



What wine goes with 'The Winter's Tale'?

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SPRING GREEN -- From cloth-covered tables with floral centerpieces to thrown-together takeout meals, American Players Theatre picnic tables have one element in common: a good bottle of wine.

An unscientific, random poll before an evening performance showed that a good many theatergoers pop a cork instead of prying open a beer bottle when it's time to play in the woods in Spring Green. On a recent trip up the hill, I aimed to find out what made a good wine for an APT picnic.

I saw plenty of supermarket cabernet and Wollersheim's sticky-sweet whites, but the feeling prevails that a visit to APT is a reason to celebrate.

"You can't get this in Wisconsin," said Trina Dixon, who was on a date with Mark Keller, also of Madison. She handed me a \$60 bottle of 2007 Hartford Court Chardonnay, made from the Stone Côte Vineyard on the Sonoma Coast.

The smooth, buttery chardonnay was a surprisingly good match for the bacon-wrapped tenderloins Keller was turning on a nearby grill.

One group of three brought a bottle of Roederer Estate Brut, a California sparkler popped open to celebrate the first day of summer. Another family, half from Minneapolis, half from Madison, brought a 2007 Can Feixes Blanco from Penedès, Spain, a favorite white they planned to pair with roast chicken.

"We're very pleased with our choices today," said Pam Adams, who was visiting APT with her husband, Ken, and another Madison couple, Star and Ray Olderman.

The four had opened an organic Spanish sparkler, Tarantas Cava Brut, and a Fess Parker Chardonnay from California, which they described as "lightly oaked, not too dry, with a little fruit."

Neal and Rhonda Sheeley from Decorah, Iowa, were enjoying a pre-show picnic with Milwaukee friends Elizabeth and Polk Burleson. They had a bottle of the 2008 Montecillo 'Verdemar' Albariño, a crisp and fruity Spanish wine. The Sheeleys said they've been coming to APT for more than 20 years.

Eric Jackman's family immediately pointed to him when questioned about the wine choices at their table, which included the sweet, crowd-pleasing 2007 Conundrum white blend from California, a Rosemount Shiraz, and the 2007 Thorn Clarke Terra Barossa Riesling.

"In the summertime, I drink more whites," said Jackman, who is from Canada. (He was also quick to point out that the Rosemount had gotten a high score from Wine Spectator.)

Finally, what did we bring to APT? On a recent afternoon, nine Madison friends traveled to picnic several hours before the "curtain" rose on "The Philanderer," toting with us no fewer than seven bottles of wine.

Of these, favorites included the '08 Michel Torino Malbec Rosé (\$11), a fresh, fruity pink wine that was appealingly dry; the sweeter, non-vintage Gruet Winery Demi Sec (\$16), a sparkling wine from New Mexico that everyone loved; and the Quinta de Aveleda Vinho Verde (\$11), a floral, delicate white from Portugal.

Also passed around the table: the Two Vines Vinho Verde, a brighter white than the Quinta de Aveleda but not as tasty; the very sweet Chateau St. Michelle Riesling from Washington state; a Rioja rosé made by El Coto in Spain; and a pretty pink French blend made by **Domaine de Tariquet**.

But really, when you're on a picnic and headed to the theater, the wine matters less than the company. I spoke to a family that was thrilled to be drinking Fat Bastard Chardonnay, Kris Pinot Grigio, and Cristalino Brut Cava -- none of them high-priced or "fancy" wines by any stretch, all of them chosen strictly for their attractive labels.

Flavored by a birthday celebration, they enjoyed each bottle as if it were Dom Perignon champagne.