

Wine Wisdom from Feast & Vine

This monthly column of wine and food tips comes to you from Wellington's premier wine event company. Feast & Vine's fun "class by the glass" wine events unveil the secrets of wine appreciation and food-wine pairing as you sip New Zealand's finest vintages.

Feast & Vine founder, Donna McCormack, is delighted to share insights and recipes from her personal wine and food pairing files compiled from around the globe. Donna's resume includes extensive study at the Culinary Institute of America, plus hundreds of food and wine classes in Asia, Europe, and North America. Please visit our website feastandvine.com for more ideas and our program of events.



Wine & Cheese: A Time Tested Marriage

Though conventional wisdom has it that wine & cheese don't always make the best match, recent Feast & Vine wine & cheese events have pleased the palate with our participants asking for more! So I decided to dedicate this issue to exploring what makes a pleasurable match when a good cheese meets the right wine!

Strategies for Harmony

When we think about a successful wine & cheese match we mean that the cheeses do not diminish our pleasure in the wine. The wine tastes just as good with the cheese as it does on its own. Here are a few tips to consider when selecting your matches:

Texture – Is the cheese creamy & palate-coating, or firm and dry? Is the wine a crisp Sauvignon Blanc? Or a full-bodied velvety Viognier? Consider the textures of both the cheese and the wine when planning your match.

Intensity – A common rule of thumb is to choose a delicate cheese with a delicate wine. For example a fresh goat cheese paired with a youthful Sauvignon Blanc or Chenin Blanc. More robust wines can handle cheeses with more concentrated flavours. A full bodied red paired with an aged Parmigiano-Reggiano for example. An exception to this rule are the bold blue cheeses as explained under molds.

Acidity – Cheeses and wines both have acidity. To match a high acid cheese (as a cheddar or valencay) with a high acid wine (as a Riesling, Pinot Gris for whites or a Merlot for reds) is a common taste experience. However, contrasting tastes offer a more complex and interesting experience, see some of our recommendations under Feast & Vine Contrasting Cheese Themes.

Molds – Veins of molds in blue cheese strip most dry white and red wines of their fruit. A sweet contrasting wine is the recommended choice. The more pungent and salty the blue the richer the desert wine should be.

Wine & Cheese Quick Reference Tips

Blues, Stilton, Gorgonzola – Salt/Sugar Principle. Sweet wines as Sauternes, Barsac, Ports, Mavrodaphne paired with salty cheeses.

Hard Cheese as Cheddar, Gouda, Emmenthal, Gruyere – Mature Bordeaux, Aged Reds, Cotes due Rhone, full body Chardonnay

Soft Cheese as Brie, Camembert – Young aged versions pair well with light, fruity reds and whites, where as aged versions pair well with aged red wines.

Goat Cheeses - Grassy field green notes pair well with Sauvignon Blancs, Pinot Gris and off-dry Rieslings.

Sheep Cheeses - Generally with a salty note consider countering saltiness with sweet wines as a late harvest Riesling or Viognier.

Mixed Platter – If you want to serve a selection of cheeses, try to choose three or four which all go well with a particular style of wine. Wisest options for a totally mixed board are mature red wines, tawny ports and best quality medium to full bodied Chardonnays.



Feast & Vine Contrasting Cheese Themes

Here is a selection from our recent wine & cheese events which represent a contrasting flavour experience:

Cheese: Washed Rouge

Tasting Notes: Creamy body with a yeasty savoury flavour and strong nose.

Wine: Brunton Road Gisborne Chardonnay 2008

Tasting Notes: Low acidity, buttery style – rich and full-bodied.

Why we made this match: The wine compliments the creamy smoothness of the cheese yet is strong enough to hold up to its inherent yeasty characteristics which creates a contrast flavour experience. High acid cheese with low acid wine.

Cheese: Crumbly Blue

Tasting Notes: A surface salted cheese which takes time to migrate through the body but gives more balance when mature. The taste is peppery from the mould and sharp from lactic acid, the mouth feel is rich and satisfying.

Wine: Wishart Dessert Hawke's Bay Merlot - New Vintage

Tasting Notes: A rich & sweet red wine

Why we made this match: A perfect marriage of contrasting sharpness against sweet with poignant blue cheese and a wine with rich ripe fruit notes. We have a high acid salty & peppery cheese with a low acid luscious desert style of wine.

The Appetiser Yum Factor – What to serve with Wine & Cheese?

Here are some helpful rule of thumb nibbles that have stood the test of time:

Dried Fruits – Dried figs, dates, pears along with compotes, purees and concentrated dried-fruit butters complement salty aged cheeses as say a mature Pecorino Toscano.

Honey – Strong blue cheeses are tamed by a drizzle of fragrant honey – perfect on your favourite cracker by the fire.

Chutney – all sorts of chutneys are a fantastic match for a mature Cheddar or an aged goat or sheep's milk cheese.

Olives – green or black provide the salty complement to fresh goat cheeses or any creamy cheese.

Toasted nuts – A favourite complement and are appropriate with virtually any cheese. Always toast nuts before serving to intensify their flavour. Toasted nuts work well with chutneys and dried fruits as well to round out your nibble selection!



Experience the taste. Savor the sip. Celebrate.®

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