



Local spirits of the season

By SALLY D. KETCHUM
Special to the Record-Eagle

Northern lower Michigan enjoys well-deserved praise for its spirits: wines, special beers, aperitif — which stimulate the appetite before the meal; and digestifs — which aid digestion afterward.

While Psalm 104 says that “wine maketh glad the heart of man” and Shakespeare claimed “it is a felony to drink small beer” both sociologists and producers of spirits advocate drinking to enjoy the subtle qualities of spirits rather than drinking in excess.

The Swiss even have a term for it — “Weinachtscholer” — for the increased tension and unrestrained holiday drinking. Spirits are a gift that mankind must enjoy with respect.

Sommeliers, chefs, bartenders, brewers and vintners know that true enjoyment means time to savor the dark, sweet bitterness of an Irish stout in an ice-cold mug or to swirl the wine of a Black Star Farms Leorie Vineyard Merlot '97 in a stemmed glass.

The following are recommendations and advice of such connoisseurs as Ronald White of Traverse City's Wine Country Market and The Blue Goat, Larry Mawby of L. Mawby Vineyards in Suttons Bay, Dan Hummel of Traverse City's Bayside Market; professionals from Wicksall and Cox (the Traverse City area's main suppliers of spirits); and local brewer John Archibale of Traverse Brewing Company, Ltd.

Holiday giving

For those who enjoy — and deserve — the best: George Smith's 1824 original recipe Glenlivet single malt, a 12-year Scotch, suggests Darryl Nelson of Traverse City's Terrace Shopper. A stocking stuffer for the beer lover: Skulls Splitter Orkney Isle Ale (comes with a bright red foil cap), said Richard Stark from The Blue Goat. Traverse Brewing Co. logo pint glasses can be given as token gifts.

Suggestions to have on hand for the holidays:

- Red House Red — Cabernet Franc blend from Black Star Farms.
- Red House White — a Chardonnay blend Black Star Farms.
- Black Star Farms Sparkling



Record-Eagle/Linda Osterman

Above, a selection of L. Mawby award-winning sparkling wines (Champagne); winemaker Larry Mawby makes sparkling wines for all the local wineries in addition to his own. Right, Blackstar Farms has won awards for their Spirit of Pear (pear brandy) as well as their other fruit brandies.



wine.

- Blanc de Fizz (dry) — Larry Mawby, L. Mawby Vineyards.

- Favorite beers to have on hand: Sleeping Bear Brown, Old Mission Light Ale and Manitou Amber suggested Valerie Micham of Traverse Brewing Co.

Spirits for Dining

- For a casual pizza or taco party, try Notarpanaro '95, a bolder wine that stands up to spicy foods, suggested The Blue Goat's Richard Stark.

- For holiday brunch Mimosas (champagne and orange juice), try Rondel (from Spain) said Stark.
- For the holiday beef roast, Leorie Vineyard Merlot/Cabernet, Franc '99 said Bayside Market's Hummel.

- For an Italian Christmas feast, fish or seafood, try Arturos Pino Gris 2000 or Arturos Sur Lie Chardonnay 2000 (both light and fruity) said Hummel. To gloriously end the feast try Spirit of Pear (Gold medal winner 2001 pear brandy) said Coe.

What am I drinking?

The terminology of spirits is complex and often confusing. An

example is the term “champagne.” Even though true champagne comes from France's northernmost wine-growing area, the word is often used for many other effervescent wines. However, some winemakers like Larry Mawby use the traditional Champagne method in making their sparkling wines.

Beer has a particular vocabulary, too. Beer usually is a low alcohol beverage brewed from malted barley, corn, rye or other cereals. All beers take some character from the water in their brewing regions.

Some beer types:

- Ale: brewed from malt and hops, the latter causing its flavor to be more bitter. Ale is somewhat stronger than beer.

- Stout: A beer that originated in Britain and Ireland, strong and dark from hops and the barley used in its brewing is dark-roasted.

- Lagers, light, golden and bubbly are stored in a vat until they are free of sediment.

Of all beers, Americans have seemed to favor lagers, but their knowledge, interest and preferences are becoming more sophisticated. For instance, Micham of

Grand Traverse Brewing Co., said that their ale, “Batch 5001PA” was brewed as a celebration of producing their 500th batch of beer in 2001. It is an India Pale Ale, rather than a lager, “and it is heavy with hops,” added Micham, “with a real kick.” Available only at the brewery, 3 miles south of Elk Rapids, it is back by popular demand.

Local producers and purveyors of spirits are not only professional and knowledgeable about the craft but unlike some in other vocations, they are quick to compliment others in the business. Ron White of Wine Country Market remarked that L. Mawby sparkling wines are recognized as “great sparklers from Michigan.”

The importance of spirits at the holidays?

“At my house...I want the best cheese, seafood, steaks and wine,” said Hummel. “I want my friends to know that I consider them special and what better time of the year to prove that than Christmas?”

Sally D. Ketchum is a local freelance writer.

Holiday Memories

“Do you ever wonder who is the one behind the white beard and the red suit? For some reason — could it be that I fill out the suit well? — people always ask me to play the part of Santa. Not to many years ago I did just that on cable TV in Traverse City. My friend Ron Jolly put me up to it. I broadcast live from the Traverse City studios of Lite 96FM where we had a live cam connected directly to the cable system. At air time, we took calls from kids who wanted to talk to the Santa on TV. Everyone seemed to love the idea and I'm not sure who had more fun — me, the kids or the guys at the station, who ribbed me about it for weeks. Best of all, though, was that the kids loved it and did not seem to mind the fact that this Santa was Jewish!”

**Dave Scott, morning host,
Michigan Talk Radio Network**

Tips for spirits

BEER

- Pour beer down the mug's center for foam and aroma, down the side of the glass for less foam. Room or outdoor temperature affects foam, too. Warm means more foam.

- Glasses and mugs must be immaculate for devotees. Even a trace of oil or soap will deteriorate beer. Beer fans might try a hot salt water wash, followed by air drying glasses. Frosted beer mugs are a plus.

- Spicy foods on menus call for beer rather than wines.

- “Light beer” in Europe refers to color; in America, it means fewer calories and less alcohol.
- Store beer upright so that smaller surface will be exposed to the air in the bottle.

WINE

- Wines are stored on bottle sides to keep the corks wet. Corks won't shrink when wet, keeping the wine from air.

- “Vintage” means wine made from grapes of a certain year.

- Fortified wine is one to which other spirits, such as brandy, have been added.

- Ideal storage for wine is a place that is dark, temperature about 55 degrees and stored so that bottles won't be jostled.

- General rules when serving several wines at a holiday feast: young wines before old, whites before reds, light wines before the more robust wines.

- Fill wine glass half full so that it can be swirled, which releases the wine's aroma. The experts suggest noting the difference in taste before and after swirling.

- Chill white wines in refrigerator no more than two hours; longer dulls it.

- Buy red wine a few days before serving to let it settle.

- If a wine is too inferior to drink, don't cook with it.

LOCAL FLAVOR-ITES

Jeff Carns, marketing director for Tom's Markets did some research to find out more about Traverse City area preferences in spirits. Talking to beverage experts, sales people and suppliers, here's what he found:

- Most brewers and bottlers make specialties, often seasonal. Sam Adams has a winter lager — a robust, dark beer and is enjoyed as a warming drink, from fall through spring. Keinkugel offers a variety pack of Honey Weiss, Creamy Dark, Red Lager and new Amber Light.

- Amaretto, Kahlua and coffee are popular flavored liqueurs. Creme de menthe is popular for its holiday green and use in recipes. Bailey's and Carolan's are two of the most popular Irish cream liqueurs.

- The most popular liquor in Michigan is vodka. Favored holiday gifts are premium vodkas because of their fancy bottles. Flavored vodkas sell well, too like raspberry, lemon and orange.

- “Carpe Diem,” the new “champagne” made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir by Chateau Chantal are the biggest-selling items in their tasting room.

- For a warm-up, Leelanau Cellars makes a popular spiced wine that can be warmed gently in the microwave and Traverse Bay Winery makes a Cranberry Riseling, great for holiday feasts.

- “Best Michigan Wine of 2002” at the Michigan State Fair was Good Harbor Vineyards Harbor Red.



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