

Entertaining with wine - part two

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Pro-Drinks

...as looked at how much wine, water, and non-alcoholic drink to provide. Here are some specific suggestions as to what sort of wine to serve at which sort of gathering.

Pre-Meal Drinks Party

Wine (plus a non-alcoholic alternative) is much easier to serve than lots of different mixed drinks. People with carpets tend to prefer to serve white wine, and it is true that many, possibly most, such are too full-bodied and tannic to be at their best without food. Sparkling wine seems special, but can go to the head very quickly, which may be a problem, or not. A good champagne can be the greatest treat of all, but perfectly well-made, more economical alternatives can be found from Germany, Italy, Sancerre, Limoux, Alsace, California, New Mexico, Australia, New Zealand and England (a cost of course).

climate is vital). Still white wines that fit the bill of being light enough but not too acid to drink without food include many not-too-expensive examples from Alsace, dry, Kabinett and Spätlese wines from Germany (Mosel especially); light Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc such as a Vin de Pays d'Oc; Chablis and unoaked examples from the southern hemisphere; well-made Pinot Blanc/Bianco and Pinot Gris/Grigio which combine the softness of Pinot with an appealing tang, and fresh, lively Verdejo and Albariño from Spain.

All-Evening Informal Party

The wines listed above could certainly be served all evening, but after a while your guests may want to crave something more substantial. Red wines that can happily be sipped at with no substantial food to break their fall on the palate tend to be light-bodied and low in tannin, such as Beaujolais and other Gamay; red Loire and other Cabernet Franc wines; simpler Merlot; young Pinot Noir (except for most red burgundy); the new generation of juicy young reds from Spain and Portugal; Colorado; and of course practically any red can fit the bill here, particularly those from Spain, which have a killer, after

taste, rather to red than white. And if you really are fond of your carpets then of humoring your guests, you could always switch to a fuller-bodied, oaked white such as a Chardonnay or Semillon when you start to serve the food.

Extended Lunch Party

A similar range of wines as for an evening party could be served here, but in smaller quantities perhaps. Warmer weather may require the addition of some examples from the following section.

Wine To Watch Football (Or Other Games) With

Well if it's Men U, it has to be red, it seems. Party food so as to provide some aesthetic against defeat, and slightly survey to lubricate the throat. Australia shows fits the bill perfectly.

Outdoor Wines

It is usually a waste to serve too fine a wine out doors, especially in hot weather when the bouquet is lost all too easily to the sun and breeze. Backyard food, however, calls for its own brand of earthy, robust Merlot and, perhaps not too surprisingly, hot climate wines come into their own here, including wines from Australia, the southern Rhône, dry rosés and reds from Provence, practically anything produced on the shores of the Mediterranean, Argentine Malbec, or California Zinfandel; even rosé from Greece.

Before A Meal

Any of the wines suggested for a pre-meal drinks party make fine aperitifs, so drinks designed to stimulate the appetite are called. The classic aperitif is dry sherry, generally about 15% alcohol (not much more than many other wines), widely misunderstood, but one of the wine world's great, undervalued treasures. In warm weather a freshly opened, chilled, bottle of Pinot or Merlot can give even more concentrated pleasure than a fine white wine (and is the perfect fit for green olives, seared and juicy jumbo prawns and salted almonds) while a dry rosé, Anjou/Bordeaux is the perfect antidote to cold

weather and an incontinent coat. Special Moders can also be intriguingly light and a real wake-up call in a glass. The most classical fortified wines to serve as aperitifs are champagne, Mosel and lighter Alsace wines.

Dinner Party

I usually serve an aperitif (see above), one or two (instead) first course wines, usually two and sometimes even three different main course wines (moving from lighter to fuller bodied and from young to old), one of which may combine with the cheese but more often (especially since my recent [wine and cheese conference](#))

), we move on to a sweet white wine, or strong and sweet wine such as port at the end. The whites might be two California Chardonnays or white Burgundies from different producers, the reds could follow a geographical, varietal or even vintage theme. But then I want to show off, and

this is why in excess of what is necessary or even sensible, which is probably an aperitif, a white and a red (to cater for those who just can't handle one or other colour). All I would say in my defence is that you learn so much more when comparing similar wines than when drinking them in isolation.

After A Meal

To my mind and palate, sweet wines taste much more delicious drunk on their own (or with cheese) than they do with sweet food. Any reasonably sweet wine can be delicious after a meal, and those with a bit of acidity such as German, Austrian, Loire or Jura can refresh as well. This is also the time to serve sweet fortified wines (port, sherry, madeira, marsala, liqueur muscat, southern French and indeed all rich Muscats as well as wine in its strongest, i.e. distilled, form: cognac, armagnac and other brandies). The spirit that finds most favour with wine lovers other than

brandy is Chateau which, like wine but unlike any other spirit, has an uncanny way of developing in the bottle.

Daytime Drinking

I may be a bit of a snob, but low alcohol wine seems the crucial element in a bottle to be sprung open for sipping between meals. Most comes into its own here, as does Italy's propensity of lightly sparkling Muscats, the wrongly named Red included. Buying an example other than the cheapest is the key to enjoyable grapey froth instead of a headache.