

Sips & Star Power: Wine Pairings for the 81st Annual Academy Awards

By Courtney Cochran



Come February 22, many of us - film and wine buffs alike - will find ourselves settling in to enjoy the time-honored tradition of watching Hollywood's annual version of an all-you-can-eat buffet with extra helpings of couture, paparazzi and bawdy political jokes thrown in for good measure. That's right: it's Oscar time! And, to further enhance your viewing pleasure, this year we're pleased to present our second-annual Academy Awards tasting lineup, complete with frank and - hopefully - amusing commentary on nominated films and personalities.

So whether your star picks turn out to be winners or just plain *winers*, you'll be guaranteed a good laugh along with a good glass as you take it all in - the most winning combination we can think of.

The Curious Case of...Oh, Hand Me the Magnum Already

Leading the nominations field with an impressive 13 nods, Oscar's longest Best Picture nom inspires a sipping companion that's as oversized as its running time of 2 hours, 47 minutes. We recommend reaching for a magnum - twice the size of your average 750mL wine bottle, technically speaking - of something sparkling (it is a big night, after all) when taking in the telecast, also sure to be nothing short of lengthy.

Wine Pick: Roederer Estate's NV Anderson Valley Brut Rosé Magnum (\$55)

Drink Wine, Not Milk

Director Gus Van Sant's critically acclaimed, Best Picture-nominated biopic chronicling the life and death of gay civil rights activist-cum-politician Harvey Milk inspires sips of something seriously intense, like its subject matter. We like soft, viscous Viognier, which - fittingly - recalls the *texture* of milk, though its stunning aromatics and rich finish leave little doubt that this beverage is cut from a different cloth entirely. Nonconformist Milk would be proud.

Wine Pick: Pride Mountain Vineyards Sonoma County Viognier (\$42)

Reading Between the Wines

Kate Winslet's riveting performance as a mysterious woman who has an affair with a man half her age in post World War II Germany helped propel *The Reader* to its Best Picture nomination. And though the film's subject matter is decidedly dark, the wine it inspires is anything but: Reach for a glass of headily perfumed, electrically flavorful German Riesling when toasting this cinematic tour de force. The emotions both wine and film inspire will be nothing short of powerful...we promise.

Wine Pick: Josef Leitz "Dragonstone" Riesling, Rheingau, Germany (\$17)

Slumdog Zinfandel

The surprise hit chronicling the life and game show triumphs of a boy genius raised amidst the squalor of an Indian slum, *Slumdog Millionaire* merits serious Best Picture consideration - as well as a wine worthy of its "diamond in the rough" plotline. This is why we recommend Zinfandel from California's scorching hot Lodi region when contemplating the film come Oscar night; the area's unbelievable heat makes it difficult to believe it could produce such a megastar sipper.

Wine Pick: Michael-David Earthquake Zinfandel, Lodi, CA (\$28)

Frost/Nixon Flavors

The [presidential palate](#) must surely be difficult to decipher, especially when said president is nicknamed "Tricky Dick" and has just resigned from the nation's top office amidst a swirl of scandal - the real-life premise behind this third Best Picture contender. Instead, we recommend looking to our *new* president's palate for tips on what to sip come Oscar night, a strategy that puts us - where else? - squarely in the land of ducks, horns and golden eyes when it comes to the next wines of choice.

Wine Picks: Duckhorn Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc, \$25; Goldeneye Anderson Valley Pinot Noir, \$50 (both poured at President Obama's inauguration lunch)

Vicky Cristina Barcelona...Lake County?

We wonder why this wasn't the official title of the film, but no matter. The important thing is that this sharp, funny Woody Allen film - for which Penelope Cruz scored a Best Supporting Actress nod - inspires a wine as saucy as its slightly sardonic subject matter. In keeping with the Spanish theme, we like Tempranillo from Nor Cal's Lake County, where savvy producers are coaxing brazen yet balanced flavors from the seductive Spanish variety.

Wine Pick: Six Sigma Ranch & Vineyard Lake County Tempranillo (\$42)

Wrestling with Reputation

Comebacks take all kinds of forms, though never have a film's subject matter and key performer's career so closely tracked the same comeback trajectory. Indeed, erstwhile washed-up thesp Mickey Rourke's star is back on the rise following the smash success of the gripping but at times gory film, *The Wrestler*, for which he snagged a Best Actor nomination. In a nod to both Rourke and the film's success, we recommend a variety that's making a comeback all its own.

Wine Pick: Columbia Crest Winery "Grand Estates" Merlot, Columbia Valley, WA (\$9)

Tropic Thunder Thirst

The theme of disguise has been used to great effect throughout cinematic history, although Robert Downey, Jr. - nominated for Best Supporting Actor this year - may have taken the theme to new heights in his role as a white Australian actor playing a black soldier in the Ben Stiller war pic send-up, *Tropic Thunder*. This is why we can think of nothing better for sipping (while contemplating the flick, of course) than a wine whose own name hints at intrigue and dubious identity.

Wine Pick: Lodi Vineyards Incognito Rouge, Lodi, CA (\$19.50)

Wall-E Wine

The roster for Best Nominated Film would hardly be complete without a Pixar pic, and *Wall-E* - director Andrew Stanton's fourth for the studio - has snagged serious buzz for its charming look at life after, well, life on earth. And so in the ebullient spirit of animated films of all sorts, we recommend a playful, palate-pleasing pink wine for swilling while celebrating this heart-warming tale. After all, though we're only *really* kids once, but we can act like them any old time we want (cheers to that).

Wine Pick: Toad Hollow "Eye of the Toad" Pinot Noir Rosé, Sonoma County (\$9)

Revolutionary Red

Sam Mendes' haunting portrayal of an unhappy marriage in 1950s America has netted enough critical praise to last the director a lifetime, though it's his wife - and leading lady in the film, Kate Winslet - who steals the show in *Revolutionary Road*. Nominated for three statues, the film inspires something profound - even brooding - in the glass, which brings us to our tenth and final Oscar recommendation. *Salute!*

Wine Pick: Luigi Pira Langhe Nebbiolo "Le Ombre," Italy (\$24)