



Holiday Dinner & Wines 101

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

Go to “school” with Tracy then WOW your family and friends

As a foodie, wine aficionado, writer, and photographer, I am often invited to unique, educational, and fun events. While working on a story at Schramsberg Vineyard in Calistoga, California, Matt Levy, Schramsberg’s marketing and e-commerce manager, invited me to Camp Davies. The following month I attended the camp and expanded my knowledge of how particular wine elements interact with various food flavors. With this new information, I hope to assist you in successfully pairing your upcoming holiday foods with tasty wines.

Davies Vineyards is the sister to Schramsberg Vineyards, and every year (excluding 2020 and 2021), Matt has run a camp twice a year for the past 25 years. The next Camp Davies is March 2023. Camp Schramsberg will be open in the fall of 2023 and the spring of 2024.

At camp I learned about viticultural and winemaking practices, professional tasting, evaluation techniques, and the art of melding fine cuisine with fine wines. The



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attendees included tradespeople and wine lovers, and although many camp activities occur in the vineyards, others happen in a classroom setting.

This year the classes were at Brasswood Cellars. Chef Holly Peterson, the camp food-pairing instructor, has worked worldwide in every aspect of the food and wine industry, including teaching at the Culinary Institute of America in California. At camp we spent hours tasting good and bad combinations and discussing why some worked and some did not.

Wine pairing can be easy or overwhelming. The old philosophy is that fish and light meats go with white wines and red meats and strong sauces go with red wines. Although this works fine in lots of situations, many of today’s home cooks are experimenting with more complex dishes. During Covid many people spent hours watching

cooking shows to improve their culinary skills and branched out and tried new wines.

If you are one of those people, maybe you learned about new herbs, spices, sauces, flavorings, or cooking techniques. Those variables can influence how your dish plays with wine. For instance, consider the average chicken breast; poach, broil, or roast, and you can pair it with almost anything. If you use a blackening method or top it with sweet chili sauce, you must consider your wine choices carefully.

Here are a few things to consider when pairing your dishes with wines.

- Taste your wines before serving them. Make any flavor adjustments before serving the meal.
- Try to complement or contrast your food and wine. Example: The potage below features one prominent yet subtle spice, anise. Find a wine that showcases the same spice or complements it.
- Rethink using processed salt which can make certain wines taste metallic. Use kosher or sea salts.
- Remember that if you choose a wine with a spicy element, it will make spicy foods hotter. Add a bit of cream or butter to the dish to counteract or mellow the reaction. The other option is to serve spicy food with sweeter wines. Example: Serve spicy Thai food with a sweet Riesling or a Gewürztraminer.

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- Understand that a super-sweet wine will make sweet foods taste less sweet. Consider pairing sweet foods with a wine exhibiting more tannins or acidity and less sugar. Other options include serving sweet dishes with dry bubbles or a tawny port that is sweet but not cloying.



- Understand that soy and umami flavors go well with earthy wines.

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- Adding mushrooms or truffles to a dish makes it scream for a pinot noir pairing.

- Combining bitter and bitter makes overwhelming bitter. Beware of those bitter notes found in some cabernets. You do not want to serve them with something bitter like radicchio. Olive oil is also something that can have noticeably bitter notes. Be cautious when using potent extra virgin olive oils.

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A Dinner to Remember

During my time at Camp Davies, Chef John Vega from the Brasswood Bar + Kitchen made these delicious recipes.



Corn potage Serves 4

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 shallots – thinly sliced
- 2 ribs celery – chopped
- ½ bay leaf
- 4 cups fresh corn kernels or frozen corn
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 2 cups chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/16 teaspoon star anise powder



In a saucepan, melt the butter over low heat. Add shallots and celery and cook until soft. Stir in 2 cups corn, bay leaf, broth, and lightly salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 15 minutes. Place the remaining 2 cups of corn and milk into a food processor and puree. Stir the puree into the soup along with the anise and some black pepper to taste. Simmer until the soup slightly thickens and remove the bay leaf.

Serve with croutons and micro greens.

Typically, I would serve this potage with a viognier or sauvignon blanc. We enjoyed it with Davies 2019 St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon. The subtle anise flavors brought the wine and food together beautifully. Have some fun with your pairings but try them first to make sure they work well together.



Honey Glazed Duck

- 4 duck breasts
- 4 tablespoons juniper powder
- 4 tablespoons salt
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 2 cups honey

Season the duck with the dry seasoning, putting most of the salt on the skin side. Cure it for 1 hour. This curing should render some of the fat. Brush off excess seasoning and then sear, skin side down, on low heat for 45 minutes to render fat completely.

Once all skin sides are seared, increase heat to medium and brown skin for about 1 minute if needed before flipping and cooking the flesh side. For medium-rare meat, cook until the internal temperature is 140 degrees.

Glaze duck in the oven with honey for 3-4 minutes at 400 degrees.

Sangria Jus

- ½ medium apple, unpeeled, cored and chopped into small pieces
- ½ medium orange – remove seeds and chop into small pieces (leave on the rind)
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1/3-cup orange juice
- ½ teaspoon brandy
- 750 ml dry Spanish red wine
- 12-½ cups beef stock

Combine all ingredients, bring to a boil. Reduce and simmer and reduce by 3/4. This process should take about 1 hour. Strain and serve. You'll have plenty of sauce, about 2 quarts.



Festive Brussel Sprouts

- 1 pound fresh brussels sprouts, cleaned and cut in half lengthwise
- 4 pieces of bacon or pancetta
- 2 parsnips
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 cup whole milk
- 4 cloves roasted garlic
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Cook bacon in frying pan til crisp; set aside.

Melt butter in a saucepan, add flour. Whisk until light brown. Add the milk and whisk. Add the roasted garlic. Cook until thickened. Place in a blender and blend until smooth or use an immersion blender. Salt and pepper to taste.

Clean parsnips, cut lengthwise. Toss parsnips and Brussels sprouts in olive oil. Add salt and pepper to taste. Roast at 400 degrees until crisp and tender. Depending on the size of the veggies, it should take 20–30 minutes. Plate decoratively for 4 people.

The sprouts pair deliciously with 2019 Davies Vineyards Three Amigos Pinot Noir. This wine has aromas of black raspberry, strawberry, and dark chocolate combined with touches of black pepper and coriander. The flavor notes include bright cranberry, rhubarb, and hints of ginger. It is delicate and elegant with zippy acidity.

Pinot noirs are a traditional favorite for all bird dishes. Just be conscientious of your sauces.

