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As American As The Holiday

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An iconic American Thanksgiving meal prepared by an iconic American chef (such as Mom, Dad or Grandma) calls for iconic American wines.

Thanks to increasingly thirsty and adventurous consumers, "American wine" today is changing rapidly with the rise of regional and local products and the growing popularity of different grapes and styles. So which wines or types of wines would count as American icons?

Here are some suggestions arranged by category, with representative examples . . .

-- **California chardonnay.** Maybe chardonnay is no longer synonymous with "white wine," but it is still the most popular white grape among U.S. consumers. California continues to set the standard. Chardonnay does best in coastal valleys that run west to east, rather than north to south, to capture cooling ocean influences. My choice for the most iconic chardonnay site in California is **Bien Nacido Vineyards** in Santa Barbara County. There is no Bien Nacido winery; the vineyard sells its grapes to more than 20 wineries throughout the state. It has more than 600 acres, most planted to chardonnay and pinot noir. Bien Nacido fruit is so expressive that several of its clients produce bottlings from individual vineyard blocks. Look for chardonnays from Qupe, Au Bon Climat Winery and the Ojai Vineyard.

-- **Pinot noir.** The cooler regions of California that favor chardonnay offer the same advantages to pinot noir, and **Bien Nacido** could stake a claim for icon status with this grape, too, especially after the 2004 film "Sideways" made Santa Barbara even more famous . . .