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barman at the famed Hotel Métropole Monte-Carlo suggests buying a small wooden barrel of the type sold at specialty shops.

His holiday tipple of choice is the Negroni, typically made with gin, vermouth, and Campari, but open to interpretation. "Start barreling your Negroni around Thanksgiving and then enjoy the fruits of your labor during the holidays," Bellec advises us. "This warming aperitif cocktail is ideal for the holidays and chilly winter months. It pairs best with foie gras and toast as well as Iberico ham and is best enjoyed with friends and family during the holiday season....The longer the preparation is aged in the barrel, the better the Negroni will be."

If even that sounds daunting, there are a couple of other foolproof ways to inject instant holiday bonhomie into any gathering, regardless of size: a great bottle of whiskey or champagne. "Lots of whiskeys are produced every year as a limited release," notes David Vitale, founder of Australian cult whiskey brand Starward. "Quite often they end up on the top shelf waiting for an occasion to open them. I'm going to let you in on a secret—there'll be another amazing limited release next year, so when you buy the whiskey, have an occasion in mind to share it. The holidays are a perfect opportunity to do just that and for me there's no better way to start or end a meal than with a toast with a whiskey."

Want to really let your friends know how highly you value their company? Open a bottle of The Balvenie Fifty: Marriage 0614, the third and final expression in the single malt distillery's series of highly-rare liquids aged 50 years or more, selected by Malt Master David Stewart MBE from some of the brand's most precious and mature stocks. It costs a little over \$40,000 and is said to be worth every penny, which all but guarantees you'll remember each sip forever.

Even that isn't quite as impressive as the new Bond-worthy Black Bowmore DB5 1964, the first collaboration from Bowmore Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky and Aston Martin. Only 25 bottles are being produced at about \$65,000 apiece, and each comes in a custom



case complete with a genuine piston from an Aston Martin DB5. You might think it should be kept under lock and key instead of passed around the table, especially as each pour costs roughly \$5,000. But that's hardly in the holiday spirit.

As for champagne, "It makes music sound better, clothes feel sexier, people look sexier, big ideas seem possible," writes Ariel Arce in her effervescent new book *Champagne: Better with Bubbles*, published by Universe. "It's a legal drug—one that lets you get a little loose, fly high on effervescence, dance a little too close, jump into pools naked. It's a mischievous potion that can allow you to make some silly mistakes—and sometimes a mistake is not a mistake at all, but rather a moment that will change the course of your life."



Top: A Bond-worthy \$65,000 bottle of Black Bowmore DB5 1964, the first collaboration from Bowmore Islay Single Malt Scotch Whisky and Aston Martin; Bottom: Nova whisky from Australia's Starward is an award-winning single malt matured in Australian wine barrels

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