

Wines for Hearty Holiday Meals pt.2



Welcome back! It's mid-December and the parties and entertaining will continue for at least another two weeks. In my last post, I proposed an alternative approach to pairing heartier winter fare with lighter wines, exploring the harmonious marriage of bright, refreshing high-acid white wines and low-tannin, high-acid, chillable reds. For this continuation of that conversation, I'm going to lean in the opposite direction. Why? For the fun of it, of course! And, also, because when it comes to pairing wine with food, there shouldn't be any 'rules,' only suggestions. Let's remember: Taste is subjective!

My thinking, again, is based on what I like to call 'Wine Pairing 101,' which is basically to choose wines that either compliment or contrast the general weight and taste of the dish. Of course, this is for sure a bit rudimentary, given how many flavor factors come into play in a single recipe, but it's a good starting point. Therefore, if big, hearty whites and reds are where you might naturally lean with hearty fare, that would be complimentary. For this column, I'm exploring what that looks like.

White Wines

Suggested Pairings

Champagne/Sparkling

You might not think of Champagne as full-bodied or 'big' wines, but they pack a lot of complexity thanks to their mandatory aging (a minimum of two years). This makes them much more layered in flavors than a Prosecco, for example (which are released quickly after their made to maintain freshness). Champagnes, and those made like them, can be paired with every course on the table, from hors d'oeuvres through dessert (though none of these below would work with sweets; ask your retailer for something 'demi-sec' or slightly sweet).

Look for:

Champagne Bollinger 'PN AYC18,' Champagne, France NV \$150

Domaine Carneros by Taittinger 'Le Réve' Blanc de Blancs Sparkling Brut, Napa Valley \$120

Champagne Ayala Blanc de Blancs, Champagne, France 2016 \$90

Langlois Chateau Crémant de Loire Brut, France NV \$29

Juvé + Camps Reserva de la Familia, Spain NV \$23

Full-body

In my experience, Chardonnay gets a bad rap for being 'too oaky,' which is a vast generalization. I think that many 'value' or inexpensive Chards are made to emulate high-quality oak (for aging) by using cheap bells and whistles to augment the flavor. High-quality Chardonnays are worth the hunt and the price, like the Santenay below (from Chardonnay's home in Burgundy, France) and the Small Vines from sunny California. The Sauvignon Blanc-based blend from Ornellaia represents one of the rare great whites from Italy. And the two Rhône blancs are my answer to anyone who says they're 'stuck' in Chardonnay: Behold the deliciousness of Marsanne, Roussanne and Viognier grapes from their sources in the Rhône.

Look for:

Domaine du Cellier aux Moines 'Beauregard,' Santenay Premier Cru, Burgundy, France 2021 \$70

Small Vines Chardonnay 'TBH Vineyard,' Sonoma Coast, California 2017 \$66

Ornellaia 'Poggio alle Gazze dell'Ornellaia' Toscana IGT, Tuscany, Italy 2021 \$80

Domaine de Nalys Châteauneuf-du-Pape 'Saintes Pierres de Nalys' Blanc, Rhône, France 2020 \$55

E. Guigal Condrieu, Rhône, France 2020 \$68

Red Wines

Suggested Pairings

Medium-body

The difference between 'medium-' and 'full-' bodied wines is a bit subjective, because how we process tannins (the bitter-drying component in red wine) varies by palate. For me, these represent the 'juicy middle' of the red wine spectrum; they're much 'bigger' than, say, Gamay or Pinot Noir, but not as massive in tannin as Cabernet and friends (see below). In other words, they are both gulpable on their own, but also formidable enough to stand up to hearty fare.

Look for:

Chateau Saint-Roch Maury Sec 'Kerbuccio,' Languedoc-Roussillon, France 2019 \$20

Masciarelli 'Villa Gemma' Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo Superiore, Italy 2022 \$86

Ruffino 'Riserva Ducale Oro-Gold' Chianti Classico Gran Selezione DOCG, Italy 2020 \$50

Materra Petite Sirah, Napa Valley, California 2019 \$50

E. Guigal Côte-Rôtie 'Brune et Blonde de Guigal' Rhône, France 2019 \$95

Full-body

These are the wines that, for many of us, represent Winter: They are bold, assertive, flavorful and lingering. Thanks to their tannins they have staying power that will help them age longer than lighter reds, but they can be disarmed happily with food, which is my goal whenever pairing wines with anything. Please remember one important fact that is often misunderstood: ALL red wines should be slightly chilled (between 55 and 60 degrees is perfect); red wines should NEVER be served 'room temperature.'

Look for:

Gianni Gagliardo del Comune di La Morra Barolo DOCG, Italy 2019 \$60

Le Ragose Amarone della Valpolicella Classico DOCG Veneto, Italy 2011 \$80

Matthews Claret, Columbia Valley, Washington 2021 \$55

Lang & Reed 'Two-Fourteen' Cabernet Franc, Napa Valley 2019 \$90

Matthew Bruno 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon, Rutherford, California \$140

“Taste is Subjective!”