



Well Red

Red Wine and Food Pairings



RED WINE PAIRING SEEMS MORE visceral to me, at least with less expensive wines. I love *temperanillo*, the most widely planted red wine vine in Spain. It produces some of the most food friendly wines I have found. One of my favorites, *Pesquera*, is a perfect match for pork, beef, lamb and chicken as well as grilled vegetables. Another example, *Cenit*, is from the oldest vines in the northern hemisphere and is big and bold and goes extremely well with beef and lamb. Finally, also from Spain is one of the greatest wines in the world, *Vega Sicilia Unico*, a blend but mostly *Cabernet Sauvignon*.

Italian regional cooking is high on my list of cuisines and I never have it without having an appropriate regional wine for balance. My two favorites are from Piedmont. The lighter, *Dolcetto*, has great fruit and tannins and when served slightly chilled (55° F) is the best wine I know to marry with eggplant. *Barbera*, the other widely planted regional grape, is superb with tomato-based pastas as well as pizza.

My favorite grape is *Nebbiolo* from which come the great *Barolo* and *Barbaresco* wines. These wines are genetically related to *Pinot Noir* but while relatively light in color they are bigger and bolder, particularly *Barolo*. The wines, whether of the new (*barriques*) or old (*cask*) school of

production, age well for many years (decades in fact) with the “new school” examples being approachable early. The greatest foods with either wine are white truffle dishes – e.g. eggs, simple pasta or risotto with a few shavings on top – *fettucini alfredo* or strong flavored meats like lamb, steak, veal chops, and duck.

At the conclusion of a meal it is divine to chew a piece of aged *Parmigiano-Reggiano* chased with the remaining *Nebbiolo*. My favorite producers include *Altare*, *Scavino*, *Gaja*, *Giacomo Conterno*, *Aldo Conterno* and *Vietti*. Other great rich wines include the “super Tuscans” *Ornellaia*, *Sassicaia*, and *Solaia* from *Bolgeri* and one of Italy’s greatest and relatively unknown wines—*Arnaldo-Caprai’s 25 Anni* made from the *Sagrantino* grape. Some years ago, I made a trip to Italy solely to procure this wine. It is the only wine from Italy to get the famed *Gambero Rosso’s Tre Bicchieri* award from 1993 to 2001, and could not compete in 2002 because it was not made due to bad harvest climate conditions. Guess what? The second label, *Collepiano*, was made in 2002 with fruit from the best available and it won the *Tre Bicchieri*. The only warning? The wine demands big food as its intensity would obliterate mild dishes.

Another fabulous wine, this one from the slopes of *Mt. Vesuvius* is from the *Aglianico*

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grape. My favorite is *Serpico* by *Feudi di San Gregorio* but also superb is *Taurasi* by *Mastroberardino*. Finally, *Brunello di Montalcino* is widely regarded as one of Italy’s best wines and it pairs well with wild game, steaks and aged hard cheeses. It’s related cousin, *Chianti*, made from *Sangiovese* grape is perhaps Italy’s most recognized wine and is sublime with pasta and meats.

Australia produces a wide range of wines but is best known for its *Shiraz* and *Cabernet Sauvignon*. *Shiraz* (*Syrah* elsewhere) is a bold red with overtones of black pepper and other spices which marry well with grilled beef and lamb. Australia’s icon wine is *Penfolds Grange* (largely *Shiraz* with minor *Cabernet Sauvignon*) and it may be my favorite red wine. Although *Penfolds’ Bin 707* is a great *Cabernet Sauvignon*, my favorite is *Wynns John Riddoch*. Both must be experienced to be believed.

Zinfandel, while originally from Croatia, has

found its place of best expression in the United States. While perhaps the greatest wine for barbecue, it is food friendly with steaks, burgers, pizza, and pasta. My favorites are Ridge Geyserville and Ridge Lytton Springs. Also very good are Ravenswood, A. Rafanelli and Rosenblum.

Pinot noir has found great terroir in both New Zealand and the United States. New Zealand's best examples include Felton Road Block 3 and Block 5. Recently Craggy Range had produced great Pinot Noir especially from the Te Muna Road vineyard. These wines are exceptional with duck and turkey. My favorite producers of great U.S. Pinot Noirs include August West, Marcassin, Aubert and William Selyem.

The United States is widely known for producing great Cabernet Sauvignon, it is also increasingly known for producing great syrah. Syrah producing areas are the Central Coast (Cal.), Washington State, as well as Napa and Sonoma Valleys. My choices include Lillian, Paul Lato, Darioush, Qupé, Pax, and Betz Family Winery. These wines demand wild game, beef, or lamb.

Cabernet Sauvignon excels in the United States, particularly in Napa and Sonoma but in other places as well, particularly in Washington. My favorite producers include my all time choice Ridge Montebello (Santa Cruz), as well as Chateau Montelena, Darioush, Cayuse and Quilceda Creek (Washington).

Finally to France. Without a doubt, the greatest varietals and greatest quality wines come from France. One could live quite well confined only to wine produced in Burgundy, Bordeaux and the Rhone .

Most people agree there is nothing to rival the greatest pinot noir from Burgundy. The nuances of flavors and aromas can be breathtaking. Served with duck, wild birds, veal or rabbit with rich sauces, especially when accompanied with wild mushrooms—this makes one pause to reflect on how good life can be.

From the northern Rhone comes the great Hermitage and Cote Rôte wines produced from syrah. Although expensive, examples from Guigal, Chapoutier, and Chave take this grape to heights rarely approached by others. They are great food wines when paired with wild game, steak au poivre, and lamb.

The southern Rhone is most famous for Chateaufeuf-du-Pape which can contain 13 different varietals. It is one of my favorite reds and I like Chateau de Beaucastel as well or better than any others. As well as a great accompaniment with big meats, it goes well with grilled vegetables and ratatouille. Cheaper appellation offerings include Gigondas, Vacqueras and Llistrac.

We close with Bordeaux—the most famed wine region in the world. Except for the wines from the 1855 Medoc Classification and certain wines from St. Emilion and Pomerol there is a glut of very good wines currently available from Bordeaux. That's good news for those who demand the classified growths as there is downward pricing pressure there also except for the top producers. The classic pairings are Bordeaux and lamb, steak, and prime rib. There are too many favorites to list; however, the Five First Growths are superb, but so are Leoville-las-Cases, Pontet-Canet, Pichon Lalande, Pichon Baron, Cos d'Estournel, as well as others. A Santé! U

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