

TIMEOUT FOOD & WINE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2008

Seasonal Cuisine • Restaurants • Recipes

205

SECTION D

FOOD & WINE

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2008 205

D3

Bite into your list with gift of food, drink

IF THE HOLIDAY roller-coaster has you staring at a blank gift list — and little time to shop — you need help. I can't tell you who wants what, but I can share a host of ideas I've stockpiled from the onslaught of press releases that continue to arrive in my e-mail inbox. The rest is up to you.

STIR THE BEANS: While I love the idea of gifting people with one of my latest wine-finds, I had to agree with the folks at Starbucks and Peet's when they pointed out that you get more for your buck if you opt to give coffee or tea.

Both of these coffee giants have top-notch seasonal offerings on the shelves. Starbucks' Holiday Blend Coffee is \$12.95 per pound. They sweeten the deal this month by offering 15 percent off store merchandise through the end of the year.

Peet's Holiday Blend Coffee from the Tres Rios region of Costa Rica costs slightly more at \$13.95 per pound, but at Peet's, as always, you'll get a free cup of coffee to go along with any pound you buy. Also popular at Peet's this year is their nearly sold-out Winter Solstice Tea — a spiced-up blend of Darjeeling, Yunnan and Sri Lanka teas. It sells for \$11.95.

If you have a bit more to spend, the adventurous tea lovers on your list might enjoy sipping through Mighty Leaf Tea's Abaca Holiday Tea Box, a collection of 30 elegant mesh tea bags in a pretty red box for \$22. www.mightyleaf-tea.com.

OILY OFFERINGS: If you're accustomed to bringing a bottle to your holiday parties but would like to veer away from wine, a luxurious option is to grab a great bottle of this season's freshly

JOLENE THYM
Picky Eater



pressed olive oil.

As time is short, the best way is to visit a gourmet store and choose one that has a 2008 date on the label. Great picks include Pietra Santa's Estate Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil, \$35, a Monterey County blend of five kinds of olive oils that makes for a fresh richness that will work way beyond the salad bowl. www.pietrasantawinery.com. Be sure to grab it quick, because another favorite, California Olive Ranch's Olio Nuovo, is already sold out. Thankfully, the ranch has several other blends still available. www.californiaoliveoil.com.

CARD THEM: If you're big on giving a food experience, you may want to consider a gift card from The Melting Pot, a chain of fondue restaurants. All foods (except salad) are served fondue-style, cooked at your table in a bubbling hot pot. It's about \$70 per head for the works; however, the San Mateo location offers a really fun "Ladies Night Out" the first Wednesday of every month for \$35. The Melting Pot has restaurants in San Mateo, San Jose

and Larkspur. Call 650-342-6358 or go to www.meltingpot.com.

If a fondue dinner doesn't appeal, grab a copy of "The Michelin Guide's Bay Area & Wine Country 2009" (\$16.95) and a VISA gift card so they can book a meal at the restaurant of their choice.

CRABBY LUXURY: Treat crab lovers on your list to a bite of the "Best Crab Cakes" anywhere, courtesy CrabPlace.com. The company's crab offerings just got the nod from O Magazine in October. The cakes are primarily crab — with little filler or extra flavorings. Gift packs of four large cakes are about \$60 plus \$30 for 2-day shipping for a single online order. Shipping is much more reasonable for larger orders. Go to www.crabplace.com.

LIQUID ASSETS: If the bad economy has put you in a funk, you may just want to liquidate. Cash it in and give your favorite people \$115 bottles of BV's Georges de Latour Private Reserve Cabernet. Those who have much can drink and enjoy. Those who have little can sell it off later at a profit.

QUICK BITES: If you're an hour late to that holiday party and don't have a clue what to bring, here are some options. Head to the grocery and look for a hunk of Sartori Asiago Cheese. It doesn't matter which kind — Pepper, Herb, Raspberry — they're all deliciously nutty and irresistible. The cheese is \$8 for an 8-ounce wedge. That's a lot, I realize, but keep in mind



that the better your cheese, the less people eat. It can be found at Draeger's and Lunardi's stores.

To go with the cheese, stop by any store and grab a few Emerald Nutcracker canisters filled with unadulterated fresh roasted nuts, mostly from California. The 11-ounce plastic canisters are \$6.99.

If your crowd loves guacamole, a great stand-in for fresh is Wholly Guacamole's spicy and regular. It's pretty garlic-forward, but that can be balanced out with a splash of bottle salsa. Wholly Guacamole comes in a range of flavors that can all be found at most supermarkets. The dips are \$3 to \$5 per package, depending on size.

FINAL NOTE: I don't have any plans to stop by Denny's Restaurant soon, but I have to say that the company recently sent over a press release that showed such class that I need to share. It's a lovely handwritten note on top of a colorful folder full of pictures of their best efforts — not the least of which is pecan pie. Said pie, the enclosed note informs me, can be secured 24/7, which is pretty convenient for the last-minute potluck planner. But here's the classy part. Included was a \$10 gift card encouraging me to try out the restaurant's offerings — and a note giving me permission to gift the card to someone in need. That's class. I will do just that.

Reach Jolene Thym at 510-353-7008 or jthym@bayarea.newsgroup.com.