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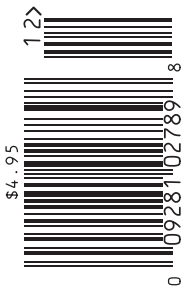
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Home of Artful Living



**GET YOUR
RED ON**
Men's fashion takes a
bright turn for the
holidays

FOOD + WINE
Find the perfect match
for your holiday table





Wine Match

The perfect marriage between wine and food is easy if you follow some basic rules.

BY PATRICK BARTLETT

Summer, the season of eating and enjoying wine and culinary celebrations, is all about casual, refreshing, sun-soaked moments. Eventually this season passes the baton to the cooler autumn, followed by the chill of winter. And with this passing, things begin to heat up in the kitchen.

In autumn and winter, culinary decisions transition from the simple joys of outdoor grilling and park picnics to more elaborate celebrations and holiday traditions. Along with this come different, and often more complex, challenges for pairing wine with food.

Creating menus for the kaleidoscope of impromptu and carefully planned meals often include much heartier, celebratory choices, both in the dishes and the wines that make them sing. For many, the idea of picking the right wine can be daunting. The old rule of red wine with red dishes and white wine with white dishes has merit, but there are so many reasons to bend these guidelines.

We are fortunate to live in the Inland Empire, with an abundance of

local wineries and wine choices. To make holiday meal planning easy, let's take a look at some of the wine styles found in our area. Finding the perfect wine is simply a matter of understanding basic food and wine pairing principles.

As a wine educator and chef, I like to tell people that matching wine with food is simple, and can be successful if you follow some basic rules.

1. Choose a wine whose flavor profiles complement the food. If it's bold, serve with bold food; spicy, serve with spicy food. Does the dish use fruit? With a berry-infused demi-glace, for instance, serve a wine that has those same berry notes.

2. Choose a wine with flavor profiles that work as a harmonious contrast to the food. If the food is spicy, serve a bright, slightly off-dry wine to balance the spice. If the food is heavy with cream or butter, serve a wine that's dry, clean and cleanses the palate between bites.

With major holiday and celebratory meals on the horizon, let's start with some classic white wines.

Chardonnay. Chardonnays are extremely versatile wines and can be made in a myriad of styles. The most common California style is a big round wine aged with oak. Oak creates a more complex toasty wine, along with the buttery mouthfeel oaked Chardonnay lovers prefer. Thanks to the richness of these wines, they work especially well with roasted turkey and most roasted game and pork. They are also great with cream sauces and anything with fall spice profiles. Nutmeg sings with these wines.

If the Chardonnay you prefer is the unoaked style, offering more lively fruit and at times subtle sweetness, you have a great wine for holiday cheese boards. If it's an especially fruity wine, or if you have a late harvest dessert wine made with Chardonnay grapes, you could easily pair the wine with your best pumpkin or pecan pie.

Viognier. Viogniers, like Chardonnays, are extremely versatile and offer varied expressions based on the winemaker's preferences. The major difference is the added floral aromatics often found in Viogniers. The basic pairing rules used for Chardonnays can easily interchange with these wines. If your holiday celebrations include Jewish traditions, this is a great wine for latkes and fish dishes. If the wine is on the fruitier side, it can be a great choice for desserts like classic cheesecake.

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Roussanne and Marsanne. The Southern California climate is very similar to Southern France, especially the Rhône region. Many of the wines you will find in Temecula tasting rooms are Rhône grapes. The Roussanne and Marsanne grapes seem to always go together. In France they are generally blended into one wine. There are more and more of these wines showing up in Temecula. They tend to be on the richer side, with lots of stone fruit. They are great with cheese boards and creamy sauces, and do well with game meat thanks to their depth.

Sauvignon Blanc. Sauvignon Blancs are some of the liveliest of the white wines found in our area. They are bright, have more acid, and generally explode with tropical notes, along with citrus. These wines are wonderful if your cooking style complements them. They are great with bright soups like consommé and spicy Asian influenced dishes like sweet and sour. They are also great complements to salty cheeses and savory dishes. One favorite for me is the after-Thanksgiving classic: a sandwich of turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce; serve this with a chilled glass of Sauvignon Blanc and you've just elevated your meal.



Now let's talk about the reds. Because holiday menus include a myriad of flavors, it's best to choose reds that balance, rather than compete. Balancing is what mid-weight reds do best. This class of reds usually has more acid, lighter fruit expression, and the wines are less dominant in their flavor profiles.

Pinot Noir. Pinot is classic with holiday meals. It boasts all the right combinations to complement or contrast with the meal. You are going to get cherries, some earth, spice and the requisite acid that identifies a more food-friendly wine. This is as close to perfect as you can get for playing nicely with so many different flavors: smoky, spicy, rich sauces, cheese plates; they all seem to harmonize with this amazing food wine.

Grenache, Barbera, Sangiovese. These are Pinot Noir's Mediterranean cousins, and there are many options in Temecula. You can practically interchange any of them with Pinots when it comes to food pairing. They all tend to offer brighter, more vivid fruit: cherries, raspberries and strawberries, and varying degrees of spiciness.

Tempranillo. Tempranillo is the dominant red grape of Spain. It's not quite as light as the Pinot Noirs, but not as big as Syrahs and Cabernets. Tempranillo is an earthy wine, with darker berries and spice. If you're all about darker meats like roasts, ribs and cured meats, this is your friend. As an aperitif wine, it's wonderful with tapas, roasted almonds and olives.

Zinfandel. California Zinfandels are famed for being big on ripe fruit, higher in alcohol, and tantalizing with signature black pepper and spice. These wines go almost as well with desserts as they do savory dishes. Imagine your grandmother's mincemeat or gingerbread cookies. This wine with spicy ribs or buffalo wings is a foregone conclusion.

Syrah. Like the Zinfandel, Syrah is the "other" bold wine for holiday dining. Weight-wise, Syrahs are bigger and bolder, in the same basic ways as Zinfandels, but they have the added punch of smokiness and practically scream to be paired with barbecued or smoked meat. The wine matches the boldness of the meat while the berries and spice create an added layer of flavor. This is the wine that seems to play the best with sweet potatoes. Sweet potato pie would be a match made in heaven.



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Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cab Franc. This is the trifecta of elegant wines from Bordeaux, France. The Cabernet is vibrant, with lots of dark berries, often subtle green notes like mint or eucalyptus, and waves of chocolate on the finish. The Merlots are all about cherries and velvety mouthfeel, and the Cab Franc is more playful with brighter fruit, some aromatics and green notes. The best way to think about pairing with these wines is to think classic French: braised, roasted or sauced dishes that focus on balanced flavor profiles. Think of dishes that are rich, but not overly demonstrative.

With these tips, you are sure to wow at every holiday spread you prepare, or party you attend as an honored guest, bearing gifts of wine. Happy wine, food and holidays!

Patrick Bartlett is a freelance writer, wine and food educator and winery brand consultant. He co-owns and operates Mood Wine, an online wine store with a focus on wine tastings, dinners and wine country tours. moodwine.com