



# Pair Shaped



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**A**S THOSE WHO READ my wine column know, I usually talk about wine and food pairings. However, I felt that a recap of some previous suggestions and the addition of others would be appropriate for an easy reference.

Champagne and sparkling wines made in the same method as champagne are often thought of as celebratory wines. In fact, these wines with their bracing acidity are very food friendly. Favorite foods are blinis with smoked salmon or caviar with garni, oysters as well as Dover sole and brill,

Notwithstanding the allure of sparkling wine, I prefer to start the occasion with non-sparkling wine. Sauvignon Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc blended with Semillon (a la Bordeaux) make for a great

beginning, with or without food. Favorites include Sancerre and Pouilly Fume from the Loire Valley as well as similarly styled wines from the United States, Chile, New Zealand as well as other parts of France. These wines pair wonderfully with many white cheeses, especially Chevre, light-to-medium bodied white fish (especially halibut), most crustaceans (except lobster), and bruschetta, as well as chips and salsa. Another wine from the Loire is exceptional but is relatively difficult to find. Made from the Chenin Blanc grape, it finds its ultimate expression in the appellation of Savennieres. Although made in dry, off-dry and sweet styles, one of my favorites is the dry offering by Baumard. The regular bottling and especially the more ex-

pensive label Papillon are worth the treasure hunt to find them.

Two relatively unknown wines in the United States — Arneis from Piedmont in Italy and Viura from Spain — are wonderful alternatives to Sauvignon Blanc as are Albariño (Spain), Verdehlo (Portugal), dry Riesling (Eden and Clare Valley, Australia) and Torrentes (Argentina). These wines are very good without food (and are excellent thirst quenchers in hot weather) but still have enough acidity to match up well with foods that pair well with Sauvignon Blanc.

For those who prefer off-dry or slightly sweeter wines, great choices can be found in Gruner Veltliner (Austria), Semillon (Hunter Valley,





*Chateau d'Yquem*

Australia and Bordeaux), and Riesling in the Kabinett and Spätlese levels (Germany, Austria and Alsace, France). These wines age extremely well, have great acidity and therefore are excellent food wines. Great matches include light meat salads, e.g. tuna and chicken, veal and poultry dishes, Asian, Southwestern or Mexican and Indian fare. In general, the more acidic the food the higher acidity the wine should have. Conversely, the sweeter the food, the sweeter the wine should be,

I saved the ubiquitous Chardonnay grape for the last main-course wine. It is the most popular wine in the United States and ranges from almost sweet to bone-dry and from unoaked to extremely oaky in style. Although I drink and love the wines mentioned heretofore, I drink more Chardonnay than any serious food wine. While there are great examples of Chardonnay producers in the United

States, such as Aubert, Peter Michael, Kistler, Stony Hill, Ridge (Monte Bello) as well as others – with one of the world's greatest from Australia (Leeuwin Art Series) – most of the greatest Chardonnay comes from France. As I noted in the July/August 2010 issue of QB, Chablis is one of my favorite wines. This unoaked Chardonnay perhaps best expresses the essence of the grape. Great accompaniments include simple white fish, oysters, crab, shrimp and mild white soft cheeses like Brie, Camembert and Saint Andre.

Although it may sound fickle, my all-time favorite Chardonnay appellation is Corton-Charlemagne, which is generally thought to be the best wine with salmon and lobster. It is rich and munificent. Think melted butter. This wine was “invented” when the emperor Charlemagne challenged his winemaker to make him a white wine that he

would love as much as the only wine he drank, Le Corton, a Grand Cru Burgundy. This was Charlemagne's way of meeting his wife's demand to stop spilling red wine in his white beard. The winemaker's resounding success is forevermore immortalized by the addition of the emperor's name to his former favorite. This wine is so rich and intense that at the end of a recent New Year's Eve dinner, I finished my last glass of 1989 Bonneau de Martray Corton Charlemagne (ironically from the vineyard which Charlemagne owned) after I had my last glass of 1983 Chateau Margaux (one of the world's greatest red wines).

The other twin titian of Chardonnay is the even more expensive Le Montrachet. It is more linear in nature with seemingly greater acidity and can be served with great seafood dishes with rich sauces. Less expensive sub-appellations,



such as. Batard-Montrachet, Bienvenues Batard-Montrachet and even the single vineyard wines from Pugligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet, are fabulous (but not inexpensive) alternatives. Lucky for most of us, even the village wines from these appellations can be very good.

Finally, I saved the best for last. Chateau d'Yquem is arguably the greatest wine in the world. As a dinner opener, paired with foie gras, it is without peer. By itself or paired with a fully ripe pear or a blue cheese, it's the perfect closer for a meal. Given the high cost, thankfully there are alternatives — Premier Cru Sauternes such as Climens and Rieussec as well as great dessert wines from the Riesling grape, like Beerenauslese, Trockenbeerenauslese and Eiswein. Alternatives, yes, but do not allow yourself to exit this world without experiencing the ultimate sensory olfactory and taste phenomenon, Chateau d'Yquem. A santé. U

### Wine notes

*Pricing for Corton-Charlemagne would be \$100 to \$200.*

*Chateau d'Yquem is from \$200 to \$400 for a half bottle.*

*These wines can be found at Binny's, Costco, and Wine Discount Center as well as your local independent wine shops and online websites and wine clubs.*

*For more information on Chateau d'Yquem, please visit the Quintessential Barrington website at [www.qbarrington.com](http://www.qbarrington.com) and click on "Down Cellar." "French Fantasies" discusses Chateau d'Yquem in the Nov. Dec. 2008 article.*



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