

Wine Pairing Suggestions – Taste of Fame Live Virtual Event
By Julie Robards

First Course

Spinach Artichoke Dip with Traditional Pita

Pair with sparkling (Spumanti) or still (Tranquillo) white wine.

Prosecco - Chardonnay - Sauvignon Blanc

Pairing wine with artichoke can be a challenge because of the herbaceous green and slightly bitter taste of the vegetable. Artichoke leaves a chalky feeling in the mouth that reacts with wine, making it seem overly sweet. The key to a great pairing is to find a dry white wine with crisp acidity and similar aroma and flavor profiles as the artichoke.

Prosecco

Prosecco is the traditional aperitivo of Italy and goes well with any type of appetizer or finger food. Dry and sparkling, the wine is produced from the Glera grape - which was first planted in the mid 1700s around the town of Prosecco in the northern Italian region of Venezia.

Prosecco is generally dry with fresh fruit aromas of green apple, peach, pear and honeydew melon integrated with a hint of cream. The bubbles in Prosecco serve to cleanse the palate between bites of food and they also add an elegant touch to any meal. Prosecco is Italy's affordable alternative to expensive French Champagne and it can be purchased for \$20 - \$25 per bottle.

Unoaked Chardonnay

Chardonnay that is cold fermented and aged in stainless steel is also a great pairing companion for artichoke. Chardonnay ranks number one in regards to consumer popularity and it's grown all over the world. In Italy, Chardonnay is the fourth most cultivated white grape and its vineyards number over 11,800 hectares, which is equal to over 29,146 acres.

Italy - Chardonnay was first planted in Italy during the mid 1800s, however, it didn't become popular until the 1970s, when Angelo Gaja of Barbaresco, began planting Chardonnay grapes in Piedmont. Other famous Piedmont winemakers, Pio Cesare and Luigi Coppo, followed and soon Chardonnay was planted across northern Italy. Look for unoaked wines from Piedmont or Alto Adige, as they have bright, crisp apple and citrus flavors accentuated with a hint of almond, nuances of mineral and sometimes an herbal touch.

France - The most famous unoaked Chardonnay in the world comes from the chalky vineyards of Chablis, France. This wine pairs perfectly with artichoke because it is bone dry and has crisp high acidity. Flavors and aromas of green apple and bitter almond are complimented by a distinctive mineral quality that is derived from the ground in which the grapes grow. Unoaked Chardonnay from the southern regions of France have less acidity, little mineral quality and more prominent fruit flavors of citrus, pear and stone fruit than those grown in northern climates.

USA - If you want to pair domestic Chardonnay with artichoke dip choose one that is unoaked from the Pacific Northwest. In colder climates the grapes struggle to get ripe, resulting in crisp acidity and restrained fruit flavors that balance the artichoke best. While it may be tempting to pair oaked wine with artichoke, it isn't recommended because oak-aging changes the texture and flavor of the wine drastically.

Sauvignon Blanc

Sauvignon Blanc is the second most popular white wine in the world and it makes a great pairing for artichoke dip since it is very dry, has crisp acidity and an abundance of fresh green herbal fragrances. Grapefruit, lime, kiwi, gooseberry, honeydew melon, green apple, green pepper, asparagus, and fresh cut grass or hay are its most prominent aromas and flavors.

Italy - Sauvignon Blanc has been grown throughout Italy for over a century, and depending upon the growing region and climate, it will display a wide range of aromas and flavors in the wine. While some are floral others are herbal - some are dry and crisp while others are sweeter with less acidity. For best results in pairing with artichoke choose an unoaked wine with an alcohol percentage over 12.5% from the cooler regions of Piedmont or Venezia.

New Zealand - Sauvignon Blancs from this region are very popular because they are delicious and affordable. The wines are ultra-dry with bold fruit and herbal flavors matched with bracing acidity. Grapefruit, lime, kiwi, honeydew melon and fresh cut grass are their prominent characteristics. A good bottle of New Zealand wine with a screw cap will run between \$12 and \$20.

France - Sauvignon Blanc wines from the Loire Valley - namely from the regions of Sancerre and Pouilly Fume - are more elegant and reserved than those produced in other parts of the world. They are bright, fresh and fragrant with refined fruit aromas and flavors of citrus, herbs, minerals and in the case of Pouilly Fume' - a touch of smoke. Traditional corks are used to seal these wines and they sell beginning at about \$25 to \$30.

Pacific Northwest - If choosing a domestic Sauvignon Blanc, seek out unoaked varieties that are produced in high altitude vineyards from the Pacific Northwest. Some California, Oregon and Washington winemakers are producing Sauvignon Blanc wines that are similar to their Loire Valley counterparts.

Finger Lakes, NY - New York is the nation's third largest wine producing state and of the 30 million gallons of wine produced annually, the Finger Lakes account for 85% of that. While the area is best known for its Rieslings, Sauvignon Blanc wines are up and coming. The award winning Dr. Konstatin Frank Winery in Hammondsport, on Keuka Lake, produces a top notch Sauvignon Blanc that is similar in style to Sancerre from the Loire Valley. Hosmer Winery in Ovid, situated between Seneca and Cayuga Lakes, makes a New Zealand style Sauvignon Blanc wine that won first place in the NY Wine Competition (vintage 2018).

Second Course

Spring Asparagus Risotto with Chicken, Shrimp or Tofu

*White Wines: Pinot Grigio, Cortese and Verdicchio
Gruner Veltliner, Gewurztraminer
Sauvignon Blanc*

Pairing asparagus with wine is a challenge because of its high level of chlorophyll, sulfur and asparagusic acid, which give it a distinctive vegetal flavor. This can clash with most wines, causing them to taste harsh and metallic. But, at the same time, the starch in risotto lends a wonderful creamy mouthfeel to the dish - so in order to compliment the blending of these complex tastes and textures - we recommend a wine with palate cleansing acidity with similar aromas and flavors.

Contrary to the assumption that asparagus is impossible to pair with any wine, there are actually several varieties that can work quite well. White Italian wines made from Pinot Grigio, Cortese and Verdicchio, as well as light and lively Gruner Veltliner from Austria or dry Gewurztraminer from Alsace, France are a good choice. Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire Valley in France and the Marlboro region of New Zealand are also an excellent choice - especially with their bright citrus fruit profile, bracing acidity and distinct green herbal and vegetal aromas that at times hint of asparagus.

Pinot Grigio

This bright and crisp Italian white is the second most popular wine in our nation. The best Pinot Grigio is grown in the northeast regions of Trentino, Alto Adige, Veneto, and Friuli- Giulia- Venezia. This is due to the vineyard elevation and proximity to the limestone laden southern Alps and Dolomite Mountains.

Pinot Grigio wines are affordable and reliable, well suited to many appetizers, creamy cheeses, pasta with white sauce, risotto, chicken, seafoods, fish and tofu. The wines from these northern areas are well balanced, crisp and clean - and depending on the growing region and wine making style - can range from light to medium bodied.

The characteristics of Pinot Grigio are fruity and floral with earthy undertones. Lemon, lime, apple, pear, white peach and nectarine are accentuated by floral aromas of orange blossom, honeysuckle and elderflower. Subtle fragrances of fresh herbs, minerality and a slight hint of salinity further enhance the wine. A distinctive chalkiness may also be detected in wines from Alto Adige and Trentino as the vineyards in these regions are planted in the foothills of the Dolomites.

Cortese - Gavi

Cortese is Italy's most prized white grape variety with a heritage that dates back to the 1600s. It is grown in the northwestern Italian region of Piedmont, in the province of Alessandria. The best wines come from the vineyards of Gavi.

Cortese di Gavi is light, fruity and crisp with refreshing acidity accentuated by a touch of flintiness derived from the mineral rich soil in the vineyards. Cortese has fragrances of white flowers and almonds complimented by the aroma and flavor of lemon, apple and honeydew melon. Cortese wines are low in alcohol with the minimum of 10.5% by volume to 12%. It is an excellent companion with seafood.

Verdicchio

Verdicchio is a white wine grape grown in the province of Marche, near the Apennine Mountains in central Italy. The name is derived from the word verde - meaning green - which is associated with the color of the wine rather than its flavor.

Recently Verdicchio has experienced a revival due to its good structure, acidity and a complex flavors and aromas. Citrus fruits like lemon, Mandrine orange and grapefruit are coupled with floral, herbal and almond nuances that lead to a pleasant bitterness in the finish.

Grüner Veltliner

Grüner Veltliner is a grape that gets its name from the word gruner - which means green and Valtellina, a river valley near the Ortles Mountains in Italy's northern province of Lombardi. The grape dates back to Roman times, and is believed to have originated in Austria, where it is widely cultivated today.

Wines made from Grüner Veltliner are aromatic, lively and bursting with fresh citrus and pineapple flavors. Aromatic herbs, white pepper and almonds compliment the bright fruit profile while mineral and green aromas reminiscent of cucumbers, green beans and lentils lend a pungent edge to the wine. It pairs beautifully with shrimp.

New York's Dr. Konstantine Frank Winery in the Fingerlakes produces an award winning 2020 Gruner Veltliner that won first place in the state competition.

Gewurztraminer

Gewürztraminer is a pink to red skinned grape variety that performs best in cooler climates. The name literally means "*spiced Traminer*," indicating that the grape originated in the Tramin region of Alto Adige of northern Italy. It is widely cultivated throughout Trentino and Alto Adige, as well as in France, Germany, California, Washington State and the Finger Lake region of NY.

The grape is naturally high in sugar and has a full bodied, oily texture coupled with strong aromatic fragrances of roses, passion fruit, lychee and spice - Gewürztraminer actually shares the same flavor compound as Lychee, a sweet-tart Chinese fruit.

Because of the sugar levels in Gewürztraminer, the wine is typically made in a sweet style, which we do not recommend with asparagus and risotto. It is best to choose a very dry Gewurztraminer from Alsace, France - the region where the grape reaches its finest expression of fragrance and flavor. Alsatian Gewurztraminer is light bodied with good acidity, yet rich with floral aromas and flavors of lychee, honeydew melon and baking spices of cinnamon, ginger and cloves.

Suggested Grape Varieties for Rosato and Red Wine

Sangiovese, Montepulciano and Dolcetto
French Gamay - Beaujolais

In recent years Rose has become the trendy wine for spring and summer drinking. It is pretty, refreshing and delicious and can be enjoyed by itself or paired with many foods. Made in every style from dry to sweet and still to sparkling, and it can have a myriad of bright red fruit flavors that are accented with floral, herbal, vegetal and mineral nuances.

Rose is typically not the product of blending red and white wine together, but rather it is made from the clear juice of red grapes that are allowed to rest on the skins after crushing. Color pigments and flavor compounds permeate the juice giving it the desired flavor and color. The amount of time the juice stays in contact with the skin- the deeper the color, structure and flavor of the wine will be. Colors range from a blush pink to pale salmon and from pinkish-orange to bright fuchsia.

Red Wine - Each red grape variety has its own unique structure and flavor profile. Some grapes with thin skins will have light red fruit characteristics like watermelon, pink grapefruit, strawberry, raspberry, red currant and tart cherry, while those with thicker skins and deeper color will have darker fruit flavors such as black raspberry, blackberry, black currant, bing cherry, elderberry, blueberry, plum and even prunes. Nuances like coffee, chocolate, tobacco, smoke, vanilla and spice often accompany the darkest wines.

Structure

Rose wines have a lighter and brighter structure than that of their red counterparts because skin contact is usually a few hours to two days at most. Red wines have much more structure and intensity because they usually spend a week to ten days fermenting on the skins.

Winemakers strive for good structure - a balance of fruit, acidity and tannin that will give the wine a pleasant well rounded feeling in the mouth. Acidity is what makes a wine crisp and refreshing. Tannins are the compounds in grape skins and seeds that causes the mouth to feel dry. Both acids and tannins work together to cleanse the palate when eating food. The intense flavor, acidity and tannin in red wines gives it structure and aging potential. The key is to find a well structured balanced wine with flavors and aromas that compliments the food.

Suggested Grape Varieties for Rosato and Red Wine Pairing *Dolcetto, Montepulciano and Sangiovese*

If you feel that you must drink something besides white wine with spring asparagus risotto with chicken, shrimp or tofu - then these grape varieties are suggested because of their light and flavorful characteristics.

Sangiovese

Sangiovese is Italy's most widely planted red grape. It is a thin skinned, bluish purple grape that grows best in the hot, arid vineyards of Tuscany. Sangiovese is the famous grape of Chianti and the wines made from it are traditionally rustic in style.

Sangiovese Rosato is light bodied and refreshing with bright juicy flavors of watermelon, peach and apricot accentuated with a hint of rose petal. Red Sangiovese is medium bodied with high acidity and fine tannins. It has flavors of strawberry, sour cherry, plum, fig, roasted pepper and tomato coupled with aromas of roses, tea, fresh tobacco and herbs.

Montepulciano

Montepulciano follows Sangiovese as the second most cultivated red grape variety in Italy. Not to be confused with the town of Montepulciano in Tuscany, the Montepulciano grape is thick skinned and late-ripening so it fares well in the Abruzzo region on the Adriatic sea.

Rosato - Cerasuolo means "cherry" in Italian and it is also the name of the delicious rose' made from the Montepulciano grape. The wine is elegant, light structured and soft with a cherry pink color. Its prominent aromas and flavors are cherry, pomegranate and almond.

Red Montepulciano is a deep purple color with ample acid and tannic structure and concentrated flavors of black cherry, boysenberry and plums accentuated with dried herbs like oregano. It is not recommended as a pairing with Lidia's main course.

Dolcetto

Dolcetto is the third most planted red grape of Italy and the best wines come from the vineyards of Piedmont in the north. While the red version of this wine would not pair well with asparagus risotto, the rosato wine would fare

well. It is fresh, lively, and fruity with a subtle pink color. The wine has bright cherry flavor with faint herb and floral notes accented with a mineral touch.

French Beaujolais

The one French wine that we recommend with this Italian dish is made from the Gamay grape that grows in Beaujolais, the southernmost region of Burgundy. The wine sometimes gets a bad rap because it is associated with the young, simple, overly fruity wine known as Beaujolais Nouveau.

There are ten different designated vineyard areas within the region of Beaujolais that are known for their excellent quality wines. These are called Cru Beaujolais and they produce delicious light bodied wine with high acidity and low tannins. The bright fruit flavors associated with these wines are strawberry, raspberry, cherry, red currant and cranberry. Earthy nuances of the forest floor, mushrooms and minerality are also present in many of the wines.

Beaujolais Rose is delicious and bursting with fresh red berry flavors and aromas accentuated with subtle herbs and a touch of minerality. One of the very best is Domaine Dupeuble Pere et Fils and it is imported by Kermit Lynch and sells in the \$20 range. Serve it chilled.

Dessert - Chocolate

Sparkling Brachetto d'Acqui

Fortified Wine - Port

The key to choosing a wine for the last course is to be sure that it is sweeter than the dessert. Our highest recommendation is Banfi's Rosa Regale - a sweet, sparkling red wine with good acidity and low alcohol.

Made from Italy's Brachetto grape that grows in the Acqui region of Piedmont, the wine is redolent with ripe flavors of red strawberries and raspberries touched by the fragrant aroma of roses. While the wine is sweet, it is not cloying since it is well balanced with good acidity. Rosa Regale pairs beautifully with anything dark chocolate. Serve it chilled.

Port - Ruby & Tawny

Port is a red fortified wine made from grapes grown in the Douro Valley of northern Portugal. There are two different styles - Ruby and Tawny .

Ruby port is deep red, as the name implies, with rich sweet flavors of raspberry and blackberry accentuated with nuances of cinnamon and chocolate.

Tawny port is aged in wood and is much lighter in color taking on a faded orange hue. The longer Tawny port ages the lighter it becomes and the more character it develops with flavors of caramel, raspberry, fig, hazelnut, almond, cinnamon and cloves.

Ports should be served at about 58 degrees fahrenheit.

The food is made for the wine and the wine is made for the food.