



Pair Shaped

If you're looking for a primer on wine pairings, read on. If you're looking one of the world's finest wineries, visit Chateau Y'Quem (above).

FIRST, AN INTRODUCTION. Let's clink glasses and get to know each other. While I've spent much of my professional career in management consulting, for the past 40 years, wine has been my true passion, inspiring me to travel the world in search of the world's finest producers, judge international wine competitions and offer advice, when solicited, to any client who might value it. Closer to home, I design wine cellars, work as a wine specialist at the Lake Zurich Costco and have written a wine column, Down Cellar, for our sister publication, *Quintessential Barrington* (www.qbar-rington.com), for the last four and a half years.

I thought we'd begin our discussion with a favorite topic — wine and food pairings — and felt

a recap of some previous suggestions and the addition of others would be a valuable debut topic.

So where to begin? With bubbly, of course. Champagne and sparkling wines are often thought of as celebratory wines. In fact, their bracing acidity is very food friendly. Think blinis with smoked salmon or caviar with garni, oysters as well as Dover sole and brill.

But to be honest, I usually prefer to start with non-sparkling wine. Sauvignon Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc blended with Semillon (a la Bordeaux) make for a great opener, with or without food. Favorites include Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé 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 chèvre, light- to medium-bodied white fish (especially halibut), most crustaceans (except lobster), bruschetta as well as simple chips and salsa.

Also remember the allure of the Chenin Blanc grape, which finds its ultimate expression in the appellation of Savennières. 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 expensive 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 Sau-



vignon Blanc, as are Albariño (Spain), Verdelho (Portugal), dry Riesling (Eden and Clare Valley, Australia) and Torrentes (Argentina). In general, 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 Grüner Veltliner (Austria), Sémillon (Hunter Valley, 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, such as tuna and chicken, veal and poultry dishes, Asian, Southwestern/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. 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 and one of the world's greatest from Australia (Leeuwin Art Series), most of the greatest Chardonnays come from France.

As I noted in the *Quintessential Barrington* July/August 2010 issue featuring Chablis, this 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-André.

Although I may sound fickle, my all-time favorite Chardonnay appellation is Corton-Charlemagne (\$100-\$200 per bottle), 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 du Martray Corton Charlemagne (ironically from the vineyard which Charlemagne owned) after I had my last glass of

1983 Chateau Margaux (one's of the world's greatest red wines).

The other twin titan of Chardonnay is the even more expensive Le Montrachet. It is generally 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 Bâtard-Montrachet, Bienvenues Bâtard-Montrachet and even the single vineyard wines from Puligny-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 (\$200-\$400 for a half bottle) 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 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 olfactory and taste phenomenon, Chateau d'Yquem. A santé. 



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