006 Domaine du

Tariquet Chardonnay (\$12) is not a big, obvious chardonnay; it is more quietly elegant, with tart pear and mild vanilla flavors. The 2006 Domaine du Tariquet Sauvignon (\$10) proved our favorite of the three, beautifully balanced between grapefruitlike acidity and lingering minerality. Both are even better with food, the former with roast chicken and the latter with lighter seafood.



The 2006 Domaine du Tariquet Ugni-Blanc is a bargain at \$8.

Another region where the contrarian's approach yields success is Australia, better known for shiraz than merlot. While searching for a merlot to recommend, we tasted our way through a dozen humdrum offerings from around the world before pouring ourselves a glass of the 2006 De Bortoli "dB Selection" Merlot (\$9), whose impressive first sip made it clear that our quest was over.