

Favorite White Wines *and* Food

OVER THE PAST SEVEN YEARS I have written extensively about wines of the world, many of which are among my favorites. As we head into spring, I feel a focus on a few of my repetitive choices along with several of my favorite dishes might be appreciated.

Although I have had little exposure to tilapia until the past year, I found a Sicilian recipe of which I never tire. To accompany this dish, I prefer Sauvignon Blanc. During the cooler months, I usually drink white Bordeaux, e.g. de Fieuzal, Smith Haut Lafite or Carbonnieux. These are blends of principally Sauvignon Blanc and a minority of Semillon. Ranging from \$40-\$90, these wines are great values in Bordeaux. The Sauvignon Blanc is dry but slightly fruity with great minerality, while the Semillon brings a viscosity element rounding out the mouth feel.

These wines age well for a decade or so and become more interesting and complex with age when they exhibit both secondary and tertiary smells and flavors. They are also great accompanied by many white soft and semi-soft cheeses from France. During the warmer months, I have found that my all-time value white wine – Eclat de Sauvignon (about which I wrote in QB Sept/Oct 2011) is so refreshing and has the perfect balance to be drunk by itself or to go with this great Sicilian fish recipe.

During season, we eat a lot of fresh halibut. Years ago, I gave the recipe to a woman who made it and sent me a tear stained letter saying this recipe changed her life. I can almost believe her given how much I love it. I would like to share this recipe with you and talk about my favorite wines with it (see box).

Without any doubt, the world's greatest Sauvignon Blanc is produced in the appellation Pouilly Fumé by the descendents of Didier Dagenau. The best (\$150) is Silex, followed by Pur Sang (\$100). Both have to be experienced to be believed. Notwithstanding the prices, the problem is in locating the bottles. I always buy every bottle of Silex I can find from great vintages and I don't have many bottles. Another great choice, and sometimes I think even better with this halibut, is Pascal or

François Cotât's Monts Damnées, a \$50 Sancerre from Chavignol. There is a richness and full mouth feel with this wine that is otherworldly, and it goes perfectly with the rich vinaigrette. Lucien Crochet produces a Sancerre, which would be quite acceptable if you cannot find the above referenced wines.

I probably eat more salmon than any other fish and enjoy wine pairings as much as with any other food. The quality of salmon varies by type, source, and purveyor, as well as freshness. Without any doubt, most people believe that Copper River Salmon is the best and I agree. The only problem is that it is only available fresh from approximately mid-May to the middle of July and often only for several weeks of this interval. When I can get it, I grill it using only lemon and marry it with the 'biggest' expression of Chardonnay-Corton Charlemagne from Burgundy. This is truly a match made in heaven. It marries with lobster, but the price of \$100-\$200-plus, prohibits most of us from drinking it often.

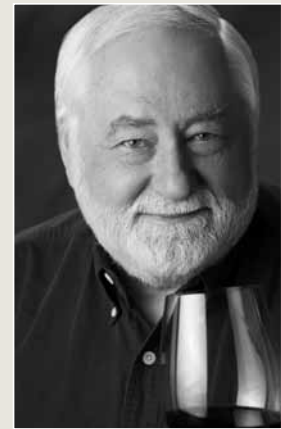


PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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To the rescue comes the oldest Chardonnay vine product wine from Argentina. I wrote about this wine in *Argentina's Best* in July/Aug. 2009. Although the salmon which follows Copper River (Sockeye) goes best with Corton-Charlemagne, Luigi Bosca's Finca Los Nobles is also a great substitute and it costs only \$26 at Costco.

Following sockeye season, I prefer steelhead, a salmon-trout hybrid, to any other salmon, wild or farm-raised. With steelhead, the Finca Las Nobles is my favorite wine, and this combination gets me through the winter until Copper River season. I just wish I could find a vegetable I like as well as fried potatoes and onions to accompany this fish, although I have recently enjoyed roasted sweet potato cubes.

I hope you enjoy these wine and food pairings. I should pass along a comment from the owner of one of Chicago's best-known wine retailers. Several years ago he told me that in his opinion the thing that most differentiates me from his other best customers is that while many of them will spend 'an arm and a leg' on red wines which they love, I am the only one who matches my red expenditures on white wines. If you want to see what I'm talking about in this article, follow my lead. À votre santé!

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Sicilian Style Tilapia

SERVES 2

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 to 1.5 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ Spanish onion, thinly sliced
- ½ red pepper, sliced
- ½ green pepper, sliced
- ½ cup pimento-stuffed green olives, sliced
- 1/8 cup capers, drained and rinsed
- 14.5 oz. can diced tomatoes with green chilies
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- ¼ cup flour
- 1-1.5 lb. tilapia or cod
- Salt and pepper to taste.

DIRECTIONS:

Saute onions and peppers in olive oil until tender. Stir in tomatoes. Saute for about 10 minutes. Stir in olives and capers. Keep warm on lowest setting while cooking fish. Stir in the vinegar just before serving. In separate skillet add 3 T. vegetable oil. Heat to medium. While oil is heating, lightly flour the fish fillets. Season the fish with salt and pepper. Fry the fish in the hot oil until lightly browned and flakes easily. Serve the sauce over the fish or alongside the fish.

Fresh Ginger Vinaigrette

YIELDS 2 CUPS

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 4 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- ½ cup diced, peeled, and seeded ripe tomatoes
- 4 tablespoons scallions, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons fresh ginger, grated
- 2 tablespoons parsley leaves, finely chopped
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

Put the mustard and vinegar into a mixing bowl and whisk the oil vigorously. Stir in the remaining ingredients. Serve at room temperature over or alongside the grilled fish.