

IT'S THE HOLIDAYS! Wining and Dining



The pleasures of combining them

The holiday season is upon us, and it is exciting to share sensational meals. I'd like to inspire you with some of my favorite food and wine combinations, suggest a few pairing techniques and encourage you to explore and experience pairings that will wow you, your family and your friends.

Pairing wine and food is not an exact science but more of an art form. It is essential to respect each element carefully, ensuring that the tiniest nuances of the wine, food and sauces shine independently, and that the combinations marry together seamlessly, creating a lavish explosion of taste with each bite. It has been my pleasure to experience numerous incredible wine and food pairings over the last four years.

My Wine Knowledge

Last year I interviewed Erik Seigelbaum, one of fewer than 600 people who hold an Advanced Sommelier Certificate through the Court of Master Sommeliers. In 2019, *Food & Wine* magazine selected Seigelbaum as one of the world's top nine sommeliers. He knows wine.

"My wine and food philosophy is to relax about wine and food pairings," Erik said. "There are millions of wines, so why not drink what you want and choose your meal around it? The difference between a good pairing and a great pairing is patience between the sips and bites."



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Story & photos by Tracy Beard

My wine and food knowledge continues to grow from conversations with Erik, interviews with world-renowned winemakers, chats with professionally trained sommeliers, and wine and food experiences prepared by Michelin-star chefs. I have recreated many dishes and played with a variety of wine combinations.

My Pairing Tips

First and foremost, it is essential to drink what you like. When you contemplate pairing a particular wine with food, consider what Andrea Immer from *Windows on the World* said about wine-and-food synergy: "When the two are paired, both taste better." The idea is that the wine you choose will elevate the taste of the food and the food will enhance the flavor of the wine. Keep the following points in mind:

- 1) Select combinations that complement or contrast each other.
- 2) Acidity acts as a booster for flavor. Ensure that your wine does not get lost in the food and does not overpower it.
- 3) Food and wine both have elements of texture. Full-style wines fill the mouth and can overwhelm delicate dishes. Look for harmony in the texture.
- 4) Sauces play a significant role when pairing food with wine. If you add a rich cream or cheese sauce to a light fish, look for a medium or full-bodied wine to maintain balance.

cont page 17

from page 16

5) Never be embarrassed to ask an expert their opinion on a pairing.

In a world full of exceptional wines, there are exponential pairings. The best way to learn about what works together well is to read and ask about the wine you want to serve, identify the wine's aromas and then taste and taste some more. Wine information can be attained through books, the Internet, wine tasting tours and a unique guide called "Wine Aroma Wheel."

Wine Aroma Wheel

This wheel, formulated to stimulate communication about wine flavors by providing standard terminology, helps wine drinkers label the fragrances and tastes they experience when sipping wine. If you can decipher whether a wine is fruity, floral, spicy or earthy, you can dig deeper and describe whether it contains notes of berry, orange blossom, clove or mushroom. This information will help you select food pairings that will work well with that wine. The more you can describe the wine, the better luck you will have with your pairing. Remember, practice makes perfect.

Read more about the Wine Aroma Wheel, page 9

My Starting Point

I believe the best place to start any meal, event or pairing is with bubbles. Sparkling wines are seductive, and whether you prefer brut Champagne, sparkling prosecco or an effervescent cava, you cannot go wrong with the allure of these tiny bubbles. Sparkling wines exhibit several taste profiles: brut, extra brut, blanc de blanc, rosé and demi-sec (sweet). A classic combination is Champagne with raw oysters, but bubbles also complement fried foods, cheeses, steak and many desserts. Chardonnay, pinot noir, and pinot meunier historically make the best bubbles, and these pair exceptionally with most appetizers and command a grand finale when accompanied with dessert. Now that we have a fantastic beginning and ending to the meal, what goes in between?



My Favorite Combos

I really enjoy old-style chardonnays. Rombauer Vineyards in Napa Valley, California, still makes oaky, buttery chardonnays. One of my favorite dishes is sautéed halibut with a butter wine sauce made with and accompanied by Rombauer chardonnay. This combo is a great example of complementing wine and food.

While dining at Valley of the Moon at Madrone Estate in Sonoma, California, Chef Sam Badolato prepared a lunch with braised beef short ribs accompanied by a creamy polenta and jam made from Madrone Road Zinfandel and estate berries. The berries supplied a sweetness in the jam, and the zinfandel contrasted with the dish by generating a tartness that



mingled deliciously with the beef. Chef served the beef with a Madrone 2014 Old Vine Zinfandel. This zinfandel, made from estate vines dating back 128 years, paired eloquently with the dish.

Pasta with red sauce is best served with a delicious chianti from Tuscany, Italy. Chianti typically is made with sangiovese grapes or a

blend that may include canaiolo and trebbiano grapes. During a dinner at Del Posto, a Michelin-star restaurant in New York City owned by Lidia Bastianich, I enjoyed a delectable bowl of penne in a light red sauce with a glass of Poggerino, Bugialla 2015, Chianti Classico Riserva. It was simply divine.



My Recipe and Pairing Suggestion

I have tasted many wines around the world from budget varietals to expensive grand crus. I never really cared for pinot noir or burgundy, no matter the price point, until I had a glass paired with mushrooms and truffles. We are coming upon the Oregon truffle season. These truffles are not nearly as expensive as those from Italy and France, but if purchased locally and in season, they can serve as an incredible pairing with a local pinot noir.

I find many pinot noirs to be too light. It does not matter whether they come from Burgundy, France, or are local pinots from Oregon. However, my favorite truffle mushroom pizza paired with a



medium-bodied pinot noir from the Willamette Valley AVA or from the Russian River Valley AVA in California makes a match made in heaven.

Guy Fieri's Pizza Dough

- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 Tablespoon active dry yeast
- 2 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour

Dissolve the sugar in 1 cup warm water (110 to 115 degrees). Sprinkle yeast on top and let stand 10 minutes. Add olive oil and salt. Mix in a mixer with a dough hook until it comes together. Knead in mixer or by hand until smooth. Put the dough in an oiled bowl and cover with a light towel. Let stand in a warm place for one hour. Turn out the dough on a lightly floured surface. Cut into two or four pieces. Roll into balls and cover loosely and let rise again for 30 to 45 minutes.

Preheat your oven to 500 degrees.

Flatten dough and form into pizza crusts.

Topping

- 6 Tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 10-15 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese-torn into pieces
- 2 shallots-thinly sliced
- Assorted mixed mushrooms
- 1 small truffle-shaved (Substitute truffle oil if you can't find truffles.)
- Sea salt

Drizzle dough with olive oil. Top with mozzarella cheese, shallots, mushrooms and truffles or truffle oil. Sprinkle with salt. Bake in oven on a pizza pan or pizza stone for 8 – 10 minutes.

