

From: The BrightWines Beacon
Subject: Cel-e-brate good wines, come on!
Date: February 27, 2026 at 5:50 PM

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The BrightWines Beacon for 2/28/26 - 3/5/26: Cel-e-brate good wines, come on!

"Let us celebrate this occasion with wine and good conversation." (loosely translated from the latin, Plautus - *Asinaria*)

What's the occasion? There isn't one!

Today's edition is the newsletter that answers the question, do we really need an occasion to celebrate good wine?? One of today's topics in fact is the annual, last Saturday of February (this year it's Feb 28th) "Open That Bottle Night" - which was invented twenty five ago by the wine writers at the WSJ as a tongue-in-cheek contrived, ready-made special occasion, to give wine lovers an excuse to enjoy a great bottle of wine, especially "that one bottle" that everyone has been saving to celebrate some special occasion. So we can celebrate good wines with OTBN (open that bottle night).

We could also celebrate the fact that we're at the end of February, the last "full month" of winter. In fact, I finally have one last late-comer bargain red wine that was supposed to be available in Feb but now is going to just be a most-favored bargain of March (the month when daylight savings and spring begins officially).

Or we can celebrate some of the best places in our hometown of the Twin Cities! Places like Como Zoo and Conservatory, where last night was the annual wine and food celebration called "Bouquets" that BrightWines has sponsored (and coordinated all of the wines for) for the past twenty years. That event features 9 of my favorite wine suppliers, with dozens and dozens and dozens of wines that I selected to showcase last night. The event also features 16 of the finest, wide-ranging and unique restaurants (and some breweries too) from around the Twin Cities, and St Paul especially. And this weekend I also want to give me newsletter readers some tips on a couple of museum exhibits that would be of high interest to food and wine lovers too! Notably the Julia Child exhibit in St Paul, and a "Wine Owl" on display in Minneapolis.

So without further ado, let's celebrate!

** Celebrate a 90-point rated Bargain red blend from Portugal

(NEW ARRIVAL) The very last wine late-comer from the February "Below Wholesale Sale" BWS-26 has finally arrived! **Fans of "Colossal" and fans of Guarda Rios too, take note!!!**

Casa Santos Lima (Lisboa, Portugal) 2020 Reserva **CONFIDENCIAL** red blend @ **\$9.99 per bottle**
(\$119.88/case, BWS-26)

Rated **90 points** by James Suckling, and highly recommended by Wine Enthusiast, which notes: "More than **10 varieties (Portugal is a cornucopia of grape varieties) go into this wine.** It is fruity and smoky, with attractive red fruits." The winemaker notes are eminently accurate based on my recent tastings, when they say "**complex aromas, such as red fruits and vanilla.** Medium body in the mouth, it reveals again sensations of red fruit, harmoniously integrated with wood notes provided by aging in oak barriques. It **develops smooth and rich flavors,** some acidity and complexity, **ripe red fruits, and chocolate notes.**" DAVE says: this is the same winery as "Colossal" and this 2020 vintage could easily pass for the last couple of vintages of that former BrightWines favorite!

** Celebrate the wines from the Como wine list (a few highlights are in-stock already)

The FULL list of great wines, priced from \$10 - \$45 per bottle (most of the wines are \$15 - \$25 smart-buys) that were served last night at the grand food-and-wine event for Como Zoo & Conservatory annual winter fundraiser is ONLINE now. <https://brightwines.com/como2026-bouquets-wine-list.pdf> **Word to the wise... most of the wines will be in stock by the end of NEXT week** - email orders are accepted through March 9th.

I did arrange to have a handful of my personal favorites, and some wines that I knew would be very popular, to arrive into stock in time for THIS WEEKEND. Here are some of those highlights...

AIRFIELD Estate 2020 Yakima - Washington SYRAH @ \$17.99 per bottle (in-stock NOW, good stock)

Suggested Retail: \$20

Rated 91 points Wine Enthusiast - with a great review too - saying "Here's a balanced, pretty Syrah where you don't have to break the bank to buy a case. It features aromas of **blackberry compote and roasted pork shoulder that were meant for one another.** That theme continues on the medium-bodied palate, where silky tannins support flavors of smoked black cherries, cranberries, and a hint of pork fat. **This is truly a great buy. 91 points. \$20**" (Wine Enthusiast) And DAVE says: at last year's Como event, one of the top two most popular wines of the event was the "Lone Birch" Syrah, the value-priced version of Syrah by Airfield Estate in Washington. So this year I decided we should up our game and do the AIRFIELD Estate label Syrah, and we LOVED it!!

Castello di Radda 2022 Chianti Classico (Radda in Chianti) @ \$19.99 per bottle (in-stock NOW, good stock)

Suggested Retail: \$24

Four consecutive vintages of Tre Bicchieri in Gambero Rosso (that's a big deal) and similar consecutive vintages of 90-91 points by Wine Spectator and Wine Enthusiast. Simply stated, this is as good as Chianti Classico gets for \$20 bucks, and it sure IS good!! This winery is the historic castle for the famous Chianti Classico town of Radda in Chianti. The 2022 is their newest release, and already has yet another 91-point rating. I have found my new "go to" Classico for this winter... and fans of Tuscany, Classico, Sangiovese, etc, need to come check it out. Reference point wine for the style. <https://www.castellodiradda.com/en/chianti-classico/>

Runquist 2023 "1448" Red Blend @ \$15.99 per bottle (in-stock NOW, good stock)

Suggested Retail: \$19

Winery notes: "**53% Petit Verdot, 29% Petit Sirah, 5% Tannat, 5% Barbera...** '1448' is the elevation of our winery in **Amador County's** Shenandoah Valley." Richly oaked, yet balanced too, which is the Jeff Runquist style. This wine is not usually submitted for wine magazine reviews, but despite that has a loyal following, and this vintage did receive a Gold Medal at San Francisco Chronicle's respected wine competition.

NOTE: there ARE plenty of other wines from the event at Como that are already in-stock, but supplies are limited and I have email orders pending from event attendees. By my count, **more than two dozen of the wines are in-stock here now**, but that means there are about 4 dozen more yet to come! To see the full list, and to email an order by March 9th, go online to <https://brightwines.com/como2026-bouquets-winelist.pdf>

**** Celebrate the “Wine Owl” at the Minneapolis Institute of Art**

One thing I want to focus on this year is highlighting the wide range of wonderful things our home town of the Twin Cities has to offer the world of wine, and related interests. This news story caught my eye, and would make a great excuse to celebrate that part of Minneapolis, not far from “eat street.” Here’s that story:

A restored ancient bronze owl artifact has returned to the Minneapolis Institute of Art nearly three years after a visitor accidentally knocked it off its plinth. The sculpture - a **wine vessel that is upwards of 3,200 years old, dating to the Shang dynasty - is one of the most valuable pieces in the museum’s collection**, says Liu Yang, the chair of Asian Art. Yang explains that Chinese archeologists have discovered tens of thousands of bronze from the period, but none quite like this one. “This is the most naturalistically depicted **owl-shaped wine vessel**,” Yang says. Ancestral temples were built; lavishly prepared meals, including wine and food, were dedicated to entertain the spirits of ancestors,” Yang says. “It was made for that purpose.”

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2026/01/13/mia-restores-and-returns-3200yearold-bronze-owl-to-public-display>

**** Celebrate Julia Child at the Minnesota History Center in Saint Paul**

Last weekend I spent my Sunday afternoon at the MN History museum on Cathedral Hill in St Paul, and particularly enjoyed their visiting exhibit on everyone’s favorite TV Chef, one who introduced French wines to me years before I could even legally drink wine! Here’s the info on that exhibit:

Discover how Julia Child transformed American cooking with wit, warmth, and perseverance. This immersive exhibition follows her journey from California childhood to French adventures, bestselling cookbooks, and groundbreaking television. Personal objects, multimedia experiences, and interactive components reveal the woman behind the whisk—curious, tenacious, joyful, and always authentically herself.

<https://www.mnhs.org/historycenter/activities/museum/julia-child>

Need a wine for one of Julia’s most famous recipes? **Coq au Vin** (and by the way the version of Coq au Vin sampled at Como last night by Meritage was spectacular) and **Beef Bourguignon** are both very successfully made by using a good **Côtes du Rhône** wines.

Domaine des 3 Cellier 2020 Cotes du Rhone rouge @ \$10.97 per bottle (BWS-26 price)

Suggested Retail: \$16 and Published Wholesale COST of \$11.33/btl

An estate in Chateauneuf du Pape, this is a dark toned black cherry and warm stone flavored Cotes du Rhone in prime 5 - 7 year range.

**** Celebrate Open That Bottle Night (OTBN)**

"Open That Bottle Night" was created from thin air by the pair of writers who wrote the wine column at the Wall Street Journal. The idea was to give their readers a ready-made excuse to open and enjoy a special bottle that was being saved for a special occasion” but one that never seemed to come long, or never seemed quite special enough. The founders of "Open That Bottle Night" or OTBN were Dorothy Gaiter and John Brecher of the Wall Street Journal, 25 years ago.

(editor's note) Did you know that BrightWines has a particular connection to Dorothy and John at the Wall Street Journal? Yep, they wrote an article for the WSJ back in 2005 when they were still writing those weekly wine articles, that highlighted BrightWines as one of the best wine shops in the country! I have the article framed here on my wall in the office, one of the two times I've been featured in WSJ among the many other times BrightWines has been featured in various Twin Cities media outlets.

The inspiration for OTBN was simple... many wine lovers - even those with a very small, or very casual collection of wines at home have a special bottle that has been saved for some unknown future special occasion. Folks with larger collections often have many mature wines that might be waiting to be had "at their peak" or "under the right circumstances" etc, and many of those wines might be getting past that point, yet still waiting. The idea for “Open That Bottle Night" was to give wine lover the excuse they need and a good date to do it! The notion struck many wine lovers as so very true that the idea of an open that bottle night is now well over two decades old and going strong.

In case you were wondering, OTBN is officially/un-officially the last Saturday night of February - which of course is tomorrow! The event was first celebrated 25 years ago, and the practice has continued every year since then, celebrated by wine lovers around the world on the last Saturday of February, whatever date that might be. IF you are intrigued by the idea, or perhaps already do it every February, here are some tips on opening "that bottle" this weekend.

1. any bottle can be special, and for a wide variety of reasons, so don't worry if you don't have something too "significant" to open. Join the fun regardless! Open up a good bottle, or open up something you've never had, or something you've been nervous to try. If you're lucky enough to be opening a “mature” wine, it might taste much younger, or much older, than you think. It might be glorious, or it might be just okay, you might love it or you might not. But you'll never know unless you open it... and I can say from experience that part of the fun is “expecting the unexpected.”
2. if the wine is mature, or even very old, get it prepared by standing it upright. Old wines naturally throw a sediment, you want to stand the bottle upright (start today, or tomorrow morning, whenever) to let gravity get it all to the bottom hopefully. And be gentle with the bottle at all times, especially while pouring it. It's also a good idea in such cases to have a variety of corkscrews available. For old wines, regardless of good storage vs poor storage, the cork can be the tricky part. It might fall apart, it might break in half, it might crumble, etc. You will want to be patient, and use your best (meaning most delicate/precise) opener. The "Ah-so" style is often useful in such scenarios, even though it is way down my list for using on standard bottles normally.
3. if the wine has been in the refrigerator forever, fear not! Despite what you may have read, the only two issues with longterm very cold storage are that refrigerators dry out corks more quickly (see above) and cold temps encourage more/faster sedimentation (see above) or even tartrate crystals in the wines. None of those problems hurt the wine itself that much, so fear not. But really cold wines will need to breathe and warm up a bit, just like

reds pulled from the cellar.

4. inspect the bottle prior to opening, to manage expectations, but BE NOT AFRAID either! Many special bottles might have been saved too long or varied conditions. As a result, the fill level (or "ullage" in fancy wine-bottle speak) might be low due to leaking or evaporation, there might be leakage, stickiness, even mold under a capsule. Be not afraid. The cork is there to protect the wine, even from all that. So just do your best to clean it up and do your best to get it open. Clean up or strain out (as gently as you can) cork dust or pieces or hefty sediments/crystal, to pour a small glass. Check it out, look at it, smell it, eventually taste it! If it does not smell overtly of vinegar or very sherry or of the "cork taint" moldy cement-and-newspaper thing, the wine going to be drinkable. Heck, for many people even unpleasant aromas are still "drinkable" if not off the deep end. Wine (and vinegar) are hygienic beverages, so it's not going to hurt you to take a sip. It might be great, it might be horrible, it might be anywhere along that continuum. But you won't know if you don't try it.

5. if your chosen wine is "a good wine" but that was recently purchased, not from your cellar... join the club! It's a well-known statistic about wine drinking in the U.S. that something over 90% of all wine is consumed within a day or two of being purchased. So don't let the lack of a cellar or wine collection stop you from enjoying this weekend's mini wine holiday. In fact, there is no harm in using OTBN as a reason to try something outside your comfort zone - whether that be wine or a style you've never tried, something you've always been curious about or that you normally would not drink, or maybe try a wine that is both of those things. - but is better than the average bear.

If by chance you don't happen to have a "that bottle" at the ready... BrightWines probably has one for you!

THE LAMP IS LIT: Store Hours for Feb 28th - March 5th

**** SATURDAY February 28th: OPEN from 10:30am until 5pm** (regular Saturday)

BrightWines will be OPEN regular hours this Saturday for in-store shopping, email order pickups and for Dave-as-personal-shopper requests too. email orders are accepted, just reply to this newsletter or contact Dave and be sure to mention when you prefer to pick up your order so I can reply and prepare accordingly. NOTE: there ARE plenty of wines from the event at Como that are already in-stock, but supplies are limited and I have email orders pending from event attendees. By my count, more than two dozen of the wines are in-stock here now, but that means there are about 4 dozen more yet to come!

**** MONDAY & TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY March 2nd - 4th: OPEN from 11am until at least 5:30pm** (regular weekday)

BrightWines will be OPEN regular hours next week for in-store shopping, email order pickups and for Dave-as-personal-shopper requests too. email orders are accepted, just reply to this newsletter or contact Dave and be sure to mention when you prefer to pick up your order so I can reply and prepare accordingly. NOTE: there ARE plenty of wines from the event at Como that are already in-stock, but supplies are limited and I have email orders pending from event attendees. By my count, more than two dozen of the wines are in-stock here now, but that means there are about 4 dozen more yet to come!

**** THURSDAY March 5th: OPEN** after 10:30am and until at least 5pm/5:30pm

Stay tuned to next weekend's newsletter for much more information on the "Como Favorites" Plenty of wines from the event at Como that are already in-stock, but supplies are limited and I have email orders pending from event attendees. By my count, more than two dozen of the wines are in-stock here now, but that means there are about 4 dozen more yet to come!

**** NEXT WEEKEND: OPEN** after 10:30am both FRIDAY & SATURDAY March 6th/7th

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The Right Wines are BrightWines!

<https://www.brightwines.com/bws26-finalupdate.pdf>

<https://brightwines.com/como2026-bouquets-winelist.pdf>

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