

THE IMPACT OF SWEETNESS LEVELS IN WINE AND FOOD

The level of sweetness in food and wine can be difficult to judge. While North American tastes have a strong preference for sweet things (just look at the candy aisle at your closest food store), we are currently biased against sweet wines. In the United States, sweet wines are frequently associated with wines of low quality, but this is certainly not always the case. Canadian ice wines and Sauternes are very sweet, but few would suggest they are of low quality. In fact, these and other dessert wines are in many cases the most expensive and opulent wines in the world.

Thresholds of perceptible levels of sweetness in food and wine can vary substantially from one person to the next, and perceived sweetness levels in wine have been shown to vary significantly across cultures.² Perceived sweetness in food and wine can be affected by level of acidity present and alcohol (in the case of wine). Sweet and sour tastes in food items such as fruit sauces, catsup, and Asian sauces create a perceived balanced taste structure. The sweetness and acidity counterbalance each other and create a pleasant contrasting sensation. The same situation is true of wine: residual sugar counterbalances acidity to awaken the senses and reduce the sharply sour sensation, while acidity reduces the cloying sensation of a high sugar level. What remains is a balanced taste structure with a pleasant perceived level of sweetness and a crisp sensation from the acid present. Canadian ice wine would be sickeningly sweet without the balance of high acidity inherent in a cool-climate growing region.

Sweetness and acidity are not always easy to discern while tasting wine or food. Even trained sensory panel members can vary in their estimations of the sweetness or acidity of a particular food or wine. A complicating factor is the tangling of additional sensations in food and wine. Food items that are a combination of sweet, sour, salty, and bitter can provide a complex and balanced taste sensation, but it can be difficult for the beginner to estimate levels of each. To complicate matters further, when alcohol hits the tip of the tongue, it creates an initial sensation of sweetness, then warms the entire mouth; if the level of alcohol is fairly high, it can leave a lingering hot sensation. The palate-mapping exercises in Chapter 2 should assist you in this regard by clearly reinforcing where these sensations are perceived in your mouth.

SWEETNESS LEVELS IN WINE

Dry wines are those that have little or no residual sugar remaining after fermentation. Wine is generally described on a continuum from dry to sweet: bone dry, dry, medium dry, medium sweet, sweet, and very sweet. Wines that are much too sweet are described as cloying. The sweetness level of a wine depends on two main things—how ripe the grapes are at harvest and what the winemaker does during fermentation. As previously indicated, wine grapes grown in moderate and warm climate zones will have a tendency to be riper when harvested. But not all wines from warm zones are sweet, for the winemaker has a huge impact as well.

Many times grapes are deliberately left to become overripe and thus create a sweeter finished product. To achieve this, grapes can be left on the vine past the normal harvest time, which is the case for late-harvest wines, ice wines, and wines infected with “noble rot.” Or grapes can be picked and left on straw mats in a wooden crate to become “raisined” (dried) prior to being turned into wine. (Italians call wines made from this process *passio*.) In all of these examples, a portion of the water evaporates, leaving a greater percentage of sugar in the grape, which upon fermentation creates very intense, complex, and sweet dessert wines.

The winemaker can control the amount of sugar and sweetness in a wine by lowering the temperature to 25°F (−4°C) or below, which stops fermentation. This method is used when some sweetness is desired to balance acidity (such as with Riesling), to offset the natural bitterness in the varietal (as with Gewürztraminer), or when slight sweetness is desired for the particular type of wine (for example, when making white Zinfandel or Asti Spumante). A second method is to add alcohol. When the alcohol level reaches more than 15 percent by volume, the yeast used in fermentation dies. This occurs naturally in very ripe grapes, and is the method used in fortified wines such as port, sherry, Marsala, and Madeira. The production of wine is constantly evolving. In Canada, ice wine producers are experimenting with the use of sulfur to stop fermentation. Toward the end of fermentation, high concentrations of sulfur are added. Because of this, the fermentation stops, the yeast dies, and the sulfur dissipates to an acceptable level while the wine remains sweet.³

Residual sugar in wine can be used to create a balance with acidity, to fit a particular style of wine, or to overcome wine fault. To create a good wine, the winemaker should provide a sense of harmony and balance. A quality wine is typically linked to a complex balance and counterbalance of tastes and smells. Balanced levels of acidity, tannin, and sweetness are important structural considerations.

Table 5.1 provides descriptions of evaluation bands for perceived wine sweetness levels on a 0-to-10 scale. The “Value Bands” column provides a range for the typical wine at each level. The “Level of Sweetness” column provides a description of the sensation for each category (bone dry through very sweet) and wine examples by type. The expected level of sweetness varies across wine types. Bone-dry wines include Sancerre, Barolo, and Barbaresco. About 85 percent of all red wines are considered dry (such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot), and the majority of white wines are considered dry (for example, Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, and Sauvignon Blanc). But fruity or floral white wines are generally assumed to have a higher level of residual sugar. Gewürztraminer, Riesling, and Vouvray usually have higher sugar levels and are described as medium dry. Late-harvest and white Zinfandel wines are generally described as medium sweet. Ice wines and fortified wines are described as sweet to very sweet. Residual sugar content varies widely and can range from .035 ounces per quart to over 7 ounces per quart.⁴ Sample wines shown in the Wine Reference Anchor Sheet (Figure B.2) provide reference values for six levels. While the examples given generally fall within the suggested value bands, there are a number of factors (ripeness, climate, wine-making techniques) that impact whether the particular wine is slightly higher or lower in sweetness level.

SWEETNESS LEVELS IN FOOD

The level of sweetness in food can be derived naturally or with the addition of sugar or other sweetening agent. In general, sweet foods should be matched with sweet wines and non-sweet foods with dry wines. The sweetness level in the food should always be less than or at most equal to the level of sweetness in the wine. A sweet taste in a dish makes the wine taste drier. If the sweetness level in the dish is higher than the wine, the wine will taste thin and sour.

There is a definite difference between sweetness in foods and sugariness. Foods at the peak of freshness are nature’s way of providing a product that is bursting with flavor, contains a sweet taste from more complex carbohydrates, and is wine-friendly to boot. Naturally sweet tastes can be found in everything from garden-fresh tomatoes, lettuce, carrots, and onions to scallops, cod, and lobster.⁵ The naturally occurring sugars researchers have found in such foods are called fructooligosaccharides (FOSs). In FOSs, one sucrose molecule combines with two or three fructose units to form a more complex carbohydrate that increases sweetness without adding calories.⁶

Table 5.1 Wine Sweetness Level Descriptions

Value Bands	Level of Sweetness	Example Wines
0 1	Bone dry. The inability to pick up the sensation of sweetness on the tongue. Sweetness anchor: brut sparkling wines.	Whites: Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé, Chablis, Germany's trocken wines, wines labeled "brut." Reds: Barolo, Barbaresco, Chianti Classico, most Médoc.
2 3	Dry. Any level of sweet characteristics are barely perceived and only with difficulty and hard work on the evaluator's part. Sweetness anchor: Chardonnay.	Whites: This is the biggest category and includes most Aligoté, Chardonnay, Sémillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, white Burgundy, whites labeled "sec." Reds: About 85 percent of all reds fall into this category. It includes most Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Syrah and some Zinfandel.
4 5	Medium dry. A lightly sweet sensation is identified and perceived at a sufficient level. Sweetness anchor: Gewürztraminer.	Whites: Most Riesling, Viognier, Chenin Blanc, wines labeled "demi-sec" or "off-dry," most Alsace wines, Vouvray. Reds: Some Merlot and Pinot Noir, some New World Cabernet and Zinfandel, Lambrusco, some Australian Shiraz, Dolcetto, Lemberger, Gamay.
6 7	Medium sweet. A sweet sensation on the tongue that is clearly identifiable in a very defined way. Sweetness anchor: White Zinfandel.	Whites: Most late-harvest wines, wines labeled "moelleux," German Spätlese, Asti, most Moscato, Vin Santo. Reds: Sangria, sparkling Shiraz, Lambrusco, late harvest Zinfandel.
8 9	Sweet. Sugary, full, noticeable glycerin, containing residual sugar but pleasant in taste. Sweetness anchor: Sauternes.	Whites: Botrytized wines, selected late-harvest wines, Italian Passito, Muscat Beaumes de Venise. Reds: Kosher Concord wines.
9 10	Very sweet. Sweetness is at an unmistakably high level of perceptibility with a lot of emphasis. Sweetness anchor: Cream Sherry.	Whites: Orange Muscat, ice wine, Tokaji, Madeira, other fortified wines. Reds: Ruby Port, Tawny Port, Cabernet Franc ice wine.

Source: Adapted from J. Robinson, *How to Taste: A Guide to Enjoying Wine* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

TYPES OF SWEETENERS

In addition to sweetness provided by nature, there are a wide variety of sweeteners that can be added to food items. The largest group is the sugars. Granulated sugar makes up the bulk of production in this category, but the group also includes powdered sugar, brown sugar, maple sugar and syrup, molasses, corn syrup, and honey. Other non-sugar sweeteners include saccharin, aspartame, and sucralose. The sweetening power varies substantially by product and is an important consideration when formulating recipes.

PERCEIVED SWEETNESS LEVELS

Table 5.2 provides appraisal bands or values based on descriptions of perceivable levels of sweetness. These sensation descriptors apply to other taste sensations as well. In Table

Table 5.2 Sensation Levels in Foods and Wine Elements: Appraisal Values

Value Bands	Description of Perception Level Used in Rating Food Elements
0 1 2	Imperceptible: If the particular sensation is not detectable or if this sensation fades almost immediately. No perception or barely perceptible. Sweetness anchor: Triscuit.
2 3 4	Little perception: A taste-smell sensation in which one succeeds in identifying or perceiving it in recognizable way, but the stimulus is not well defined. The level of perception is low. Sweetness anchor: Wheat Thins.
4 5 6	Sufficiently perceived: A taste-smell sensation in which one succeeds in identifying and perceiving it at a sufficient level. An intermediate level of perception. This score is not based on a hedonic (good or bad) evaluation or appraisal of the taste sensation but simply a quantitative appraisal.
6 7 8	Abundant perception: A taste-smell sensation in which one can clearly identify and perceive it in a defined way. The taste-smell sensation is at an emphasized level. Sweetness anchor: Graham cracker.
8 9 10	Highly perceived: A taste-smell sensation that can be unmistakably identified with much emphasis. One can identify a particular food or clearly characterize a complex preparation. High perceptibility with a lot of emphasis. Sweetness anchor: Pepperidge Farms Bordeaux Cookie.

5.1, wine descriptions followed the standards used by most wine evaluators in North America (bone dry to very sweet), but those labels are not used for food sweetness. Food items can form a continuous scale of sweetness level based on type and amount of natural and added sweetness.

The Food Reference Anchor table (Figure B.1) includes four food items that are readily available in the marketplace and provide standard measures of food sweetness levels. These items are included in Table 5.2 in the rating range under which they fall. Column 1 in Table 5.2 provides a numerical rating range for each sensation description. Column 2 of Table 5.2 provides a description of how the sensation is perceived by the taster at the particular level and the anchor sweetness example for each.

INTERACTION BETWEEN WINE AND FOOD SWEETNESS

Rule #1: Food sweetness level should be less than or equal to wine sweetness level.

Basically, wine and food experts suggest matching the level of perceived sweetness in food with the level of perceived sweetness in wine. This match creates a balance in taste and allows the remaining elements to interact in a positive way. When the sweetness in wine is greater than the food, the slightly higher wine sweetness creates a pleasant contrast with the savory, salty, and bitter characteristics of most foods. When the sweetness in the food item is greater than the wine, the interaction seems to accentuate and overemphasize the acidity present in the wine and any characteristics of bitterness or astringency inherent in the wine.

Many times, a savory dish will be prepared with a sauce or other accompaniment that has fruit or sweet elements (e.g., Duck with Sauce Bigarade). Sweeter wines work well with this type of dish, particularly medium-sweet Riesling. If you are preparing red meat or game

with a fruit/sweet sauce, choose a wine that has a good sense of lush fruit of its own. In this situation, very ripe grapes from warm flavor zones will be appropriate (Zinfandel from California's warm zones or Australian Shiraz). It is a good idea to avoid serving heavily oaked white wines alongside savory dishes with sweet accompaniments. The fruit in whites aged in oak will be reduced, making the resulting food-and-wine combination taste harsh. As with reds, white wines in this situation should have ripe fruit flavors.⁷ If the dish has sweetness and acid, you will want to use wines that both are sweet and have a higher acidity. Cool-climate whites from the Loire Valley or sweet German Rieslings are useful in this case.⁸

Foods that are served at the peak of freshness need to be matched with wines that have equally vibrant fruit flavors. Therefore, it is best to serve peak-season foods with lively young wines. These can be red or white but will generally be from New World locations (the United States, Chile, Argentina, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand). Wines from these locations will have a fruit-forward, more lush tendency than their Old World counterparts (France, Germany, Spain, and Italy), which can have subtler, earthier profiles.⁹

ACIDITY: FROM FLAT TO TART (AND BEYOND)

The second main component of wine and food is the level of acidity and its relative level to sweetness in the wine or food. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, climate, culture, traditions, wine varietals, and preferred flavor profiles all impact sourness characteristics in wine and food. The use of acid is prevalent in food preservation methods (think of pickles, ceviche, sauerkraut, and marinades) as well as in the preparation methods in many cool-climate areas (examples include pickled herring, sourdough bread, stroganoff, and so on).

Any food item high in acidity makes pairing difficult. Vinegar in food can create unhappy marriages if not properly finessed. Acids used in food preparation are not created equal—many are harsher than others. The citric acid in oranges or lemons will be less likely to ruin the taste of a wine than the acetic acid of most vinegars. The lactic acid in yogurt and cheese will be even less destructive than the citric acid group. In fact, the creamy characteristics of cheese soften the palate and may have a flattering effect on the wine.

Which acids taste the most acid? While numerous organic acids exist in wine and food, common ones include malic (found, for example, in apples), tartaric (in grapes), citric (in citrus fruits), acetic (vinegar), and lactic (dairy). In solutions of equal strength, acetic acid is perceived as stronger than citric and lactic acids.¹² Malic acid is perceived as stronger than tartaric acid, which in turn is perceived as stronger than citric and lactic.¹³ These general perceptions of acidity and the effects they can have on wine provide basic guidelines for selecting ingredients for salads, marinades, and accompaniments intended to be served with wine.

ACIDITY LEVELS IN WINE

Acidity in wine provides a feeling of crispness or freshness. Too much acidity creates a sour sensation in wine, and too little leaves a bland or flat impression. The right amount creates a pleasant, tingly sensation. A balance between sweetness and acidity (combined with tannin for reds) in all wines is essential to creating pleasant, cleansing, and contrasting sensations in the mouth.

Higher levels of acid in wine result in a “green” taste and may remind you of unripe fruit. Climate and geography can have a substantial impact on acidity levels in wine. Cooler-climate wines have a tendency to be crispier and tarter, while wines from warmer climates

WINE AND FOOD

There is only one golden rule when you are selecting a wine to accompany a dish. The more delicately flavored the dish, the more delicate the wine should be, whereas fuller-flavored foods can take fuller-flavored wines. It's as simple as that.

THIS RULE IS VERY FLEXIBLE because it is capable of adapting to personal circumstances. We all have different ways of perceiving tastes and smells; if one person has a blind spot for, or is especially sensitive to, a particular characteristic such as acidity, sweetness, or bitterness, then their perception of the delicacy or fullness of a certain dish or wine will be somewhat different from other people's. The best approach is to start with conventional food-and-wine combinations, but use them as a launchpad for experimentation.

APERITIFS

Whether you are serving a one-course supper, or a full dinner menu, you might like to start with an aperitif. This should not be an afterthought. Inevitably, the most delicate dishes in a meal arrive first and nobody will be able to appreciate them if palates have been saturated with strong spirits or highly flavored concoctions. Choose the most suitable aperitif according to your taste; do not offer a choice.

SHERRY

Fino sherry is a traditional aperitif, but its use has been abused. If the first course is sufficiently well flavored, then sherry can be an admirable choice, and may sometimes be used as an ingredient. Mostly, however, even the lightest *fino* will have too much alcohol and flavor.

PROPRIETARY APERITIFS AND SPIRITS

Proprietary brands of aromatized aperitifs, such as vermouths, inevitably also fall into the trap of being too alcoholic and too strong-tasting. All spirits, especially if they are not mixed, are too aggressive to allow the palate to appreciate the types of food usually served as a first course.

WINES

It is customary in a few countries, notably France, to serve a sweet wine such as Sauternes as an aperitif. For most occasions, this choice would be inappropriate, but sometimes it can be effective. White wines that are light-bodied, dry or off-dry, still or sparkling, make perfect all-purpose aperitifs, although a rosé may be suitable if

APPETIZERS

When matching wines to appetizers, it is important to consider the next course and its accompanying wine.

When using the food-and-wine combinations below to plan a menu, always aim to ascend in quality and flavor, serving white before red, dry before sweet, light-bodied before full-bodied, and young before old. The reason for this is twofold. Obviously, a step back in quality will be noticed. Equally, if you go straight to a reasonably fine wine, without first trying a lesser wine, you are likely to miss many of the better wine's subtle qualities.

Try also to make the sequence of wines proceed in some sort of logical order or according to a theme. The most obvious one is to remain faithful to the wines of one area, region, country, or grape variety. You could plan a dinner around the Pinot Noirs of the New World, or the Cabernet Sauvignons of Italy, for example. The theme could be one wine type or style, perhaps just Champagne or Sauternes, a popular ploy in those regions. It could be even more specific, such as different vintages of one specific grower's vineyard or a comparison of the "same" wine from different growers.

the first wine served with the meal is also a rosé or a light red wine. Excellent choices for a white-wine aperitif may include Mâcon Blanc or Mâcon Villages, good Muscadet, lighter Alsace wines such as Pinot Blanc or Sylvaner, new-wave Rioja, aromatic dry whites from northeastern Italy, many English wines, young Mosel (up to Spätlese) or Rhine (up to Kabinett), and light-bodied Chardonnay, Sauvignon, Chenin, or Colombard from California, Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa. The list is endless. If the choice is to be a rosé, try to select one from the same area, and preferably made from the same grape, as the first wine of the meal. The aperitif *par excellence* in every conceivable situation is Champagne, with Crémant de Bourgogne or Crémant d'Alsace making excellent alternatives.

✓ **Budget choice** *Cava Brut*

APPETIZERS

At one time, it was customary to get well into the first course before it was permitted to serve the wine. Nowadays, each stage of a meal is seen to play a vital part in the taste experience, leading onto the next taste, or following on from the previous one.

ARTICHOKE

If artichoke is served with butter, a light but slightly assertive, dry Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire is best. The same wine might also accompany artichokes with Hollandaise sauce, although a dry rosé with a fairly high balance of acidity, such as Coteaux d'Ancenis Rosé from the Loire, Arbois Rosé from the Jura, or Schilcher from Austria, is also suitable.

✓ **Budget choice** *Sauvignon de Haut-Poitou*

ASPARAGUS

Fine Champagne or a young Muscat d'Alsace are perfect accompaniments. Medium-weight white Burgundy and Californian or Pacific Northwest Chardonnay also work well.

✓ **Budget choice** *Raimat Chardonnay Blanc de Blanc Brut*

AVOCADO

Although many wines of excellent acidity, such as Champagne or Chablis, are extremely successful partners of this food, Alsace Gewürztraminer, which is naturally low in acidity, is the best choice.

✓ **Budget choice** *Muscadet*

CAVIAR

Champagne is the classic partner.

✓ **Budget choice** *Mineral water*

GARLIC BUTTER

Choose the general style of wine recommended for the main ingredient, but opt for one with more body and a more assertive flavor or higher acidity.

PÂTÉS

Whether fish, fowl, or meat, pâté should be partnered according to its main ingredient or flavor. Look in the appropriate entry and choose a recommended wine. Foie gras is fabulous with a fine vintage Champagne or mature Sauternes and, although diverse in character, Alsace Gewürztraminer and Pinot Gris are both perfect partners.

SALADS

Plain green salads need little more than a light, dry white such as a Muscadet, unless there is a predominance of bitter leaves, in which case something more assertive but just as light, such as a lesser Loire Sauvignon, should be chosen. A firm Champagne is the best accompaniment to salads that include warm ingredients.

✓ **Budget choice** *Cava Brut*





SHELLFISH
A variety of white
wines including good
Muscadet, Loire Sauvignon,
and Mosel can accompany the
Spanish dish paella.

SNAILS

Modest village Burgundy from the Côte d'Or, either red or white.

✓ **Budget choice** *Côtes de Roussillon*

SOUPS

Champagne or any fine sparkling wine is ideal with most purée, velouté, or cream soups, especially with the more delicately flavored recipes. It is virtually essential with a chilled soup, whether a jellied consommé or a cold purée soup such as Vichyssoise. Most sparkling wines can match the flavor of a shellfish bisque, but a good pink Champagne makes a particularly picturesque partner. Rich-flavored soups can take full wines, most often red. A good game soup, for example, can respond well to the heftier reds of the Rhône, Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Rioja. The frothy character of Lambrusco cuts through the texture of a genuine minestrone. The sweet cherry flavor of Lambrusco also matches the soup's rich tomato tang.

✓ **Budget choice** *Blanquette de Limoux*

TERRINES

Fish, shellfish, and meat terrines should be partnered with a wine according to their main ingredient or flavor (see appropriate entry). Most vegetable terrines go well with young, dry or off-dry, light-bodied, still, sparkling, or aromatic white wines from the Loire, Alsace, Germany, Austria, northeastern Italy, New Zealand, and England.

✓ **Budget choice** *Crémant d'Alsace*

VINAIGRETTE

Appetizers with vinaigrette are difficult to partner. Conventional

wisdom suggests a *fino* or *manzanilla* sherry, or Montilla, although many believe it best not to serve any wine with such a first course. I have found that an Alsace Gewürztraminer is one of the very few wines that can really take on vinaigrette and come out on top.

✓ **Budget choice** *Inexpensive Gewürztraminer*

EGG, RICE, AND PASTA DISHES

Champagne is the perfect foil to the bland flavor of any egg dish, the texture of which is cut by the wine's effervescence. Dishes such as omelettes, quiches, soufflés, eggs cooked *en cocotte*, coddled, fried, scrambled, or poached can also be accompanied by any good sparkling wine. Savory mousses and mousselines, whether hot or cold, fish or fowl, should be partnered by a wine with slightly less body and at least as much acidity or effervescence (if this is applicable) than those suitable to accompany their main ingredient. Good sparkling wine is equally useful for many rice and pasta dishes, particularly the more delicately flavored ones, but light red wines—not too fruity and with nice grippy tannins—can make a surprisingly good accompaniment. Richer ingredients should be matched by the wine.

✓ **Budget choice** *Saumur Brut and Saumur Rouge*

FISH

Most fish and shellfish go well with dry white wines, but red, rosé, sparkling, and sweet styles are all possible accompaniments in certain circumstances.

FISH WITH SAUCES AND PAN-FRIED FISH

Whatever the fish, pan-fried, cream sauce, or butter sauce dishes require wines with more acidity or effervescence than normal. If the sauce is very rich, then consider wines with more intense flavors.

✓ **Budget choice** *Crémant de Loire*

FISH STEWS

Although red wine and fish usually react violently in the mouth, dishes cooked in red wine, such as highly flavored Mediterranean fish stews, present no such problems.

MACKEREL

An assertive but modest Loire Sauvignon is needed for mackerel, although a richer Sauvignon from various New World countries is preferable with smoked mackerel.

✓ **Budget choice** *Sauvignon de Touraine*

RIVER FISH

Generally, most river fish go well with a fairly assertive rosé, since both the fish and the wine have a complementary earthiness, but an assertive white such as Sancerre is just as effective. Sancerre, white Graves, and Champagne are especially successful with pike. Champagne or Montrachet is classic with salmon or salmon-trout, whether baked, grilled, pan-fried, poached, or smoked, but any good-quality dry sparkling wine or white Burgundy will be excellent, as will top Chardonnay wines from California, the Pacific Northwest, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. Riesling, whether Alsace or German, is almost obligatory with trout, particularly when it is cooked *au bleu* (rapidly, in stock with plenty of vinegar).

✓ **Budget choice** *Pink Cava Brut*

SARDINES

Vinho Verde is the ideal wine with sardines, especially if freshly caught and cooked on a beach in Portugal.

✓ **Budget choice** *Vinho Verde*

SHELLFISH

Choose a top estate Muscadet, a Bourgogne Aligoté from a sunny vintage, a Loire Sauvignon, an English wine, or a Mosel with most modest forms of shellfish (shrimp, mussels, etc.); a fine but assertive Sancerre or Pouilly Fumé with crayfish; a *grand cru* Chablis or a good Champagne with crab, lobster, oysters, and scallops. Choose a wine with more acidity or effervescence if the dish you are eating includes a cream sauce.

✓ **Budget choice** *Crémant de Bourgogne*

SMOKED FISH

A good tip is oaked for smoked. For smoked fish, drink an oak-

matured version of the wine you would drink with an unsmoked dish of the same fish. It does not work every time. Since some wines are not oak-matured, but oakiness in wine does blend well with the smokiness in food, so pick any oaked wine you think suitable.

✓ **Budget choice** *cheap Ryman-produced oaked Chardonnay from anywhere*

WHITE FISH

White fish have the very lightest flavors and it would be a pity to overwhelm their delicate nuances with a dominant wine. Grilled sole, plaice, and mullet are enhanced by a youthful *blanc de blancs* Champagne, top-quality estate Muscadet, Savennières, Pinot Blanc from Alsace, Pinot Grigio from northeastern Italy, and fine estate Vinho Verde with authentically tart dryness and just the barest prickle. Haddock, hake, halibut, turbot, cod, and sea bream are good with all the wines mentioned above, but can take slightly richer dry whites.

✓ **Budget choice** *Crémant d'Alsace*

MEAT DISHES

Few people have not heard the old maxim "red wine with dark meat, white wine with light," but it is quite acceptable to reverse the rule and have white wine with dark meat and red wine with light meat, provided that the golden rule in the introduction is observed.

BEEF

Bordeaux is the classic accompaniment to roast beef. Choose a younger, perhaps lighter style if the meat is served cold. A good Cabernet Sauvignon from Australia, California, Chile, Italy, New Zealand, or South Africa would do just as well and would be preferable in the case of steaks that are charred on the outside and pink in the middle. For pure beef burgers, an unpretentious, youthful red Côtes-du-Rhône with an honest, peppery flavor is ideal. But, frankly, almost any drinkable red wine of medium, medium-full, or full body from anywhere will accompany all beef dishes with some degree of competence, as will most full-bodied and rich-flavored white wines.

✓ **Budget choice** *Bulgarian Cabernet Sauvignon*

CASSEROLES, DARK

Dark meat casseroles require full-bodied red wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy, the Rhône, or Rioja. Chateau Musar from Lebanon and Chateau Carras from Greece are both also ideal, as are many Italian wines, from the Nebbiolo wines of Piedmont, through the fuller Sangiovese wines of Chianti, Carmignano, and Montalcino, to

the Montepulciano wines of Abruzzi and the Aglianico del Vulture, not to mention the super *barrique* wines from Tuscany and northeastern Italy. The richer the casserole, the more robust can be the wine, and the more tannin needed.

✓ **Budget choice** *Inexpensive Zinfandel*

CASSEROLES, LIGHT

Light meat casseroles are best with young Beaujolais, Loire reds (e.g. Bourgueil or Chinon), various medium-bodied reds from southwestern France and Coteaux du Languedoc, Pinot Noir from Alsace, and soft-styled Chianti. For the white-wine drinker, new-wave Rioja, Mâcon Blanc, Tokay d'Alsace, and inexpensive French Colombard or Chenin Blanc from California or South Africa are all worth trying.

✓ **Budget choice** *Californian dry white jug wine*

CHILLI CON CARNE

If it is a good chili, forget wine and stick to ice-cool lager or water.

CHINESE DISHES

Good-quality German Riesling *Kabinett* wines are very useful for partnering many Chinese dishes, particularly those in black bean, ginger, or oyster sauces or with any gingery or bell pepper flavoring. Spare ribs require a *Spätlese*, sweet-and-sour an *Auslese*, chilies and other hotter flavors an Alsace Gewürztraminer, preferably *Vendange Tardive*. For duck or goose, try a good-quality Vouvray *demi-sec*, still or sparkling. If delicate or bland ingredients such as water chestnuts, bamboo shoots, or cashew nuts dominate, choose a fresh or soft white such as a light Australian Chardonnay. With egg rolls, choose a good dry fizz. Iced water makes a good substitute for any of the above.

DUCK

Roast duck is very versatile, but the best accompaniments include certain *cru* Beaujolais such as Morgan or Moulin-à-Vent, fine red and white Burgundy, especially from the Côte de Nuits, and mature Médoc. With cold duck, a lighter *cru* Beaujolais such as Fleurie should be considered. Duck in orange sauce goes extremely well with softer styles of red and white Burgundy, southern Rhône wines, especially Châteauneuf-du-Pape, red Rioja, and Zinfandel.

✓ **Budget choice** *Quinta da Bacalhôa*

GAME

For lightly hung winged game, choose the same wines as for poultry. If it is mid-hung, try a fullish *cru* Beaujolais. Well-hung birds require a full-bodied red Bordeaux or Burgundy. Pomerol is

the classic choice with well-hung pheasant. Treat lightly hung ground game in the same way as lamb and mid-hung meat in the same way as beef. Well-hung ground game can take the biggest Hermitage, Côte Rôtie, Cornas, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, red Rioja, or an old vintage of Châteauneuf Musar. White-wine drinkers should opt for old vintages of Rhône or Rioja or an Alsace Pinot Gris *Vendange Tardive* (vinified dry).

✓ **Budget choice** *Australian Shiraz*

GOOSE

I find it hard to choose between Chinon, Bourgueil, Anjou Rouge, and (sometimes) Chianti on the red side, and Vouvray (still or sparkling), Riesling (preferably, but not necessarily, Alsace), and Champagne on the white. The one trait they all share is plenty of acidity, which is needed for this fatty bird. If the goose is served in a fruity sauce, stick to white wines; a little sweetness in the wine will do no harm.

✓ **Budget choice** *South African Chenin Blanc*

GOULASH

When on form, "Bull's Blood" is the obvious choice, otherwise any East European full-bodied, robustly flavored red wine will suffice.

✓ **Budget choice** *Bulgarian Kadarka*

HAM AND BACON

Ham can react adversely in the mouth with some red wines, particularly if it is unsmoked, but young Beaujolais, Loire Gamay, and Chianti are safe bets. Sparkling white wine is perhaps best of all, although I have known that to react strangely at times.

✓ **Budget choice** *Cava Brut*

INDIAN DISHES

Surprisingly enough, a light and slightly tannic red wine can go well with a number of Indian dishes, such as chicken tikka, korma, pasanda, tandoori, and even rogan josh. You need something fresh and crisp such as a Côtes de Gascogne or one of the lighter New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs to wash down a vegetable tikka or a Madras curry, something fruitier, such as German Riesling *Kabinett*, for a vindaloo.

✓ **Budget choice** *Iced water*

LAMB

Bordeaux is as classic with lamb as it is with beef, although Burgundy works as well, particularly when the meat is a little pink. It is well known in the wine trade that lamb brings out every nuance of flavor in the finest of wines, which is why it is served more often than any other meat when a merchant is organizing a special meal. Rack

of lamb with rosemary seems to be a favorite. As with beef, almost any red wine can accompany lamb well, although this meat is perhaps best with slightly lighter wines.

✓ **Budget choice** *Bourgogne Rouge (Buxy)*

MEAT PIES

For hot pies and puddings, treat as for dark- or light-meat casseroles. Cold pork, veal-and-ham, or ham-and-turkey pies require a light- or medium-bodied red that has a firm acidity, such as Chinon or Bourgueil, while cold game pies call for something at least as rich, but softer, such as a New Zealand Cabernet Sauvignon.

✓ **Budget choice** *Saumur Brut*

MOUSSAKA

For romantic association, choose one of the better, medium- to full-bodied reds from Greece, such as Naoussa, Goumenissa, or Côtes de Meliton. White-wine drinkers require something of substance that is not too full or oxidative. A few Greek wines fit the bill (Lac des Roches from Boutari comes to mind), but something Spanish might be better, such as one of the "in-between" white Riojas.

✓ **Budget choice** *Bulgarian Merlot*

VARIETY MEATS

Kidneys go with full, well-flavoured, but round wines, such as a mature red or white Châteauneuf-du-Pape or a Rioja. But much depends on what sort of kidneys they are and how they are cooked. A ragout of lamb's kidneys, for example, needs something with the finesse of a mature *cru classé* Médoc. The finest livers go well with a good but not too heavy Syrah, such as a mature Côte Rôtie or Hermitage from a top producer in a medium-good vintage. Chicken livers are quite strong and require something with a penetrating flavor, such as a good Gigondas, Fitou, or Zinfandel. Pig and ox livers are the coarsest in texture and flavor, and require a full, robust, but not too fussy red—maybe a modest *vin de pays* from the Pyrénées-Orientales. Either red or dry- to medium-dry white wine may be served with sweetbreads. Lamb's sweetbreads are the best, and take well to fine St-Émilion or St-Julien, if in a sauce, or a good white Burgundy if pan-fried.

✓ **Budget choice** *Crémant de Bourgogne*

PORK, POULTRY, AND VEAL

These meats are flexible and can take a diverse range of wines from modest traditional method sparkling, through almost every type of medium- or full-bodied dry or off-dry white wine, to light

reds from Beaujolais, Champagne, Alsace, and Germany, literally any medium-bodied red wine, whatever its origin, and a large number of full-bodied ones too. For chops, cutlets, or escalopes, grilled, pan-fried, or in a cream sauce, it is advisable to choose something with a higher acidity balance or some sparkle. Beaujolais is perhaps the best all-round choice; it works well with roast pork, particularly served cold.

✓ **Budget choice** *Gamay de Touraine*

POT-ROAST

Consult the appropriate entry for meat, and choose a wine listed there. Because of the extra flavor from added vegetables, it is possible, though by no means necessary, to serve a slightly less fine wine than with the straight roast.

✓ **Budget choice** *Côtes de Duras*

STROGANOFF

An authentic Stroganoff requires a full red with a good depth of flavor, but with some finer characteristics, not too robust, and preferably well rounded with age. Try a modest Médoc, a good Cahors, or a Bergerac.

✓ **Budget choice** *Bulgarian Cabernet Sauvignon-Merlot (Oriahovica)*

THAI DISHES

Much spicier than Chinese, with a more intricate mix of flavors, these dishes are far more difficult to match wine to. For the very hottest chili-charged dishes, forget wine and stick to beer or, better still, iced water, but with mildly hot Thai dishes, you can get away with a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc or a Champagne, which will also go

POULTRY

Poultry has such a delicate flavor that how it is cooked will be the most important consideration when choosing a wine, particularly if it is served with a sauce, as even the most bland ancillary flavors can dominate.



with dishes that include coconut milk. When lemongrass, lime, and other zesty ingredients dominate, try an unoaked Australian Sémillon.

✓ **Budget choice** *Iced water*

DESSERTS

While a dessert wine can easily be drunk on its own, there is no reason why it has to be. There are those who believe that the finest points of a great dessert wine are lost or overshadowed by a sweet. But this happens only if the golden rule of partnering food and wine is broken.

CAKES, GÂTEAUX, PUDDINGS, AND PASTRIES

Many cakes, sponges, and gâteaux do not require wine, but I have found that Tokaji enhances those with coffee or vanilla flavors, various Iberian Moscatels are very good when almonds or walnuts are present, and sweet sparkling Vouvray or Coteaux du Layon go well with fruit-filled, fresh cream gâteaux and fruit-flavored cheesecakes. Iberian Moscatels are superb with Christmas or plum pudding and, on a similar theme, Asti is ideal with mince pies. Chocolate is more difficult, and although some people enjoy drinking wines ranging from Sauternes to *brut* Champagne with chocolate fudge cake or profiteroles, I am not one of them.

✓ **Budget choice:** *Iced water*

CRÈME BRÛLÉE AND CRÈME CARAMEL

Something sweet and luxurious is required to accompany crême brûlée. German or Austrian wines would be too tangy, a top Sauternes or one of the richer Barsacs would be excellent, but perhaps best of all would be an Alsace Pinot Gris

Sélection de Grains Nobles or a great Malmsey Madeira.

✓ **Budget choice** *Australian Liqueur Muscat*

FRUIT

A fresh peach, plump and juicy, makes the ideal partner for a Rheingau Riesling *Auslese* or *Beerenauslese*, or a late-harvest, botrytized Riesling from California or Australia. Asti, Californian Muscat Canelli, and Clairette de Die may also partner peaches, especially if they are served with strawberries or raspberries. These wines go well to one degree or another with virtually every other fruit, including fresh fruit salad. Lighter Sauternes and Barsacs, Coteaux du Layon, and sweet sparkling Vouvray are also good with fruit salad and are the best choice for apple, pear, or peach pies, tarts, and flans.

An Austrian Grüner Veltliner or Gewürztraminer *Auslese* with strawberries and fresh coarse-ground black pepper (no cream) is a revelation. A fine Bordeaux or Burgundy with fresh raspberries that have been macerated in the same wine is liked by some, as is a top-quality Mosel *Auslese* with strawberries and fresh raspberry purée (no cream). Apple Strudel, Dutch Apple Pie, and other spicy fruit desserts need to be eaten with a Tokay, Iberian Moscatel, or an Austrian Gewürztraminer *Beerenauslese*. Pies made with dark, rich fruits require full Sauternes, Bonnezeaux, or Quarts de Chaume.

✓ **Budget choice** *Moscatel Spumante*

ICE CREAM

When ice cream is part of a dessert, the other ingredients should be considered when choosing a wine.

FRUIT PASTRIES

Sweet wines, particularly Sauternes, are well suited to fruit pies, tarts, and pastries.

Ice cream on its own rarely calls for any accompaniment, but there is one perfect combination—Muscat de Beaugues de Venise with Brown Bread Ice Cream.

✓ **Budget choice** *Moscatel de Valencia*

MERINGUE

For meringue served as part of a vacherin or pavlova, choose a still or sparkling Moscato, Californian Muscat Canelli, a late-harvested botrytized Riesling, a top Mosel *Beerenauslese*, a sweet Vouvray, or a good Sauternes. For meringue desserts with nutty, coconutty, or biscuity ingredients, a Tokay Essencia, Alsace Pinot Gris Sélection de Grains Nobles, Torcolato from Veneto, or Malmsey Madeira would be equally successful. Lightly poached meringue served as floating islands or snow eggs needs something of less intensity, such as an Alsace Pinot Gris *Vendange Tardive*. An Eiswein is the perfect partner for lemon meringue pie—a dessert that demands luxury, acidity, and a vibrant sweetness.

✓ **Budget choice** *Iberian Moscatel*

CHEESES AND CHEESE DISHES

There is a school of thought that decries the traditional concept of cheese and wine as ideal partners. I am not one of its pupils. Most cheeses are flattered by many wines; only the most delicate or the most powerful of either cheeses or wines require careful consideration before trying to partner them.

BLUE-VEINED CHEESES

A good-quality blue cheese is best partnered by a sweet wine, which produces a piquant combination of flavors not dissimilar to that found in sweet-and-sour dishes. Many dessert wines will suffice, and the choice will often depend on personal taste, but I find that hard blues such as Stilton and Blue Cheshire are best with port, while soft blues are greatly enhanced by sweet white wines. Lighter Barsacs, Coteaux du Layon, German *Beerenauslese*, or a mature Sélection de Grains Nobles from Alsace for Bleu de Bresse cheeses, and Sauternes, Austrian Gewürztraminer *Trockenbeerenauslese* or Tokay are needed for the more powerfully flavored Roquefort and Gorgonzola.

✓ **Budget choice** *Moscatel de Valencia*

SOFT AND SEMI-SOFT MILD CHEESES

A light Beaujolais Nouveau or an elegant Pinot Noir from Alsace (as opposed to the deep-colored, oak-aged reds that are now being made) will partner most soft and semi-soft cheeses of the mild type, although

something even more delicate, such as one of the many fragrant dry white wines of northeastern Italy or a soft-styled Champagne Rosé should be considered for double- and triple-cream cheeses.

✓ **Budget choice** *Blanquette de Limoux*

SOFT AND SEMI-SOFT STRONG CHEESES

Munster demands a strong Gewürztraminer; and the most decadent way to wash down a perfectly ripe Brie de Meaux or Brie de Melun is with a 20-year-old vintage Champagne. Washed-skin cheeses (that have been bathed in water, brine, or alcohol while ripening) need an assertive red Burgundy or a robust claret.

✓ **Budget choice** *Young Côtes du Rhône*

HARD CHEESES

Dry and off-dry English wines are ideal with Caerphilly, while the sweeter styles of English wine are perfect with Wensleydale served with a slice of homemade apple pie. Mature Cheddar and other well-flavored, hard English cheeses demand something full and red such as a fine Bordeaux or, if it has a bite, Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Château Musar. Sangiovese-based wines bring out the sweet flavor of fresh (but mature) Parmesan. Alsace Pinot Gris and Gewürztraminer are ideal with Gruyère, although something with a little more acidity, such as a Californian Sauvignon Blanc, is better with Emmental.

✓ **Budget choice** *New World Macération carbonique*

GOAT CHEESES

These cheeses require an assertive, dry white wine such as Sancerre or Gewürztraminer, although a firm but light *cru* Beaujolais would also suit.

✓ **Budget choice** *Sauvignon de Haut-Poitou*

CHEESE FONDUE

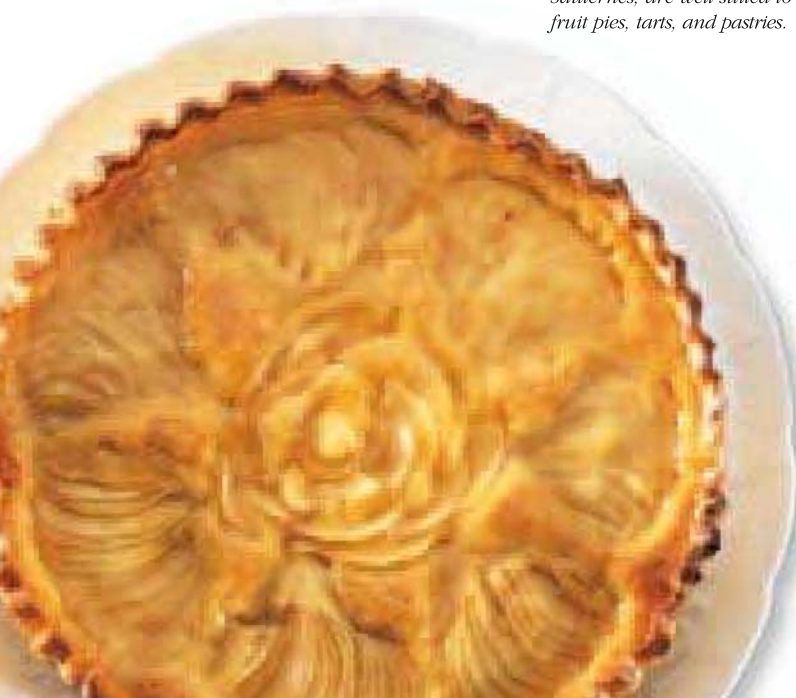
It is possible to drink a wide range of red, dry white, and sparkling wines with fondue, but it is fitting to serve a wine from the area of origin of the dish: Fendant from the Valais with a Swiss fondue, for example, and Apremont or Crépigny with fondue Savoyarde.

✓ **Budget choice** *Edelzwicker*

CHEESE SOUFFLÉ

This requires a good sparkling wine, preferably Champagne. If it is a very rich soufflé, such as soufflé Roquefort, then the wine must have the power to match it. A *blanc de noirs* such as Bollinger's "Vieilles Vignes" would be superb.

✓ **Budget choice** *Blanquette de Limoux*



Wine and Food Pairing: A Journey of Discovery

by

**Carole Beamish, Jane Hardy and Brenda
Valois**



Wine and Food Pairing Project: Our Journey of Discovery

Carole Beamish, Jane Hardy and Brenda Valois

Purpose: to boldly go...

As sommeliers-in-training, our purpose for this project was to challenge conventional thinking about certain wine and food pairings. We also wanted to challenge ourselves to explore a range of possible (and impossible?) potential pairings. We wanted to find out what might work, what would not and why. We wanted to draw as much learning as we could from this project. We decided not to play it safe.

We had five specific objectives. We wanted to explore:

1. The idea that wine is difficult to pair with salad,
2. Which works better -- similarity of pairing or contrast,
3. How much texture, weight and body matter in pairing ,
4. Does the wine really have to be sweeter than the food, and finally
5. Whether the wine pairing suggestion originally made for our dish was actually the best.

This paper outlines how we approached the project, our chosen dish and its ingredients, the results of our research to select the wines to try, the results of our tasting panel, our final wine selection, our conclusions and what we learned from the project.

Methodology: a four part approach...

First, we met as a team to plan our project and select our dish. We chose a salad because salads are considered more “difficult” to pair with wine. Since there were three of us, we gave ourselves the task of each finding three wines that we individually thought would offer an opportunity to explore the issue of similarity or contrast in pairing, both in sweet versus dry, sparkling versus still, and light, medium versus full body.

Second, we each researched and selected our wines. We consulted these sources: *The Oxford Companion to Wine, Third Edition* (ed. Jancis Robinson, Oxford University Press, 2006); *Grapes and Wines* (Oz Clarke and Margaret Rand, Sterling Publishing 2010); the Liquor Control Board of Ontario website www.lcbo.com; the Fermented Review website www.fermentedreview.com; the Wine Spectator website www.winespectator.com; Jay Miller at www.erobertparker.com/sitesearch/jmiller.aspx; and *Wine and Food Pairing* (Robert J. Harrington, John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2008). We finally selected ten wines to try.

Third, we held a tasting panel one evening composed of six people: two sommeliers-in-training and four amateur wine and food lovers who are world travellers. We developed a wine rating form (see Appendix B) to assist in the evaluation. We cooked our dish and rated our wines over a two and a half

hour period. The panel took the project very seriously. There was a good deal of variation in perspectives as we will show later in this paper.

Fourth and finally, we compiled and charted the results (see Appendix A), discussed and synthesized our findings and wrote this paper.

The Dish: a salad but not any kind of salad...

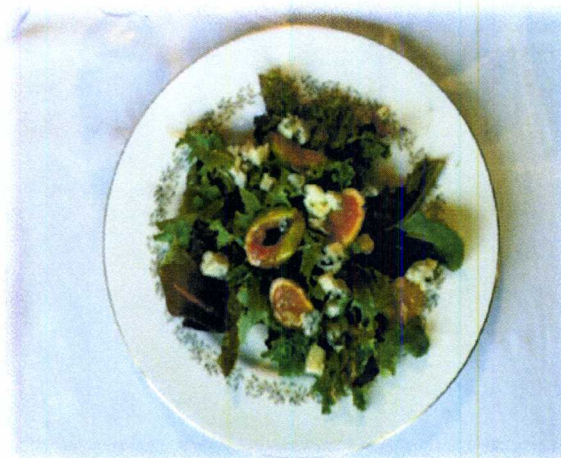
We chose a salad from *Saveurs: Le magazine de l'art de vivre gourmand*, published in Paris, France. The salad is unusual, particularly for North American tastes, because it has strong flavours and uses ingredients with a high contrast among sweet, salty, sour and bitter (a true challenge, nest-ce pas?) The magazine also suggests a pairing with a French wine. Will this be the synergistic match? We shall see...

Salade de roquefort et figues au gingembre confit (Roquefort and Fig Salad with Crystallized Ginger)

Ingredients: 180g roquefort cheese, 4 fresh figs, 25g crystallized ginger, 50 ml rice vinegar, 50ml sunflower oil, 1 tablespoon honey, 30g butter, 100g mixed spring salad leaves, salt, pepper

Preparation:

- Chop ginger. In a bowl, mix chopped ginger with vinegar, sunflower oil, salt and pepper;
- Cut figs into slices. In a pan, sauté figs in the butter for 20 seconds per side. Add the honey. Let figs lightly caramelize;
- Remove figs from pan; add vinaigrette to deglaze the pan. Allow vinaigrette to cool slightly;
- Place salad leaves on each plate, arrange figs on top, crumble roquefort over plates. Lightly cover with warm vinaigrette, finish with a twist of the pepper mill.



In terms of flavours, the roquefort was certainly a dominant salty and savoury taste. However, the sweetness of the caramelized figs, ginger and honey together helped to balance the cheese. The slightly sour rice vinegar and gently bitter leaves in the spring salad gave depth and complexity to the savoury/sweet contrast. The magazine's suggested wine pairing: a Monbazillac but...did we agree?

The Wines: a wide variety to test the rules...

We began by identifying four categories of wines we wanted to explore. They ranged from light to full bodied, dry to sweet. The first category was: sparkling wines, dry and sweet. We wanted to find out the impact of varying levels of effervescence on our dish and whether a dry sparkling wine would be

a complementary contrast with the sweeter flavours in the dish. Since this is a salad with a salty, high fat cheese as a dominant flavour, would an acidic wine cut through the fattiness of the cheese? We also selected a less effervescent, lighter, slightly sweeter sparkling wine to see if it would pair better with the sweeter caramelized figs and honey. Our second category was: still whites, crisp, spicy and slightly off-dry. We wanted to test the structural impact of refreshing acidity without effervescence on our dish, and how/whether certain wines might bring out the spicier notes of ginger and honey in our dish. Our third category comprised: sweet white wines, both botrytized, but from very different grape varieties, to contrast with the roquefort and complement the sweeter elements of the salad. Our final category included a range of dry, medium and sweet fortified wines. We wanted to know if the strong flavours in the dish could stand up to these fortified wines and vice versa.

Preliminary research: some cool wine facts and early hypotheses...

Category 1: Sparkling, dry and sweet

1. Dama de Naveran 2007, Cava Extra Brut, Barcelona, Spain

Cava (meaning “underground cave”) is Spain’s sparkling wine, 95% of which is produced in areas between the cities of Tarragona and Barcelona (chiefly around the city of Sant Sadurni in Penedes) in the region of Catalunya. Cava is based chiefly upon the traditional Catalan white grape variety triad consisting of macabeo, xarel-lo, and parellada (typically with small amounts of subirat and chardonnay). Xarel-lo provides the structuring body, parellada the crisp acidity, and macabeo the soft creaminess. Tasting notes (Jay Miller) for this wine said it is “broad in the mouth with excellent volume and lingering flavours...Lots of fine foam on pouring with several streams of minute bubbles. The spritz is full in each sip adding an enjoyable texture to muted green apple, asparagus and lime flavours - no sign of sugar and medium-bodied. The finish is curious, emphasizing the vegetable aspect and ending extra dry.

We chose this cava to see if its acidity and effervescence would break through the saltiness and fattiness of the roquefort cheese, complement the acidity in the vinaigrette and serve as a contrast to the sweet flavours in the dish. A risk? Of course.

2. Su Reimond 2009, Moscato d’Asti, Piemonte, Italy

Moscato d’Asti is produced in the Piemonte Region of Northwest Italy from Moscato Bianco, Italy’s version of the superior Muscat Blanc a Petits Grains varietal. With a maximum of 1.7 atmospheres of pressure in the bottle, it is only slightly frothy with one third the pressure of most fully sparkling wines. Its alcoholic strength is also considerably lower at 5%.

This particular Moscato d’Asti is produced by the Bera family who have a long and rich wine making tradition. Their Moscato d’Asti provides a more delicate expression of the musky orange flowers and spice character that is typical of the Muscat Blanc a Petit Grains varietal. The most prevalent flavours were citrus, peach, pear and vanilla cream. The body, alcohol and mousse were all characteristically light. The fresh sweet fruit dominated yet remained refreshing.

We added this wine to compare the effects of a lightly fizzy wine relative to a traditional method sparkling wine such as Cava. We were also interested in testing wines of varying body levels. Moscato d'Asti offers a light, somewhat refreshing, sweet wine alternative.

Category 2: Whites, crisp, spicy and off dry

3. Quinta de Linhares Azal 2009, Vinho Verde, Portugal

Vinho Verde is a DOC in northwest Portugal. Its wine of same name is light, acidic and slightly sparkling. Vinho Verde ("green wine") gives reference to the youthful state in which it is usually sold and best consumed. This particular Vinho Verde is made from 100% Azal grapes in a drier style as is customary with the smaller quality focused quintas. The wine was awarded a silver medal at the 2010 Concours Mondial de Bruxelles.

Bright lemon in the glass, the aromas and flavours of this Vinho Verde include green apples, pear and lemon peel accompanied by light floral notes. Dry with med + crisp acidity, the body is light supported by a refreshing, light fizzy mouth feel. The alcohol is medium. There is no evidence of wood ageing and the fairly neutral fruity nature of the wine dominates.

This wine was included in our tasting panel to test the structural impact of refreshing acidity on its own merit without other structural influences such as sweetness, fuller texture or intensity of flavour. The objective was to use the high acidity to help balance the acidity of the vinaigrette and try to bring out the honeyed and caramelized flavours of the figs. Conversely, we were hoping to accentuate the fruit in the wine.

4. Heimberger 2009, Gewurztraminer, Alsace, France

Gewurztraminer is a pink skinned grape variant of Traminer responsible for the particularly pungent and full bodied wine of the same name. It is deeply coloured, opulently aromatic and fuller bodied than almost any other white wine. Gewurztraminers also tend to attain higher alcohol levels than most whites with over 14% being by no means uncommon. Acidities however can be low, so it is important to find a quality producer that uses ripe concentrated grapes while still retaining sufficient acidity to balance the intensely perfumed fruit of this varietal (typically lychee and roses).

The producer of this gewürztraminer is Cave de Beblenheim, a quality minded co-op in Alsace, France where the top examples in the world are produced. This gewürztraminer featured flavours of ginger spice, rose petal, honey and melon. The palate was medium dry with sufficient acidity to remain fresh. The alcohol was slightly lower than many gewürztraminers at 13.3% and the texture was lush and slightly syrupy.

Gewurztraminer is a traditional Alsatian wine pairing with blue cheese, one of the strongest flavour components in our dish. In addition to the strong flavour intensity shared by both, they are also complementary in terms of weight and richness. A similar dense, textural match applies to the figs, although a syrupy element was also expected. Young gewürztraminer is also commonly recommended

with fusion food redolent of ginger or other spices. Ginger is a key ingredient in the vinaigrette. While gewürztraminer is often produced dry, we chose a medium dry style so that the sweetness would serve as a foil to the saltiness of the blue cheese while complementing the honeyed sweetness of the figs.

5. Ken Forrester 2009 Chenin Blanc, Stellenbosch, South Africa

According to Oz Clarke, the world's spotlight is now turning on to the previously unnoticed chenin blanc grape variety. In the New World, South Africa, in particular, has embraced this grape. Now, 18 % of its total vineyard area is planted with chenin blanc. In the historic wine growing region of Stellenbosch, Ken Forrester's vineyards are widely known as the home of chenin blanc. The vineyards are farmed sustainably with no herbicides or pesticides. All the vineyard work is done by hand. Ken Forrester's 100 % chenin blanc is pale yellow-green in colour with a nose of lime, green apple and floral notes. On the palate, it is fresh and bright with flavours of apples, citrus and chamomile.

This chenin blanc was used in this study because it is a variety often paired with spicy dishes. We wanted to explore whether the slightly off dry taste would pair well with the ginger and honey, whether the citrus and green apple notes would bring out the vinegar in the dressing and cut the fattiness of the cheese.

Category 3: Sweet whites

6. Kracher 2007, Beerenauslese, Weinlaubenhof, Burgenland, Austria

Kracher Cuvee Beerenauslese is based predominantly on the welschriesling grape plus 40% chardonnay. It is produced in the beerenauslese style, one of the three ripest Pradikats in the QMP quality wine category defined by the German Wine Law. This particular botrytized wine is produced in Austria on the shores of the Neusiedlersee in Burgenland by Alois Kracher, a highly reputable Austrian winemaker who has helped put Austrian late harvest wines on the map.

As indicated by its name, which translates as 'foreign riesling', welschriesling is not related to the riesling grape variety. Although welschriesling has little in common with riesling, it too is a late ripening grape that keeps its acidity well and produces light bodied, relatively aromatic wines when dry to more full bodied wines when noble rot is able to form.

This wine was full bodied expressing intense flavours of juicy ripe peach, honey, dried plum and salty minerality. The bouquet showed notes of smoky flint. The sweet palate was balanced by vibrant acidity. This wine was included primarily due to its sweetness level combined with its powerful flavours and body. We expected these characteristics, along with the high acidity, to contrast the sharp, salty flavours and dense texture of the blue cheese. Also, Beerenauslese, or sweeter versions of this varietal, generally handle caramelization well. So we expected good synergy with the figs.

7. Chateau Myrat 2007, Sauternes, (Barsac) Bordeaux, France

Sauternes is a region within the Graves district south of Bordeaux. It is dedicated to the production of unfortified sweet white wine. This appellation is reserved for wines from five communes

(Sauternes, Barsac, Preignac, Bommes and Fargues). Three grapes are planted: semillon, sauvignon blanc and muscadelle. Semillon is the principal grape as it is especially susceptible to noble rot. Barsac is the most distinctive commune and is entitled to its own appellation although it can also be sold as Sauternes. Its proximity to the Ciron river and its alluvial soil give wines that are often lighter and more elegant than its neighbours. This Chateau Myrat is from the estate of Comte Jacques de Pontac in the commune of Barsac. Oz Clarke identifies Myrat as one of the best producers of sauternes.

This particular vintage (2007) has dried apple, pear and honey on the nose and palate. It is full-bodied, medium sweet with citrus fruit, apricot and spice character. It has a long and flavourful finish and achieved a 92-95 score from Wine Spectator.

We chose this wine for our tasting panel because we thought its sweetness, full body and long finish would pair well with the salty and powerful flavour of the roquefort cheese. Its dried apple, pear and honey notes would complement the ginger, honey and caramelized figs and its citrus would echo the vinegar in the salad dressing. We also thought the overall sweetness of the wine would calm any bitter flavours from the salad greens.

Category 4: Fortified wines

8. NPU Romate Amontillado, Spain

The Sanchez Romate winery was founded by Juan Sanchez de la Torre in 1761. It is situated in Jerez de la Frontera in southern Spain. It is one of the few remaining wineries still in the hands of the Official Purveyor to the House of Lords and to the Vatican Palace. This Amontillado is made from palomino fino grapes and is considered one of the finer sherries from Jerez. NPU Romate Amontillado is bright amber in colour with aromas of almonds and citrus fruit. On the palate, the wine is dry and silky, with notes of orange peel, vanilla and smoke.

This Amontillado was selected for our study because we wanted to explore the impact of a dry, smoky, nutty sherry on a salty, strong Roquefort cheese. We also wanted to know whether the silkiness of the sherry would complement the smooth, rich texture of the honey, ginger and caramelized figs.

9. Leacock's Rainwater Madeira, Portugal

Rainwater Medium Dry Madeira is a sweeter style of Madeira fortified with high strength grape spirit to interrupt fermentation and retain unfermented sugars in the wine. Madeira is typically known for its distinct burnt caramel and honeyed nut flavours accompanied by high tangy acidity. The distinct caramel and often smoky characters are thought to originate from two primary factors: 1) the volcanic soils and high levels of potash infused following years of ravaging fires on the Portuguese island of Madeira; 2) an aggressive oxidative ageing process in which the wines are heated either in large concrete tanks (estufas) or wooden casks over a period of months or through a gentler more gradual process of heating in the sun over a period of years. Most methods tend to be followed by extended ageing in oak casks.

Leacock's Rainwater used the estufas method of transferring to tanks where the wine underwent a cyclic heating and cooling process over a period of 3 months. It was then aged in American oak for 3 years. The "Rainwater" style is produced on a limited basis, mostly for North American markets and is considered to be one of the mildest styles of Madeira (similar to Verdelho).

Medium amber in colour, this Madeira shows medium intensity flavours of roasted hazelnuts, burnt sugar, dried fruits (orange peel) with a long spicy finish (cinnamon). Acidity is med+ accompanied by medium body, medium dry sweetness and medium alcohol (for a fortified). Leacock's Rainwater Medium Dry Madeira was recently awarded 90 points by Wine Spectator and listed as the one of the top scoring wines for \$25 or less.

It was included in our study to contrast the sharp and salty nature of the blue cheese with the sweetness of the Madeira, match the honeyed flavours and textural lushness of the figs with the full bodied richness of the Madeira (although light bodied for a Madeira, the wine is still full relative to other wine styles) and use the high acidity of the Madeira to balance the acidity of the vinaigrette and accentuate the honeyed character of the figs.

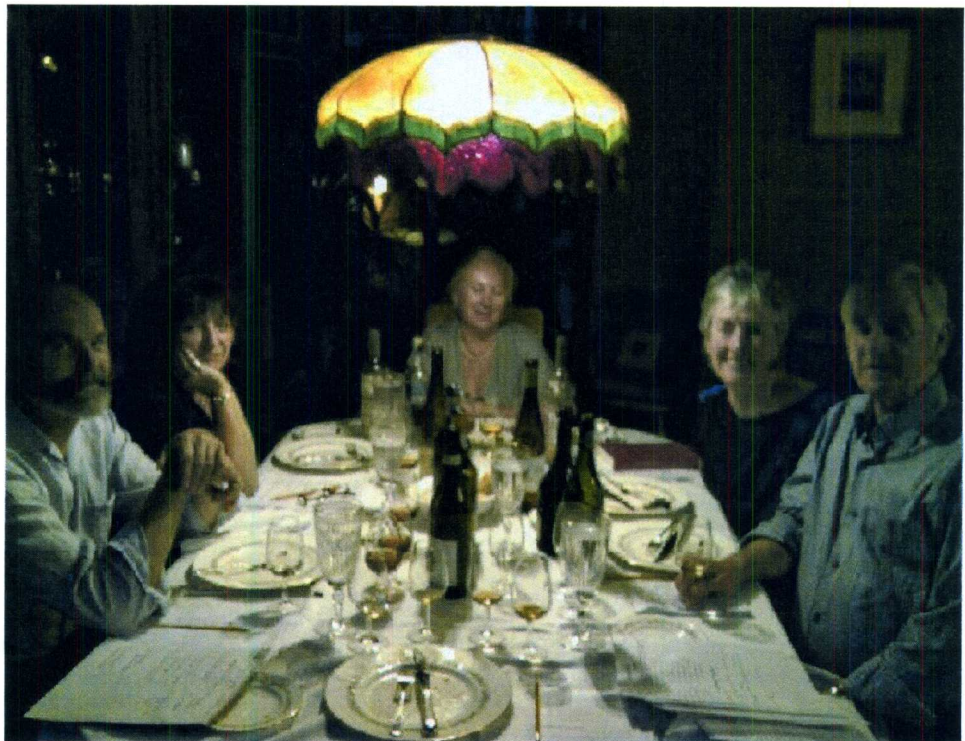
10. Warre's Otima 20 Port, Portugal

Warre's was established as the first British port house in 1670. Its wines are now produced by the Symington family who have been in the port trade for over 350 years. Six members of the Symington family actively manage their vineyards in the Douro region of Portugal. Previous releases of this port have received several silver medals. This 2011 release is well balanced with a clear, bright medium to light mahogany color, with a light structure. In the nose and on the palate, there is dried fruit with some caramel under notes. There is some moderate sweetness (more honey than sugar) with good balance and a medium finish. It is smoother than the 10-year version. (Fermented Review)

This port was included in our study as a suggestion by a LCBO sommelier at Bank and Walkley location. The dried fruit and caramel flavours in the wine may be a match with the caramelized figs, honey and ginger. Port is also known to pair well with another blue cheese (Stilton). We wondered whether this lighter port might work with the roquefort cheese.

The Tasting Panel: an interesting discussion...

Our six member tasting panel comprised our two sommeliers-in-training, Carole Beamish and Jane Hardy, and four wine and food lovers: Jane and Hunter McGill, Yvan Hardy and Monique Saint Amand. We conducted our study as a blind tasting where bottles were covered with tin foil and numbered. We ordered the wines for the tasting from lightest to fullest bodied. We began our tasting by explaining our wine rating form (see Appendix B). It was derived from similar forms contained in Robert Harrington's book, *Wine and Food Pairing*. The form was divided into two parts. Raters were first asked to review the wines with the salad and identify which aspects of the wine (sweetness, acidity, tannin, alcohol, overall body, intensity, persistence, spiciness, and effervescence) positively and negatively affected the food and wine match. The second part of the form asked for a wine and food match rating from 1 (no match) to 10 (synergistic match). Part 1 of the form was useful as a basis for discussion but numerically rating the impact of each element became too complicated.



Consequently, only the actual match ratings could be charted and compared (see Appendix A).

In addition to tabulating the views of the panel, we conducted two other analyses. The first analysis reviewed the level of consensus or diversity among raters to determine whether the panellists had very similar or different palates. The second analysis attempted to capture the views of raters on their reasons for or against the matches.

Analysis 1: Diversity or Consensus

When reviewing the results, it became apparent that tastes and perceptions varied widely on some wines. The greatest rating consensus was for wines 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10. The greatest diversity came with wine 7. (See table 1 below.)

Table 1: Wines		Rater Consensus or Diversity
1	Spanish Cava	<u>Diversity</u> : Three raters gave 6 to 8; other three gave 3 to 5
2	Moscato d'Asti	<u>Diversity</u> : Three raters gave 6 and 7; three gave 3 to 5
3	Vinho Verde	<u>Consensus</u> : All raters gave 2 to 4
4	Gewürztraminer	<u>Diversity</u> : Four raters gave between 4 and 6; two raters each gave 2
5	Chenin Blanc	<u>Diversity</u> : Two raters gave 6; four rated between 2 and 4
6	Beerenauslese	<u>Consensus</u> : All raters rated between 7 and 9
7	Sauternes	<u>Diversity</u> : Three raters gave 6 to 9; three raters gave 2 to 4
8	Madeira	<u>Consensus</u> : All raters gave 1 to 3
9	Amontillado	<u>Consensus</u> : All raters gave 1 to 2
10	Port	<u>Consensus</u> : All raters gave 1 to 3

Individual raters varied as well in the way they rated. Only two raters awarded a 9 to any wine (the sommeliers-in-training, although they disagreed on the highest rated wine). Three other raters gave 8 as their highest rating and one rater gave 7 as the highest score. Three raters used 1 as their lowest score. One rater was tougher and gave three ones (also 7 as the highest).

Although there was some diversity among the palates of the panellists, a clear consensus emerged that Wine 6 was the best match for the salad. Consensus also emerged that wines 3, 8, 9, and 10 were definitely poor matches.

Analysis 2: Rationale for ratings

Raters provided a range of comments to support their conclusions as Table 2 below shows.

Table 2: Wines		Rater Comments
1	Spanish Cava	Several raters liked the bright acidity/effervescence and thought it reduced the saltiness/fattiness of the cheese and contrasted well with sweeter elements. Others found it too acidic overall.
2	Moscato d'Asti	Although the sweetness and refreshing acidity provided a good flavour contrast to the blue cheese, the mouth feel seemed too light. Also, the wine flavours were too delicate for overall flavour intensity of the dish.
3	Vinho Verde	The wine did not have enough sweetness, flavour complexity and body to work with the flavour interplay and dense textural elements of the salad ingredients. So the wine became bland.
4	Gewürztraminer	The lush textural match of the cheese and figs with the wine was positive. The spicy ginger flavours of the wine complemented the ginger in the vinaigrette. But overall raters found the body of the wine too light and too dry for the dish so it became thin.
5	Chenin Blanc	Some raters thought the wine complemented the ginger and honey in the salad. Overall, raters considered this wine too dry and too light for the dish so the wine became too acidic.
6	Beerenauslese	Raters found this wine the best match. Its sweetness contrasted well with the cheese, complemented the sweet elements, brought out the ginger/honey and calmed any bitterness in the salad leaves
7	Sauternes	Raters were split. Some found this brought out the depth and complexity of both the salad and the wine. Others detected a slight diesel aroma and found the wine too lush for the salad.
8	Madeira	Wines 8 and 9 were rated as poor matches. The Madeira's burnt caramel brought out the bitterness in the salad leaves and overpowered the delicate fig flavours. The Amontillado's dry nutty smoky flavours made the Roquefort too salty and the sweet elements of the dish made the sherry too dry.
9	Amontillado	
10	Port	Although raters found the sweetness of the port a good contrast to the roquefort, the wine was considered too heavy and overpowering for the remaining elements of the dish.

Final selection: not what we expected...

Based on the decisions of the panel (see chart on Tasting Panel Results in Appendix A), the wine chosen as the best match for the salad was Wine 6, the Kracher Beerenauslese from Austria. We were unable to find a Monbazillac as the *Saveurs* magazine proposed. Instead, we chose a Barsac Sauternes to get as close as possible. The Sauternes might have won except that several panel members noted a slight diesel aroma which did not pair well with salad. The panel found the Chateau Myrat a match with the roquefort but too heavy bodied and rich for the overall salad dish. The Beerenauslese, by contrast, did not overwhelm the dish. It complemented the figs which were lighter than anticipated. It paired well with the ginger. Its acidity brought out the tang of the rice vinegar and softened the slightly bitter salad. Its sweetness also stood up well to the roquefort. Considering that this is a salad and likely to be served as a first course, the panel considered the lighter wine would be a better beginning for a meal.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Based on the objectives we established, our conclusions from this project are:

- Salad is not universally more difficult to pair with wine than other dishes. It depends very much on the ingredients. In our salad, there were very few traditionally bitter elements. The vinegar in the salad dressing was a very mild, almost sweet, rice vinegar and the only raw ingredients (salad leaves) were mostly neutral and mainly added texture.
- Both similarity and contrast can work well in pairing. The challenge is to determine what wines work in both circumstances, especially if there are high contrast flavours in the same dish.
- Texture, weight and body matter significantly in pairing. If your wine is too dense, too heavy, too lush or by contrast too light, it will either overpower the dish or become too thin – like water.
- Yes, the wine does have to be as sweet – but not necessarily sweeter than the food. This may be more an issue of body, however. If the wine is sweeter AND more powerful, it may overwhelm the dish. As well, the aromas and flavours of a sweet wine can complement a dish to a greater or lesser extent. Not all sweet wines work with all sweet dishes.
- Did we find a better wine pairing than the Monbazillac – result inconclusive since we could not find one (should have tried SAQ). Our sauternes substitute was too heavy and lush. We did find a lovely discovery though in the Austrian welschriesling.

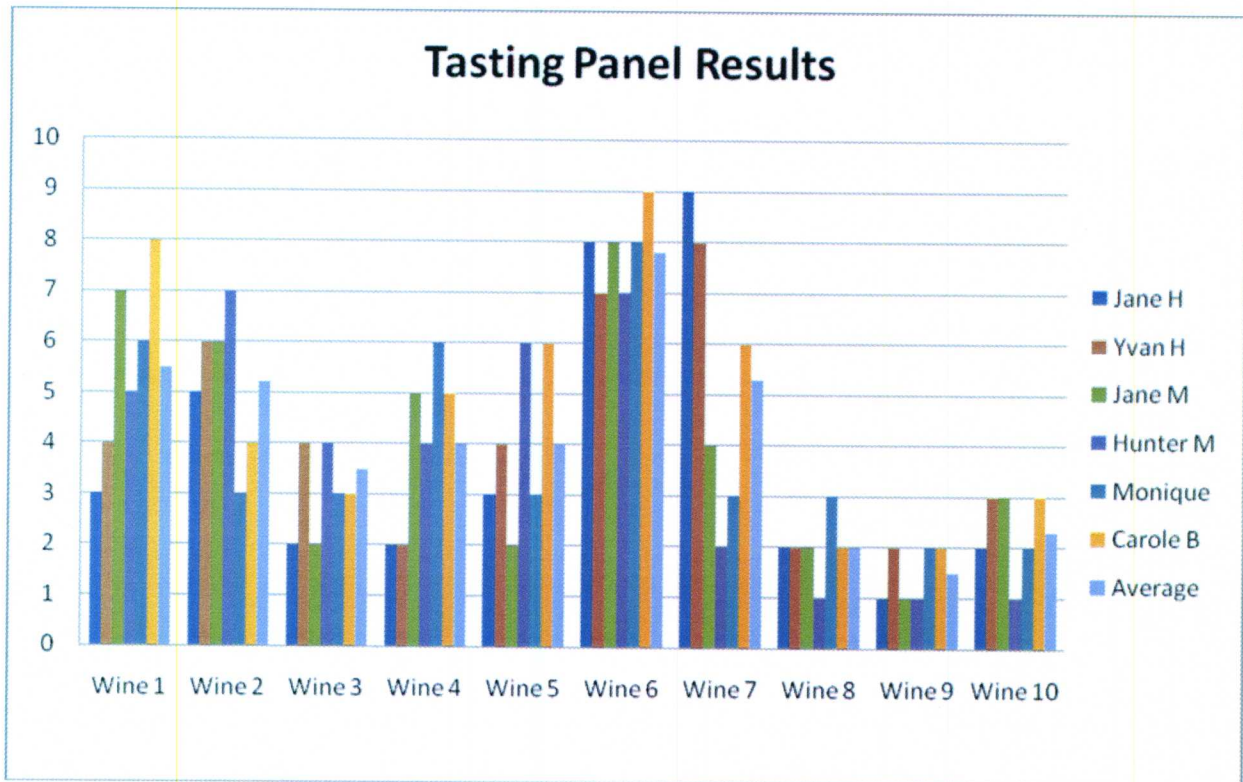
In terms of lessons learned, we were delighted with our experience in this project. We were very happy that we chose a wide range of wines to be able to taste the pairings for ourselves. We saw that we could have placed more off dry to sweet Rieslings on our list or perhaps explore sweeter sparkling wines. We also learned that it is very difficult to predict a pairing if you really don't know what the wine tastes like. And even then, the outcome is not always what you expect. For instance, in our panel, two raters really liked the Moscato d'Asti as a possible match. But the remaining four participants found it too sweet, not complimentary to salad and vice versa.

We learned how a dish can dramatically change the flavour of a wine and vice versa. In our experiment, the dressing/vinaigrette in the salad played a much larger role than we expected in the

tasting. Also, the caramelized figs were more delicate than we anticipated from the recipe. While the port and sherry were creative choices that were intended to compliment the weight of the cheese and figs, the remaining ingredients in the salad were not strong enough to be matched with a fortified wine. As a result, we learned that the wine and salad ingredients needed to balance each other in weight and texture not just in taste. Most people liked the Cava (Dama de Naveran) with the salad as a neutral match. This may be a desired outcome if the salad and wine pairing are the appetizer of a larger meal. A lesson learned here is that a food and wine pairing also needs to be looked at in the larger context of the meal.

In conclusion, our project certainly reinforced the concept that people's tastes and perceptions can vary widely, even among people of similar experience, age and culture. It is also important to be aware of "place bias" and "palate fatigue". It is likely that the Cava received more favourable reviews simply because it was first. By the same token, the last wines may have received lower scores because people's palates were tired.

APPENDIX A: Tasting Panel Results and Wines Rated



Wines Rated

1. Dama de Naveran 2007, CAVA Extra Brut, Sadeve S.A. Barcelona, Spain (12%)
2. Su Reimond 2009, Moscato d'Asti, Bera Azienda, Piemonte, Italy (5%)
3. Quinta de Linhares Azal 2009, Vinho Verde, Agri Roncao, Portugal (13%)
4. Heimberger 2009 ,Alsace Gewurtztraminer, Vielles Vignes, Cave de Beblenheim, France (13%)
5. Ken Forrester 2009, Chenin Blanc, Stellenbosch, South Africa (14%)
6. Kracher 2007, Beerenauslese, Weinlaubenhof, Burgenland, Austria (13%)
7. Chateau de Myrat 2007, Sauternes, Bordeaux, Comte Jacques de Pontac a Barsac (Gironde) France (13.5%)
8. Leacock's Rainwater Madeira, medium dry, Madeira, Portugal (18%)
9. NPU Romate Amontillado, Jerez de la Frontera, Spain (19%)
10. Warre's Otima 20 Port (twenty year port bottled 2011), Symington, Portugal (20%)

Appendix B

WINE RATING FORM

NAME OF RATER _____ WINE NUMBER _____

Which wine element(s) **positively** impacted the wine and food match (check all that apply). Please rank them in order of impact (1 = greatest impact)

____ Sweetness _____

____ Acidity _____

____ Tannin _____

____ Alcohol level _____

____ Overall body _____

____ Wine flavour intensity level _____

____ Wine flavour persistence level _____

____ Wine spiciness level _____

____ Wine effervescence _____

Which wine elements(s) **negatively** impacted the wine and food match (check all that apply). Please rank them in order of impact (1=greatest impact)

____ Sweetness _____

____ Acidity _____

____ Tannin _____

____ Alcohol level _____

____ Overall body _____

____ Wine flavour intensity _____

____ Wine flavour persistence level _____

____ Wine spiciness level _____

____ Wine effervescence _____

LEVEL OF WINE AND FOOD MATCH

Please circle a number on the scale below

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No Match

Average Match

Synergistic Match

Note: A synergistic match is when the food makes the wine taste better and the wine makes the food taste better

Wines that are medium

10 Mar 2012 by Jancis Robinson/[Financial Times](#) but this is much longer

We like our wine to be dry, don't we? Unless of course it is unashamedly very sweet (and even this, alas, is a minority taste). But the supposedly dry wines on our shelves can vary very substantially in how much unfermented sugar they contain – and those that fall between dry and sweet present real challenges.

Sweetness in wine, 'residual sugar' or 'RS', is usually measured in grams per litre of liquid, although Americans generally express it as a percentage. It is impossible to get residual sugar levels down to zero (wine begins life as very sweet grape juice) but the general threshold of perception of sweetness is around 2 g/l, or 0.2% and most fine red wine is well below this, often below 1 g/l, so don't taste at all sweet.

It's a very different story with mass-market brands, however. Some of them are really quite sweet. Yellow Tail, the archetypal 'critter' brand that has been so successful that it now accounts for almost half of all Australian wine imported into the US, is famously relatively sweet – as is one of the most successful brands of California Chardonnay, Kendall Jackson Vintner's Reserve. These brands are likely to notch up sugar levels of at least 5–6 g/l, and some of the California whites naughtily labelled 'Chablis', even though it is a controlled geographical appellation in Europe, can notch up well over 10 g/l of sugar, often in the form of deliberately added sweet grape-juice concentrate.

Those who routinely analyse a wide range of wines report that in general inexpensive wines, reds as well as whites and pinks, made in California, Australia, Chile and New Zealand have notably higher sugar levels than Europe's 'dry' wines: 3–8 g/l rather than 1–2 g/l. Because of New Zealand's relatively high latitudes, acid levels in the grapes tend to be higher than in wine regions closer to the equator. The higher the acid, the less sweet a wine tastes, so Kiwi wines' sweetness tends to be less obvious than those grown in hotter climes.

Sweetness can be used deliberately by a winemaker to counteract excessively high acidity. Some of France's cheapest 'dry' white labelled Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne from armagnac country, for example, tends to be naturally extremely high in acidity, so winemakers often soften this by boosting the natural sugar level. The same technique may be applied to some of the more commercial whites from Italy, where high yields leave the grapes and therefore wines particularly high in acid. European reds that are sold as dry but often in fact contain up to 8 g/l residual sugar include some of the less artisan wines from Sicily and Puglia in southern Italy.

Another factor that can affect how sweet a wine tastes is temperature. At a recent blind tasting exploring perceptions of sweetness, we were, unbeknown to us, served the same wine twice, once at room temperature and once well chilled. We all thought the chilled version of this sweetish wine (60 g/l residual sugar) was drier than the warmer one because acidity is more prominent at lower temperatures.

Although virtually all red wines are relatively dry, the level of residual sugar in white wines can vary enormously – from under 2 g/l to hundreds of grams per litre in naturally sweet wines made from really ripe grapes. Wines at each end of the sweetness spectrum are generally easy to identify and we more or less know how they are going to taste.

But a considerable proportion of white wines lie somewhere in between dry and very sweet. It can be very frustrating to buy a bottle of wine and find that it is much sweeter (or drier) than expected. The wines of Alsace have been particular sinners in this respect. They can vary from bone dry to medium sweet without any indication on the label to help the consumer – which has driven a handful of producers such as Zind Humbrecht to devise their own systems for indicating sweetness.

Because Riesling wines come in a particularly wide range of sweetness levels, and because, largely thanks to the efforts of Washington state's dominant wine company Chateau Ste Michelle and their joint venture with Erni Loosen of Germany's Mosel Valley, Riesling has had a head of steam behind it in the US, an American-based organisation called the International Riesling Foundation has also come up with a graphic to be used on wine labels to show how sweet wines are.



It was to test how well this scale, the Riesling Taste Profile, from Dry through gradations of Medium Dry and Medium Sweet to Sweet, could be applied to a wide, international range of Rieslings that 25 of us tried to grade the sweetness levels of 26 examples ranging in sweetness from 0.92 to 207.50 g/l (see Tasmanian Riesling sweetness workshop.) We were shown International Riesling Foundation guidelines of extreme complexity beforehand that indicated what influence acidity and the level of pH (the intensity of the acidity) should have in addition to the residual sugar level (see below). One of the tasters was Wendy Stuckey, responsible for Chateau Ste Michelle's highly successful Washington state Rieslings. She confessed that, when deciding exactly which point on the Riesling Taste Profile should be applied to each wine, they took no notice of the complex formulae and did it all on how it tasted to them.

IRF RIESLING TASTE PROFILE, TECHNICAL GUIDELINES SUMMARY					
	SUGAR TO ACID RATIO	pH		pH	SHIFT DUE TO pH
DRY	< 1.0	3.1 to 3.2	If	= or > 3.3	Med Dry
				3.5 or >	Med Sweet
MEDIUM DRY	1.0 to 2.0			= or > 3.3	Medium Sweet
				< or = 2.9	Dry
MEDIUM SWEET	2.1 to 4.0			= or > 3.3	Sweet
				< or = 2.9	Medium Dry
				< or = 2.8	Dry
SWEET	= or > 4.1			< or = 2.9	Medium Sweet
				< or = 2.8	Medium Dry

I'm not sure average consumers can be bothered with comparing nuances of gradation – and I'm sure they wouldn't want to see the table above. They probably just want to know whether a wine is Dry, Medium Dry, Medium Sweet or Sweet – and many consumers will already be prejudiced against any wine not in the first category. This is a great shame since many delicious fine white wines taste a little sweet, though, thanks to counterbalancing acidity, are far from cloying. I have listed some of my current favourites below.

The only trouble with medium-dry and medium-sweet wines is working out how to serve them. If, like a German Kabinett and Spätlese, they are low in alcohol, they may well be too light to stand up to anything other than the most neutral white fish dish and are best drunk on their own. But whites such as the richer examples from Austria, Alsace and Tokaj and medium-dry Chenins made in the image of Vouvray have quite enough body to accompany food and can be particularly delicious with rich shellfish, creamily-sauced savoury dishes and smooth pâtés.

MEDIUM DRY TO MEDIUM SWEET RECOMMENDATIONS

These whites taste richer than bone dry and are listed in (very) approximately ascending order of apparent sweetness. Average prices per bottle as calculated by wine-searcher.com.

Millton, Te Arai Chenin Blanc 2009 Gisborne, New Zealand £14

Mullineux 2010 Swartland, South Africa £15

Dr Loosen, Ürziger Würzgarten Riesling GG 2009 Mosel, Germany £22

Huet, Le Mont Demi-Sec 2008 Vouvray, Loire, France £23

Botani Moscatel Seco 2008 Sierras de Málaga, Spain £11

István Szepsy, Estate Furmint 2008 Tokaj, Hungary £20

Dom Zind Humbrecht, Turkheim Riesling 2008 Alsace, France £19

Frankland Estate, Smith Cullam Riesling 2010 Frankland River, Australia £28

Hirsch, Heiligenstein Riesling 2009 Kamptal, Austria £25

Bründlmayer, Heiligenstein Riesling Lyra 2010 Kamptal, Austria £29

Ken Forrester, The FMC Chenin Blanc 2009 Stellenbosch, South Africa £29

A Christmann, Idig Riesling GG 2010 Pfalz, Germany £30

F X Pichler, Durnsteiner Kellerberg Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 2009 Wachau, Austria £43

Dr Loosen, Ürziger Würzgarten Spätlese 2009 Mosel, Germany £16

And Julia recommends:

Monte Cascas Fernão Pires 2009 Tejo, Portugal

Birgit Eichinger, Lamm Grüner Veltliner 2010 Kamptal, Austria

Bründlmayer, Alte Reben Grüner Veltliner 2010 Kamptal, Austria

Bründlmayer, Steinmassel Riesling 2006 Kamptal, Austria

Loimer, Steinmassel Riesling 2010 Kamptal, Austria

Umathum, Gelber und Roter Traminer 2010 Burgenland, Austria

THE SWEET FACTOR

XD**EXTRA DRY**

No perceived
sweetness;
clean, crisp
acidic finish

D**DRY**

No distinct sweetness;
well-rounded with
balanced acidity

M**MEDIUM**

Slight sweetness
perceived

Many of you told us that you like to choose wine based on how dry or sweet it is. We're glad our recently introduced sweetness descriptors are helping you out.

Here's a reminder of the abbreviations you'll see on each LCBO wine's shelf ticket, and what they mean.

You'll find the sugar descriptor here

PINOT GRIGIO	LIGHT & CRISP	CANADA SKINNY 750 ML	(M – 21 g/L)	9.75 + 20¢ Deposit = \$9.95  283804
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You'll find the actual sugar content noted in grams per litre here

MS
MEDIUM SWEET

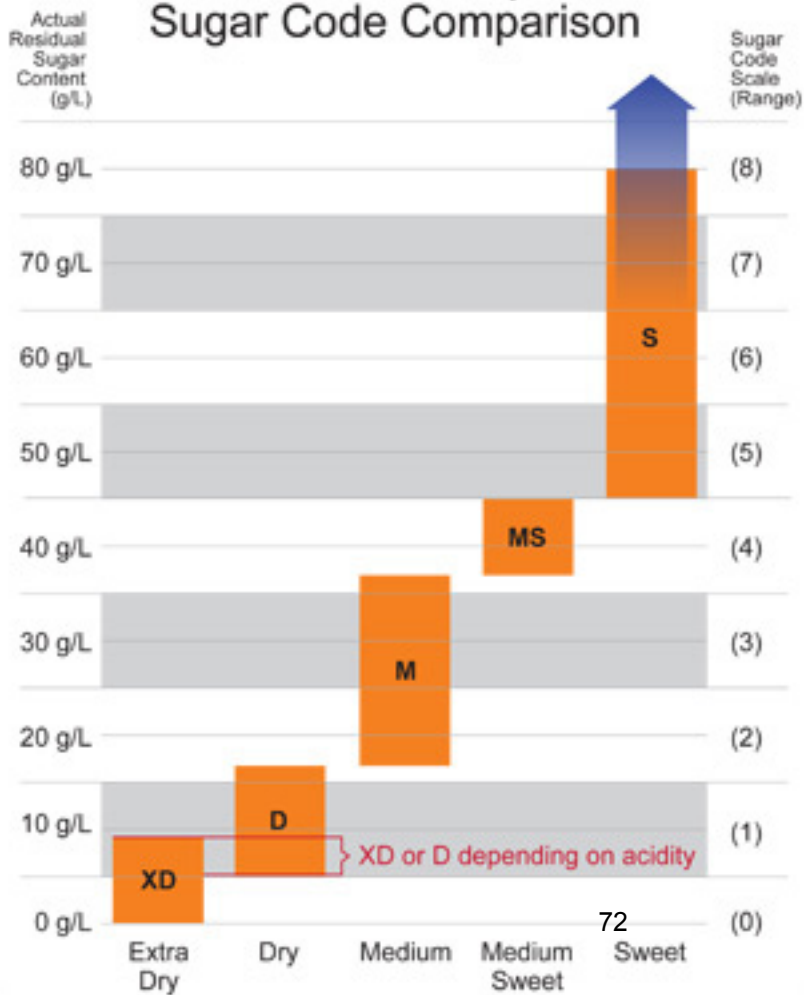
Noticeably sweet

S
SWEET

Distinctively sweet



Sweetness Descriptor & Sugar Code Comparison



Matching Peak-Sweet Seafood and Wine (continued)

Matching Shellfish and Crustaceans with Wine (continued)

Things to consider when matching	Wine styles that work
Full-bodied shellfish dishes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soup—crab and lobster bisque, creamy chowders, oyster stew, she-crab soup • Classics—crabcakes, lobster Thermidor, low-country shrimp and grits, coquilles St.-Jacques, oysters Rockefeller, shrimp or crawfish étouffée 	Decadent New World Chardonnays match the go-for-broke buttery, creamy richness of these dishes: UNITED STATES —Kistler, Chalk Hill, Beringer Private Reserve, Robert Mondavi Reserve, Peter Michael, Talbott AUSTRALIA —Leeuwin, Penfolds Yattarna, Knappstein-Lenswood, Devil's Lair, Rosemount Roxburgh

Matching Peak-Sweet Seafood and Wine

Matching Ocean Fish with Wine

Things to consider when matching	Wine styles that work
Ocean fish "Mainstream" sounds like a play on words, but it's reality nowadays when it comes to the role of fish on the American table. The deliciousness and ease of ordering out or home-cooking flown-in-off-the-boat or farmed fish at peak freshness are both a health- and wine-friendly windfall for the American table. For direction in matching, consider: FLAVOR PROFILE: The fish that dominate menus and markets are, from light to heavy: sole, flounder, snapper, turbot, cod, grouper, halibut, monkfish, bass, swordfish, salmon, tuna. Though they vary in taste and body, all when fresh and well-prepared are tender-textured and succulently sweet-tasting. PLATE-MATES: These fish are a wonderful canvas for displaying the flavors of whatever accompanies. So, if you prefer to match the side or sauce, you'll have a winner, too. WINE-WORTHY ADD-ONS: Perhaps I sound like a broken record but butter, sesame oil, and coconut milk are all wine-loving add-ons for fish, too, with the tropical and toasty Chardonnay wine styles already mentioned in the corn and peak-sweet vegetables charts. Brown butter sauce (<i>beurre noisette</i> in French) in particular is classic to fish. Be ready with a splash of wine to stop the cooking just when the butter colors—it can go from an opulent, nutty-flavored brown, to black and bitter in a split second (one of the many things one learns the hard way in French culinary school!).	To match the fish: American Pinot Noir This red (!) is the choice for fish purists, because it is a like-with-like match of texture (silken) and taste (tender-sweet). Ripe-but-elegant Pinot Noirs without heavy oak are the best. OREGON —Sokol-Blosser, Willakenzie, Argyle, Ken Wright, Panther Creek, Adelsheim, Benton Lane, Ponzi, Foris, King Estate, Archery Summit CALIFORNIA —Au Bon Climat, Byron, Estancia, Iron Horse, J. Gallo of Sonoma, Marimar Torres, Etude, Williams-Selyem, Saintsbury, Sanford, Littorai, Kendall-Jackson, Estancia, Indigo Hills To match the plate-mate— You could match the side, say a tropical Chardonnay and grilled polenta; or the sauce, perhaps toasty Chardonnay for brown butter sauce (check the previous veggie charts for specific names); upcoming chapters will give you ideas from earthy (e.g., sautéed mushrooms), to herbal (such as a dilled cream sauce), to spicy (perhaps pico de gallo) and beyond. Truly any wine can work— This is an extension of the prior point, but both fish and wine lovers should take serious note. I've tasted fabulous pairings from a golden sweet Sauternes dessert wine with lobster consommé, to the biggest and inkiest of dry reds with seared tuna <i>au poivre</i> . The best wine choice really does turn on the preparation or plate-mate, a point we'll illustrate many more times in chapters to come. For that reason, fish may be the most wine-loving food of all.

Matching Peak-Sweet Seafood and Wine

Matching Shellfish and Crustaceans with Wine

Things to consider when matching	Wine styles that work
<p>Shellfish and crustaceans Lobster, shrimp, scallops, and crab: whether cakes, skewers, or rolls; steamed, sautéed, or sizzled, all of these delicacies share sea-sweet flavors and plump, pillowy textures that just love wine.</p> <p>Match according to the richness of the dish.</p>	<p>Bubbly wine is my all-time favorite choice for these creatures, no matter the preparation. Some of my favorites: <i>United States</i>—Argyle, Iron Horse, J, Roederer Estate; <i>France</i>—Moët Brut and White Star, Veuve Clicquot, Pol Roger, Gosset, Bollinger, Perrier-Jouët, Charles Heidseick, Krug; <i>Spain</i>—Aria</p> <p>Beyond bubbly I match the wine pairing to the heaviness and spiciness of the dish, as follows.</p>
Specific shellfish dishes	Wines to Try
<p>Light-bodied shellfish dishes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steamed, grilled, broiled, roasted, pan-seared—scallops, shrimp and prawns, lobster, clams, oysters, mussels, hard-shell crabs • Sushi—though any can be prepared with nori and sushi rice, most shellfish “sushi” features the cooked form of the fish • Soup—broths and stews • Spicy-boiled—shrimp, hard-shell crabs, crawfish • Salad—crab, shrimp, lobster, mussels with creamy dressing <p><i>The classic condiments for these preparations—cocktail sauce, lemon, drawn butter, creamy dressings (such as remoulade, mayo, and tartar sauce), and Japanese soy—all showcase the sea-sweetness. So should the wine.</i></p>	<p>Ripe-but-crisp whites Pure and crisp fruit, without the weight of oakiness, lets the sea-sweetness star, and cools the peppery heat of boiling spices.</p> <p>Riesling from anywhere UNITED STATES—Bonny Doon, Chateau Ste. Michelle, Hogue, Columbia, Jekel FRANCE—Trimbach, Pierre Sparr, Hugel, Beyer, Josmeyer AUSTRALIA—Pike’s, Grosset, Mt. Horrocks, Penfolds GERMANY—Dr. Loosen, Haag, Strub, Selbach, Prüm, Müller-Catoir, Lingenfelder, Weil, Grünhaus</p> <p>New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc (Their tangy acidity makes these top bets for cocktail sauce, and for any sushi-style preparation.)—Brancott, Allan Scott, Nautilus, Villa Maria, Cloudy Bay, Te Mata, Giesen, Glazebrook, St. Clair</p>
<p>Medium-bodied shellfish dishes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwiches—lobster and shrimp rolls, oyster po’ boys • Fried—shrimp toast, coconut shrimp, tempura, batter-fried clams and shrimp, fried oysters (usually breaded with seasoned cornmeal or flour), sautéed soft-shell crabs • Main dishes—scampi, fajitas <p>Breading, frying, mayonnaise, coconut, and guacamole all add richness and weight to the dish.</p>	<p>Ripe-style Chardonnays with restrained oak match the food flavor intensity, without being too heavy:</p> <p>UNITED STATES—Trefethen, Silverado, Cakebread, Chateau Montelena, Callaway, Calera, Au Bon Climat, Estancia, Acacia, Chehalem, Wente, Sonoma-Cutrer, Woodward Canyon, Hanzell, Long Vineyards AUSTRALIA—Shaw and Smith, Kim Crawford, Penfolds, Rosemount Diamond Label, Coldstream Hills NEW ZEALAND—Kumeu River, Brancott “O” Reserve</p>

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