

## **Don't be afraid to try unfamiliar wines or unusual pairings**

By Pete Martin  
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Different may be good, but let's face it: Different can be scary. We like the familiar and dislike the unknown, and that continues to be a challenge for wine drinkers, myself included.

This year for Thanksgiving, I decided to do something completely different. Instead of the traditional gathering with family, friends and a big turkey in the oven, I headed to a remote little cottage near Charlottesville, Va.

The nearby Palladio Restaurant at Barboursville Vineyards was serving Thanksgiving dinner with a wine pairing, and this sounded like a great way to let others do the cooking and cleaning.

Instead of getting drowsy from too much turkey, I planned to get drowsy from too much wine.

Wednesday night, however, we were on our own for dinner. One of the few nearby options was Restaurant Pomme in Gordonsville, Va. Gordonsville — with 1,500 or so residents — is a quaint little town nestled in the hills about 20 miles northeast of Charlottesville. It's among the last places I would ever expect to find a French restaurant — and a very good one, at that.

As we considered the menu, I headed by default to the list of California wines, but quickly stopped myself. Sitting in a classic French restaurant in Virginia's Monticello wine appellation, a California wine seemed like heresy.

It was time to rethink things.

I looked at the four Virginia wines on the menu, but there would be five Virginia wines served during our Thanksgiving meal and many more to be tasted at area wineries on Friday and Saturday.

It was still time to rethink things.

Our waiter, who was quite knowledgeable about wines, was happy to make a recommendation. Beyond the practical value, this is a great way to break away from the routine and try something different. Asking a waiter or sommelier for a recommendation is something we all should do more often.

Perhaps that will be my new year's resolution.

A bit to my surprise, our waiter suggested — after learning our menu choices — a moderately priced Louis Jadot Bourgogne 2010 French Burgundy. The wine, which is made with 100 percent pinot noir grapes, belied its price with a medium body, silky texture and gentle finish that paired well with our veal and chicken dishes.

Our first meal in the area proved to be a wonderful experience, as was our Thanksgiving dinner at Palladio. Here, food courses were paired with wines from Barboursville Vineyards. The pairings worked splendidly: oysters Rockefeller with lightly sparkling brut rose, salad with pinot grigio, pumpkin and apple soup with chardonnay, and turkey and sage sausage roulade with sangiovese.

Yes, you read that right: red wine with turkey.

Proof that different isn't always good. Sometimes, different can be great.