

Winter Wines and Food

As many of you who know me best, I drink almost no wine without food. Fortunately, I have lived most of my life with someone who knows as much or more about food preparation than I know about wine. As I often tell my wife, Pat, if she were not such an outstanding chef, I would not be so vertically challenged, weight wise.

Over the past 2.5 years, I've given lots of information about wines and ideas of wine and food pairings, but not in a concise, easy-to-access article. This too shall wait. I've decided to share two of my favorite winter meals with suggested wines. The bonus lies in that my wife is sharing her recipes for both.

The first recipe is Mediterranean Stew. It was purported to be Ed Asner's favorite meal. Whether it was or still is, is beside the point because it's one of our two favorite winter dishes. The dish goes extremely well with many wines but our choice is always wine from the Mediterranean, and most often, a Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Great choices include Château Beaucastel, Le Vieux Donjon, Clos Des Papes, Bosquet des Papes, Domaine Du Caillou, as well as many others. Older vintages (five to 15 years) are best, but if it is a current release, decant it for several hours before serving.

Alternative, less expensive Rhone appellations include Gigondas, Vacqueyras, and Cotes Du Rhone-Villages Rasteau (Jerome Bressy's, Gourt de Mautens is my favorite), as well as inexpensive Côtes du Rhône (including Coudoulet du Beaucastel — my favorite). All of these wines pair extremely well due to the minerality of the southern Rhone terrior resulting from the extremely rocky vineyards. In fact, the vineyards are generally full of old, round stones (galets) weighing several pounds with no or minimally visible soil. I once saw a vine 40 feet in length growing at Domaine Du Caillou. Northern Rhone wines, i.e., Hermitage and Côte-Rôtie would overpower the dish unless they were quite old. Other acceptable choices would be Spanish wines based on Grenache, Tempranillo, Monestrel, and Syrah, Australian GSM's (Grenache-Syrah-Mourvèdre) as well as older Zinfandels from California.

The other savory dish is one that neither of us had had until recently. While we both love pork ribs, we had not experimented with beef ribs. After my wife had a pleasant experience with them on a business trip to Texas, she started looking for great recipes and found several that looked promising. Whether we'll ever get past the one presented here is unknown, as we both fell for it and in fact used it for our daughter's recent wedding dinner reception. In fact, this dish could be served all year but the complementing wines make it better suited for winter.

My favorite wines for this meal are big in structure. While a large scale Zinfandel would work with the dish, I prefer Syrah-based wines. Several Syrahs from Washington would be superb with it — Betz Family Winery and Cayuse both produce several variations, any of which are great. From California, I would pick any of the offerings from Pax, Saralee's Vineyard from Arrowood, and multiple offerings from Alban, Lagier-Meredith, Qupé, Saxum, and Tablas Creek. In addition to these wines, all that I referenced for the other dish would go well with this one also.

I encourage you to try these dishes, as they are relatively easy to prepare and showcase some of my favorite wine pairings with food. Santé. U



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Recipe courtesy of Ed Asner via Bon Appétit, November 1977

MEDITERRANEAN STEW

Sauté in large skillet 'til brown.

- 1 lb. chuck steak, 1.5-inch cubes
- 1 lb. sweet Italian sausage

Drain meat, slice sausage, put in Dutch oven. Add:

- 1 ½ cups burgundy
- 2 cups water
- 6 oz. can tomato paste
- 2 tsp. salt
- 3/4 tsp pepper
- 3 minced garlic cloves
- 2 tsp. paprika

Bring to boil, cover, simmer 1.5 – 2 hours.

Add, cover, and cook 20 minutes.

- 1 lb. cubed cooked ham
- 3 coarsely chopped medium onions
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1 coarsely chopped sweet red pepper
- 1 tsp. grated lemon rind.
- 2 1-pound cans drained garbanzo beans

Add, cover, and cook until cabbage is crisp tender, about 15-20 minutes.

- 1 head chopped cabbage

Refrigerate overnight. Skim off fat. Reheat and enjoy with crusty bread and your glass of wine.

6-8 servings

For the Braised Hoisin Beer Short Ribs recipe by Dave Lieberman, go to www.foodnetwork.com.