



A is for Abstinence

There are many things you could do without over the festive season: interstate relatives camping out on the lounge room floor, constant reminders of rapidly disappearing shopping days, the Dantean hell of the office Christmas party – but under no sensible circumstances should wine be one of them.

It is no coincidence that man's discovery of fermentation followed quickly from his decision to cease his nomadic wanderings and stay put in family groups. How else could you deal with history's first mother-in-law?

B is for Beach House

At this time of year, the entire non-albino population packs up the station wagon, digs out the Totem Tennis and heads for the beach. And while our charmingly quaint seaside towns have much to offer, they're not known for their extensive and exciting liquor-retailing options. If your drinking ambitions are higher than a flagon of cream sherry from the local drive-through, it's wise to plan ahead. This is what you'll need.

1. Champagne – obviously. What is a festive season without fizz? **NV Pol Roger Brut Reserve** (A\$80/NZ\$100) is a consistent non-vintage option; **1998 Krug Clos Mesnil** (A\$490/NZ\$482) makes the stresses of the past year melt away; and a selection of small-grower bottlings can deliver very pleasant surprises, such as **NV Paul Bara Grand Cru Brut Reserve** (A\$85), **NV Pierre Gimonet 1er Cru Blancs de Blancs** (A\$50) or **NV Janisson et Fils Prestige Brut** (A\$88/NZ\$95).

2. Gin – summer sunsets suggest the possibility of a benevolent higher power. A great gin and tonic confirms it. Try **Tanqueray** (A\$60/NZ\$50) for the traditionalists and **Hendrick's** (A\$75) or **Millers** (A\$80) for those looking for a zanier twist.

3. A mixed case of young rieslings – because a better wine for summer is yet to be found. Here's what to pack: **2009 Larry Cherubino The Yard Acacia Vineyard Riesling** (A\$30/NZ\$45), **2009 Clos Clare Riesling** (A\$30), **2009 KT & The Falcon Melva Riesling** (A\$35), **2009 Smallfry Barossa Riesling** (A\$20), **2009 Atlas**



Wines Watervale Riesling (A\$40) and **2008 Crawford River Young Vines Riesling** (A\$35). And a sprinkling of sexy Germans from **JJ Prum**.

4. Current-vintage Hunter semillon – for when the bloke at the fish and chip joint forgets to add lemon wedges to your order. The '09s from **Brokenwood, Meerea Park, Pooles Rock** and **Pepper Tree** are crackers, while Andrew Thomas' off-dry **2008 Six Degrees Vineyard Selection Hunter Valley Semillon** (A\$22) is a new take.

5. A case or two of a great Czech pilsener – because man can't live on VB alone. **Trumer** is the perfect post-beach beer.

6. **Aperol** – because summer's coolest drink is the spritz. Mix a splash of prosecco or white wine in a glass with a splash of Aperol, top it up with soda, garnish with a slice of orange and you're instantly in the Veneto.

C is for Cellar

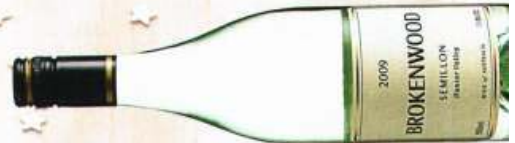
What is a cellar for if not for raiding when special occasions roll around? There's no better way to elevate a bottle from dusty relic to cherished memory than by sharing it with those who gladden our hearts. Or, even better, in the spirit of Christmas, donate a great bottle to a friend's cellar.

Check the progress on your '04 Margaret River cabernets, revel in the emerging beauty of your '03 Hunter semillons and lash out on some of the treasured '99 red Burgundies. And drink up those blockbuster '98 shiraz that you went long on in all the excitement. They're not going anywhere.

D is for Disaster

Disaster invariably features more heavily than triumph in tales of festive drinking. Who ever had one too many at the office Christmas party then hit on the solution to the company's woes and earned the love and respect of the CEO?

And in the pandemonium of a family gathering, it's all too easy to leave the sherry within arm's reach of Auntie Elsie and end up spending a large chunk of the afternoon listening to tales of "when I was a girl".



It's about now that the universe becomes ruled by Murphy's law, so you can be sure that the birth-year Burgundy you carefully decanted will end up in the gravy the minute you turn your back. Be prepared.

E is for Elegant Sufficiency

Over the festive season, all normal standards of drinking and dining decency become like the television in Keith Moon's hotel room – they get thrown out the window. By encouraging anyone who has already read this far to exercise restraint and moderation, the author outs himself as a subscriber to the appalling hypocrite's well-worn mantra: "Do as I say, not as I do." Because he's busy drinking his bodyweight in **NV Primo Joseph Sparkling Red** (A\$60).

F is for Fortifieds

A traditional Christmas lunch isn't about the food. It's to get you in the frame of mind to drink fortifieds. I don't care if it's hotter than the surface of the sun outside, if the calendar says December 25, I'm drinking something sweet, sticky and dazzlingly complex.

While true believers make pilgrimages to sacred sites, I'm popping off to Rutherglen. Who needs gold, frankincense and myrrh when the truly wise man has apera, muscat and topaque to serve with the pudding? These will get you started: **NV Stanton and Killeen Rutherglen Tokay** (A\$18), **NV Campbells Isabella Rare Rutherglen Tokay** (A\$99), **NV Campbells Rare Rutherglen Muscat** (A\$99), **NV Morris Liqueur Muscat** (A\$62) and **NV Seppeltsfield Rare Rutherglen Tokay** (A\$59).



G is for Gluttony

In the 14th century, the Vatican decided this was one of the seven deadly sins. Thomas Aquinas said there were several ways this carnal vice could be perpetuated: consuming too eagerly, consuming too expensively, consuming too much. Even anticipating a great meal too keenly could book you a one-way ticket on the afterlife's downward-bound lift.