

Bringing a bottle

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Some people think that because of their age or status, it is somehow not 'normal' to bring a bottle. Others would never dream of crossing a friend's threshold without a bottle of wine in hand. I can't see why anyone would resent the gift of a bottle thoughtfully chosen; although anyone who expects every guest to bring a bottle and gets upset if they don't, is probably wise to spell this out in advance.

One of the touchier questions of modern etiquette is whether you have to open a bottle that someone brings, or can you keep it and savour it on another occasion? I would say that if someone brings a bottle of white or sparkling wine ready-chilled or, as has frequently happened to me, a red wine already decanted, then this should be taken as a pretty strong hint that its donor expects the wine to be drunk then and there. If, however, your guest arrives and puts a bottle on one side without comment, then you are not duty-bound to open it. However, the perfect host would probably uncap it at some point, express thanks, and ask whether the guest would like to taste it (these being such a useful expression for 'taste').

(Well, by the way, is a British expression for something we all agree to look down on.)

Not bottles



Cheaper branded wines e.g. Bissoux 198, Gallo's Sierra Valley, Yellow Tail, Pin 600, Masci, Lambini, Liebfraumilch



Any really cheap table wine comes in funny, asymmetrical bottles, wine with serving suggestions on them, or wine in containers other than bottles

Not as stiff as many people think



Supermarket own-label wines - although they look good enough to present to design gurus, some taste quite good



Mineral water - perhaps it's just my hermit, but some home are much better at providing taste than the water needed to stop the dehydration effect

Smart choices



Champagne - almost always appreciated, almost always appreciated. Bollinger and Louis Roederer (Rég, Dom Pérignon or Cristal if you can afford it) are good chip presents; David, Gosset, Charles Heidsieck, Laurent Perrier, Blanc Pallard, Pils Roger, Ruart, Salon, Taittinger and Veuve Clicquot are all reliable large houses but a bottle from one of the more admired growers such as Solaire or Villaret would show that you really know your stuff. Vintage-dated is always a treat.



Obscure wines - either a small, unknown producer of a well-known wine such as Barolo, sherry, or Chablis, or something new (to avoid new grape varieties or varieties from eastern Europe or Asia), or something not in general commercial distribution (such as Château Latour's basic 'Pauillac', effectively the 'third wine', for example). A good independent wine merchant can be invaluable here, or a bottle brought back from abroad.



Sweet wines - good Sauternes, Vinho Verde, Moscatello, Jurançon and Lake Geneva Riesling are of stylishly unusual, and usually appreciated even in half-bottles



Clarets - unless bottled odd are what wine pros take to each other's houses

