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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

On the mountain road that leads into the Santa Ynez Valley from Santa Barbara, radio reception disappears.

Since I make that drive at least once a week, I decided it was time to subscribe to XM Radio. One of my favorite programs on XM is "Theme Time Radio With Your Host Bob Dylan." Each week, the folk/rock legend puts together an hour-long set of songs dealing with a specific topic. And during one recent show, I heard Dylan playing songs about drinking.

Of course, a number of the tunes had wine as a theme. Which gave me an idea: Let's compile a perpetual list of "wine songs." We'll share some right here in *The Grapevine*, and we'll post the complete list — and constantly update it — on our website.

We're not going to be too strict about the definition of a "wine song." If it mentions wine in the title or the lyrics, it qualifies. Send a list some of your favorites to Martin@Vinesse.com, and we'll get this ball rolling.

There's More to Food & Wine Matching Than Meets the Eye

By Robert Johnson

Take a look at those pork back ribs. Don't they just make your mouth water?

So what kind of wine would you serve with those ribs? It's not a trick question, but it is a challenging one.

Let's start with the pork. Since pork is a meat, one could follow the old rule of "red wine with meat," and choose a nice Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot. But wait — pork

has been called "the other white meat," an observation that renders the meat rule a bit fishy.

Okay, if we can't match the wine to the meat, perhaps we could match it to the sauce. Unfortunately, there's no universal definition or recipe for barbecue sauce, and different styles of sauce call for different types of wine.

As if that weren't confusing enough, there's a third factor that influences the flavor of food: the method of preparation. In the case

of those ribs, they could have been grilled or smoked — with very different flavors in the finished product, and different choices of complementary wines.

From the base ingredient to the type of sauce or condiment used to the preparation method utilized, there's more to matching wine with a dish such as pork back ribs than meets the eye.

Yes, you could follow the popular advice of the day — to simply drink what you like — but doing so may cause you to miss out on some truly amazing food-and-wine pairings.

To help you sort through the maze

of matching possibilities, we're devoting the "Cellarmaster" feature in this special bonus issue of *The Grapevine* to a detailed look at both the food variables and the wine variables that one should consider in order to make the best pairing decisions.

We hope this story will help you enjoy your featured wine selections even more. And we hope you'll share your favorite pairings by dropping us a line at the e-mail address below.



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OUR MISSION:

To uncover and bring you wine gems from around the world, which you're not likely to discover on your own, and which enhance your wine enjoyment.

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If you're looking for a unique wine country getaway this summer, consider the seaside villages of Italy's Tigullio Gulf.

In a country known for red wine and red sauces, the area around Portofino provides a haven for those who prefer lighter fare — in both color and weight.

Portofino was the summer residence of choice for European aristocracy toward the end of the 19th century. By the 1950s, it had become a favorite destination among Americans as well, particularly alluring to artists, politicians and Hollywood stars.

Today, colorful houses line the coastline and surround the town square, and nearby castles showcase magnificent gardens. Pathways within the Portofino Natural Park lead to breathtaking mountain and coastal vistas.

A few short train trips away are the *Cinque Terre* — five enchanting villages that hug the rocky coastline. Centuries-old footpaths wind their way

500 to 1,000 feet above sea level, and lead the inquisitive hiker through olive groves, orchards, chestnut woods and vineyards.

Even more spectacular are the human-carved terraces leading all the way to the shore, and covered with grapevines. Many of the grapes are used to make *Cinque Terre DOC*, a delicate white wine that pairs beautifully with the fresh local seafood.

Other local wines — nearly all whites — include Pigato, Vermentino, Colli di Luni and the intensely aromatic Sclaccheta.

You can get *focaccia*, a puff-pastry *torta pasqualina* pie, or meat dishes such as *tomaselle* at the local restaurants, but the



real culinary star is fish.

Anchovy, whether pickled or used as a stuffing, is a favorite among locals. Ditto for mussels, prepared in a variety of ways. But my favorite is sweet and sour stockfish with pine nuts and raisins — talk about an array of flavors and textures.

A visit to Portofino and its neighboring communities will open your eyes — as it did mine — to an entirely different side of Italy and Italian cuisine.

Master Course in Food-and-Wine Pairing

Wine is not like vodka. There are no Absolut's.

Okay, now that we've gotten the bad joke out of the way, class officially is in session. Today's topic: How to make the best choices when pairing wine and food.

You've undoubtedly heard the standard advice: red wine with meat, and white wine with fish. If you've been drinking wine for a while, you may have read the book, *Red Wine With Fish*, which refutes the standard advice. And you may have heard that it's best to pair ethnic food with wine that comes from the same country or region — not bad advice, but not universally good, either.

Think of all the sauces used at a Chinese restaurant, and you'll see how they drive the flavors.

There are five wine variables and three food variables that contribute to matching success — or otherwise. Once you know about these eight key factors, you'll be as qualified as almost any sommelier to make the most satisfying, satiating and successful choices.

WINE VARIABLES

1. Acid. This is the most important variable of the eight, so we list it first. Always, always, always (did we mention *always*?) make sure the wine's acid is higher than the food's acid. If you don't, the wine will taste flat.



2. Sugar. If the food has sweetness, the wine must be sweeter. This is why off-dry renditions of Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Chenin Blanc go so well with certain Asian dishes.

3. Alcohol. All wines taste more alcoholic with food. The goal is to match the relative levels of wine alcohol and food richness. The reason Riesling is not a good match with Filet Mignon has more to do with the alcohol level than the color of the wine.

4. Oak. Some people love its influence on wine, while others merely tolerate it. But since it so often is one of the defining flavor elements in wine, seek out grilled, roasted or smoked foods. Remember, high heat was used to bend and toast those oak barrel staves.

5. Tannin. This is the reason low-protein food and wine aren't a match made in heaven. To tame those mouth-puckering tannins, serve protein and fat — in other words, meat

and cheese. Just don't overdo the cheese, because it can transform a big red into a wimp.

FOOD VARIABLES

1. Ingredients. As the intensity of the fish, chicken or beef increases, so should the intensity of the wine.

Again, color is not the key. A rich, oaky, buttery Chardonnay is a much better match for a Filet Mignon than a Filet of Sole.

2. Flavor Enhancers. This often is the key pairing factor, because sauces and condiments can define a dish.

You'd select one wine to pair with plain ol' fried chicken; you'd choose a much different wine to pair with chicken and mango salsa. Think of all the sauces utilized at a typical Chinese restaurant, and you'll understand how they truly do drive the flavors of the dishes.

3. Method of Preparation. Often overlooked in the pairing paradigm, but very important. Think about the flavor you get in a dish that has been boiled or steamed, as opposed to the flavor derived from smoking or blackening. Low-impact preparations render the ingredients and the flavor enhancers as the pairing keys. High-impact preparations add one more variable to the matching equation.

Cheat Sheet: What to Serve With the Wines of California

We're not much for sweeping generalities, but because California wines are fairly high in alcohol, fairly low in acid, often high in tannin and almost always oaky, we suggest pairing them with foods that are:

- Low to moderate in acid.
- Low to moderate in salt.
- Lacking in spicy heat.
- High in grilled, smoked, roasted or toasted flavor (if the wine is oaky).
- High in protein and/or fat (if the wine is tannic).
- Of equal weight.

Bonus tip: Food that is a bit salty and/or tart goes best with sparkling wine.



CHICKEN SALAD FOCACCIA SANDWICHES

For a taste of Italy on your next picnic, make these sandwiches and bring along a bottle of light white wine. This recipe makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

- 1 can refrigerated pizza dough
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 tsp. dried tarragon leaves
- 12-oz. can dark and white meat chicken, well drained
- 1/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp. honey dijon mustard
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 tsp. dried tarragon leaves
- 1 avocado, peeled and chopped

Preparation

1. Unroll pizza dough and place on greased cookie sheet. Cut into 4 pieces crosswise.
2. Combine garlic, olive oil and 1 tsp. dried tarragon in small bowl.
3. Spoon half of this mixture over pizza dough pieces. Fold each dough piece in half, starting with short side. Press surface with fingers to dimple. Spoon remaining garlic mixture over folded dough pieces.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes until light golden brown.
5. Meanwhile, combine remaining ingredients in small bowl.
6. When focaccia is done, remove from oven, let cool slightly, then gently pull each apart to split in half and fill with chicken salad mixture.

PENNE PORTOFINO

Here's a recipe that Wine Steward Katie Montgomery got from a local Portofino restaurateur. It matches well with light white or red wines, and serves 4.

Note: Use your own tomato sauce recipe; Katie suggests olive oil and basil for flavoring.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 10 jumbo shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 1/3 cup vodka
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1-lb. pennette rigate

Preparation

1. In a sauté pan large enough to accommodate the pennette later, heat the olive oil and sauté the shrimp until they turn barely pink, about 2 minutes over medium-high heat.
2. Reduce the heat to medium. Add garlic, parsley, salt, pepper and crushed red pepper, and cook for 1 minute.
3. Pour in the vodka and light a match to the pan, keeping your hair and clothes away from the flame. Be very careful, as the pan will flame up.
4. As soon as the flame dies down, add the tomato sauce and cook for 3 more minutes.
5. Stir in the cream, bring to a gentle boil, and cook 2 more minutes.
6. Meanwhile, bring 5 quarts of water to a boil. Add the pennette and salt, and cook until al dente.
7. Drain and sauté with the sauce for 1 minute, adjusting the salt if needed.