

# Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Trader Joe's Wine Club: What to Pour for Thanksgiving

*[Upbeat orchestra music begins.]*

Tara: From the gas lamp lit brick sidewalks of Beacon Hill to the annual Boston Pops holiday concert and beautiful decorations everywhere you look, there's really no place like Boston during the holiday season.

Matt: It's true, and I mean a lot of cities sparkle this time of year, but I think maybe because of Boston's history, you really feel connected to something timeless here, especially this time of year.

Tara: On today's episode from the Trader Joe's mothership on the East Coast, we hope to capture that Boston holiday feeling, combining tradition with innovation, the old and the new.

Matt: And we're going to talk about some wine.

Tara: Yeah, that too.

Matt: Let's go *Inside Trader Joe's*.

*[Theme music begins with two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]*

Matt: All right, let's call this meeting of the Trader Joe's Wine Club to order.

*[Gavel bangs twice.]*

Tara: I'm Tara Miller.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan.

Tara: And we are joined today by Trader Joe's Boston-based senior category manager for alcohol, all non-alcoholic beverages, coffee, tea, cereal and supplements.

Matt: So all things imbibable.

Tara: Colin!

Colin: Hi.

Tara: I might've gotten a little carried away talking about Boston during the holidays, but it's special.

Colin: I love the fact that the weather changes, and I love the fact that during the holidays the communities tend to really get together. People really look at it as a time to celebrate with people that they really enjoy hanging out with.

*[Theme music ends. Light upbeat holiday music.]*

Matt: So thinking about celebrating, maybe if you start the season with a Thanksgiving table setting. That's a meal loaded with traditions, but I feel like I'm hearing more and more these days about people not making the typical Thanksgiving menu or they might have variations on it. What would you recommend for great Thanksgiving wine pairings this year?

Colin: We've got two great wines to talk about today, and they're classic. There's a lot of folks now that think that Chardonnay is a less popular grape varietal or that maybe they're over it, and I would challenge that.

Tara: (chuckles)

Matt: I think a lot of Chardonnay drinkers would challenge that.

Colin: For sure. Great wine is timeless. And so the first wine that we have is our Trader Joe's Grand Reserve Chardonnay. It's a 2024 vintage and it's from Carneros, which is an area in the Sonoma County region.

Tara: But it's also in the Napa Valley region, and it's a really special place for wine.

Colin: Well, Carneros is an area that some would believe is somewhat similar even to Burgundy, France. And so the area that it's grown in really tends to have some of these mineral characteristics. So the Chardonnay doesn't drink like what some people might call flabby flat. It really is bright, has great acidity, and the climate does somewhat mirror Burgundy, France. So this is a wine that if you like Chablis, you're going to love this wine.

Tara: All Chablis is Chardonnay, but not all Chardonnay is Chablis. Right? So Chablis is Chardonnay grown in a specific region of France.

Colin: In Chablis, France.

Tara: In Chablis. But if you're growing Chardonnay and you're making a wine in that style, it's really going to reflect that type of wine.

*[Music transition to light upbeat music.]*

Colin: That is correct. One of the differences in this wine compared to Chablis is this does use some oak aging, and in Chablis that's a little bit less common. And the reason that we do that is we think it rounds out the flavors. We work with great winemakers. And so really what we're trying to do is have the wine that's a reflection of the land and also something that's really elegant. People who know great wine or somebody who just wants a great recommendation would be really wowed by this wine.

Matt: What is it that you think about this wine works well with a table? Because I don't know about your holiday gatherings, my Thanksgiving table has a lot going on flavor-wise. So this is bright, nice balance of acidity. What else does it have going on in terms of pairing that would make it easy for a variety of dishes?

Colin: Well, this type of wine is going to go really well with specifically cheese boards and things that have a lot of dairy in it. It acts as a counterbalance to things that have lots of butter in it or cheeses. So this is a terrific wine to open up your Thanksgiving meal with, and it has enough of a structure, and that's a fine word for saying that it's really well-made. It is going

to cut through really heavy foods, so it really goes well, for example, mashed potatoes, which is going to be on many people's meals. But it really can stand on its own. So it's great just to have as your first glass of the day.

Tara: First glass of many. When I think of Thanksgiving dinner, it's a really rich assortment of food. People who are not serious wine drinkers might not understand that acidity is a really good thing in a wine like this. You said it's going to cut through those heavy foods. What do you mean by that?

Colin: Well, the easiest way to think of acidity, especially in a white wine, is to think more of citrus notes. So when you think of lemons and limes and that kind of thing, it's not that this wine tastes like lemon. It's that sides of your mouth tingly feeling that makes you want to have another sip. And when you have something that's very heavy, so let's say cheeses or butter, that coats your whole mouth, this wine cuts through that.

Tara: I like the way you described that little tingly feeling, because that exactly describes for me what happens when I drink a wine with good acidity.

Colin: I think a lot of people feel that. The other way to explain it is that when you have the right type of acidity, it's what makes you want to keep drinking.

Matt: I think as a counterpoint, pairings are not about same for same kind of this repetition of flavors. It's about a foil or a counterpoint, something that balances it. And you had mentioned this being well-structured, well-made, and that it's good on its own because I found a lot of wines with really bracing acidity, they need food. It's that push and pull of acidity or maybe a fat, oil, heavy dairy kind of presence. So this is interesting that this works well as an aperitif or a cocktail wine to start that gathering. Guests come over, families at the ready, and people just want to dive-in to Thanksgiving. So if you have a cheeseboard, mixed nuts, whatever you have going on, it's nice to have something ready for people who are partaking, and this would be a great choice, I think.

*[Music transition.]*

Tara: We've had conversations in the past about temperature. People tend to think white wine cold, red wine room temperature. We now understand, I now understand through these conversations, that's not always the case. If you have people coming to your house at say, let's say 3:00 PM, when do you want to take this out of the fridge so that it's at the right temperature for people to enjoy at 3:00 in the afternoon?

Colin: I'd say probably 20 to 30 minutes before your guests arrive. When you drink wines that are too cold, it masks a lot of those great flavors. So really the right temperatures for red wine and white wine or a little more similar than not. If it's not very, very cold, it will go down a lot easier, feel a bit smoother, be more balanced, and consequentially, it'll go a lot better with the foods that you're having.

Matt: So Colin, I'm looking at some notes. We've offered this wine for more than 10 years. It's looking like maybe 12 years or so. We've had subsequent vintage after vintage of this. We taste every single vintage. Why do we keep going back to this wine? What is it about it?

Colin: Well, firstly, this is made by a family-owned winery that has really deep traditions in Burgundy, France, specifically with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Matt: But this is the Carneros spot in California. So these people have French roots.

*[Music transition.]*

Colin: And they also own vineyards in the Carneros region and other places around California. And again, they really know Chardonnay. What we want our customers to know is we taste every new vintage, and we re-approve a vintage every year because we have to make sure that it's excellent. And we really only carry wines like this over and over vintage after vintage because they're great, and our customers keep coming back, and they really highlight what we do really well, which is drive excellent values.

Matt: Because sometimes that incredible story, well, it can just be lost, right? This is Trader Joe's Grand Reserve Carneros Chardonnay. That tells a little bit of a story, but we often hide, if you will, or don't make plain the producer's name for a bunch of reasons because maybe their brand, well, it might sell at a very different price point, maybe a higher price point. Or we want to be able to have the flexibility to say that we might not like next year's vintage, and we might not have it. So we use our name and our label as a strategy.

Colin: We're also really proud of our name, and we're proud of the partnerships that we've developed.

Tara: We've worked really hard to make sure that the wines that are in our reserve labels, whether it's the Reserve, the Grand Reserve, the Platinum Reserve, or the Diamond Reserve, those wines are fantastic values all the time, which means they taste great, and the price is just excellent.

Colin: This specific wine, it's really difficult to find a comparable wine for less than \$20. So this is basically half the price that you would pay if you went into a regular wine shop and bought a brand Chardonnay from Carneros.

Tara: So just to be clear, and we say this every time, but it's important to say it. The prices we're talking about, generally speaking, that's going to be the price you pay for this wine at Trader Joe's. There might be some regions of the country where that price is a little different due to factors that are somewhat outside of our control.

Matt: Colin, a wine with the Trader Joe's name on it, it has to over-deliver. This has to go above what's expected, and that's a lot of work.

Colin: It is. The great part about what we do is delighting our customers, and we also think about our crew members. It's really easy to get customers excited when we get our crew members excited first. So now all of our crew members know. If you see Trader Joe's in the label, if you see a Trader Joe's Reserve label you know that that wine is worth way more than what the customer is going to pay for that.

Tara: If you're looking for a wine to bring to someone's home for a holiday meal as a host or hostess gift, first of all, the bottle is beautiful. I love the black label of the Trader Joe's Grand Reserve Wines, but it's a really great bottle of wine.

Matt: I have an etiquette question. When it comes to bringing a bottle over to someone's place or someone brings a bottle over to your place, do you open that bottle right then and there? Do you save it? Does it depend on how good it is? What's your take on this?

Tara: So here's my experience, and I am not queen of etiquette. When somebody brings a bottle to my house, they're walking into a situation where there's already an open bottle of wine. I'm not going to open their bottle just because they've brought it to me because I already have wine open. However, should I need to open another bottle of wine during that event, I will open the bottle of wine that somebody brought to my house.

Matt: That seems reasonable.

Tara: That's what I do. Now, no one calls me Miss Manners.

Colin: I don't know anybody that brings a bottle of wine to somebody else's house and expects that to be the bottle that they're going to drink there. It's the gesture that matters. You want the host to know that you appreciate them, and you're not coming empty-handed.

Matt: All right, I got to up my game.

Colin: Yup, you do.

*[Music transition.]*

Matt: So we have white wine for Thanksgiving covered.

Tara: I think we need a red.

Colin: And for Thanksgiving meals, a lot of us like to recommend Pinot Noir. As compared to some other red wines that are a little bit heavier, Pinot Noir is a lightly skinned red wine grape, and it is a little bit easier to drink because it's not so bold. It tends to be much more elegant. It has good acidity, just like we mentioned on the Chardonnay. It's very smooth and this particular one is a wonderful, wonderful wine and for \$10, so it's \$9.99 in most regions, is an exceptional value.

Tara: What is this wine that we're talking about?

Colin: So this is the Compass Bridge Pinot Noir. It's from Sonoma County.

Tara: Okay.

Colin: This comes from a terrific family-run business. They've been in the wine business for over 50 years. We've partnered with them for many decades now. We think that they just do terrific wines.

Tara: Compass Bridge. That's not the name of the winery that makes this wine, correct?

Colin: That's correct.

Tara: That's a name that they created so that they could sell us this wine and not put it in their label because if they put it in their label and sold it to us for the price that they are, they

would be undercutting their own brand, because for \$10 for a Sonoma County Pinot Noir, that's a phenomenal price.

Colin: You'll find some Cabanero wines at even a higher price that are California appellationed, and really what that means is they take grapes from all over California. This being from a specific region has more value in it. And you're right, this winery created this label. They wanted to have something that would look really elegant, but also that would protect their own brands. We like to do this with our winery partners because it allows us to give our customers great values. We don't care so much about the particular brand name on a label. We care about the Trader Joe's brand. We do care that when we work with a winery, we come up with a great brand, that it looks great, and that somebody feels proud to purchase this because we all need to acknowledge that customers do tend to purchase the first purchase at least on how something looks. And that's really true when it comes to wines.

Matt: And as important as all that work is, it's all in the surface of what's in the bottle. I think it's this angle of over-delivering, because some of these things just on a surface level, well, they might seem too good to be true. I mean, if this is half the price of something similar elsewhere, how can it be real?

Tara: But that's what we do. You go back to the beginning of Trader Joe's, that was the whole point of selling wine. We figured out a way to do it at a price point that was so much lower than what other places were charging for wine, and we're still doing that. Part of it is how we source. Part of it is how much we source, because we sell a lot of wine. Part of it is how we pay our suppliers.

*[Music transition.]*

Tara: In the wine business as in the food business, there's a lot of trickery that can go on with how people get paid and how people don't get paid and buying things on consignment and having to pay back if you don't sell. I mean, there's all kinds of crazy stuff that happens. We just pay upfront, and we pay in cash.

Colin: We do. I would say the most important thing though, especially in the wine world, is it's the relationships. And that doesn't mean we take everything that's offered to us. But in the case of this wine, we have a long-standing relationship, and we're not necessarily interested in talking with the people who are selling us the products. We're interested in talking with the people who are making the wines and making sure that we're really getting something truly exceptional. You learn a lot when you talk to the winemakers, and in this particular case, it's an exceptional wine-making team. They really want to make sure that Trader Joe's customers have the best possible wine for the best possible price.

Tara: There are a lot of folks out there who think white wine makes the most sense for Thanksgiving, because Thanksgiving features turkey, and you drink white wine with poultry. There are rules quote/unquote about how you're supposed to drink wine and what foods go with what kinds of wines. We're suggesting a Pinot Noir, a red wine with Thanksgiving dinner, which is a very common suggestion for Thanksgiving dinner.

Colin: Well, this is the type of red wine, so the Pinot Noir grape, that does go really well with turkey. It also goes great with ham and other types of meats that you might have on your Thanksgiving table. But really it's because this wine is not heavy. It doesn't have a ton of oak, so it's not overly dry. It's not super sweet. It really has this nice elegant balance. It does not

overpower the food. Matt mentioned earlier, there's a lot of stuff happening, lots of different dishes during Thanksgiving. This wine, even though it's red wine, is very complimentary.

*[Music transition.]*

Matt: I think it would work well with all of the roasted vegetables, squashes, root vegetables, some of the herbs that you associate with a Thanksgiving meal, and maybe just some other herbs like sage, thyme, et cetera. This would work nicely with all of those flavors. This is a standalone Pinot Noir too. It's not watery or thin. It is very present, and so there's a lot of flavor going on here, but it's not that hit-you-in-the-face kind of flavor. There's not a ton of tannins. It's not this gigantic thing that competes with the flavors. It works really nicely alongside them.

Tara: It's a lighter-drinking wine, but still an incredibly satisfying wine to drink.

Colin: It's going to go great with the meal. It will also go great for your guests that come, and they want to have a red wine before they start eating.

Tara: It's a multi-tasker.

Matt: I think these are helpful recommendations, because you don't necessarily ... I mean, maybe you do at your house. I don't know how a 17-course thing with a taste pairing that matches each one of those in 17 different wines. But I think simplicity wins out at a Thanksgiving table, at least when it comes to how many wines you're going to pair.

Tara: The relationships at a Thanksgiving table are rarely simple. So if the wine can be simple, then maybe your Thanksgiving meal will be a little bit more harmonious altogether.

Matt: Or you just give people enough to eat that they can't talk.

Tara: Oh, I like that. Okay. Colin, this has been fantastic. I look forward to purchasing both of these wines for my Thanksgiving table this year.

Matt: I do too. And I want to do a show on other beverages. I want the crackerjack team of beverage people to come back. Let's do sparkling water.

Tara: I love our sparkling water.

Matt: So do I.

Tara: But that's an episode for another time. And-

Matt: All right, focus.

*[Music ends. Transition to closing music.]*

Tara: I'm Tara Miller.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the current Trader Joe's Wine Club recommendations for the Thanksgiving table are ...

*[Ding on a wine glass.]*

Colin: The Trader Joe's Grand Reserve Chardonnay 2024 Vintage from Carneros.

*[Ding on a wine glass.]*

Colin: And the Compass Bridge Pinot Noir, which is from Sonoma County.

Tara: We still have more *Inside Trader Joe's* plan for 2025.

Matt: Including more meetings of the Trader Joe's Wine Club.

Tara: Until then, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.

Colin: And have a happy Thanksgiving.