

# Some thoughts on pairing **Food & Wine**

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FOOD AND WINE PAIRING IS OFTEN THE TOPIC OF EXTREME OBSERVATIONS. I'VE HEARD THINGS LIKE "JUST EAT WHAT YOU ENJOY AND DRINK WHAT YOU ENJOY AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT PAIRING." THAT ISN'T VERY FAIR IF YOU LIKE SHIRAZ WITH YOUR CALAMARI AND YOUR FIVE DINNER GUESTS ARE FACED WITH THE SAME PROSPECT.

**AT THE OTHER END OF THE ARGUMENT** are the rules. "You must have Port with Stilton!" or, "You must have foie gras with sweet wine." It leaves little room for imagination or trying new things. In this argument it takes guts to hold the middle ground. Let's take a stand.

The most important point: you can only have one diva in a room at a time. What the heck does that mean? Think about it. There is only one star of a show. Any more and they are singing against each other and you end up with a cacophony, not a melody. Someone has to sing harmony. The same is true with food and wine.

If you have spent all day in the kitchen making a multi-layered flavour extravaganza then you need the wine to take a supporting role. You don't want to open

your Phelps Insignia. You are looking for a simple wine that will cleanse the palate and allow you to concentrate on the food. (Reading between the lines: Don't spend too much!)

One of my favourite reds at the moment is the Laughing Stock Portfolio 2006 from the Naramata Bench in B.C. – evidence that Canada can make wine of Olympic standard. It is a Bordeaux blend based on Merlot (Roughly \$67.95 in Ontario and \$40 in B.C.) Packed with cherry, black berries and dark chocolate, it has a long and smooth finish. For this, make sure you have simple food. A roast or grilled meats are perfect. The same is true for the best white wines. Roast chicken or grilled fish are perfect.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 106...



### Pleasing everyone

If you don't have time to think about it, get two wines. Start with an unoaked white like a Santi Pinot Grigio from Italy or a dry Ontario Riesling. Oaked whites can clash with spice or mask delicate flavours and some folks just plain hate them. Unoaked whites are safe and generally pleasing to most palates. Then you want a fruity red. Look to a Californian like Ironstone Cabernet Sauvignon or a Mitolo Jester Shiraz from McLaren Vale. These won't be too tannic to have on their own or with most dishes. These days people like and expect a big burst of fruit. Don't disappoint your guests just to suit a recipe.

### Sweet wine and dessert

The wine must always be sweeter than the dessert or it will taste acidic. That's why fruit pies work well, because they have a little tartness. It is also why Canadian Icewine is such a great dessert wine. It is one of the sweetest wines in the world.

### Wine and cheese

This is the ultimate cliché, but is rarely done well. Cheese is nearly as complicated as wine can be. The secret is that on the whole, white wine works better with cheese. This is particularly true with soft cheeses like brie, goat's cheese or epoisses. Big reds will either taste awful or smother the cheese's delicate flavours. If you do have a red, look to pecorino, hard gouda or a nice old cheddar. Something like a Shaw and Smith Sauvignon Blanc from the Adelaide Hills will work with everything.



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