

Hosting with Wine

The season is rapidly approaching when we will all gather together in search of warmth and good times. The coming of the holiday season means an endless array of parties, gatherings, dinners and events of good cheer. Even beyond December, the winter months afford us ample opportunity to plan get-togethers that help take the bite out of winter. Wine is not only a great winter warmer, but it is a great tool in the hosting of a successful event.

There are many ways that wine can be used in a hosting situation but predominantly it is either the star or the partner to a food pairing or event. Let's start with a quick look at food events. There are three types of food and wine events that I would like to touch on today: the simple dinner pairing, the instructional pairing, and the international theme night.

The most common gathering is a dinner. From the simple (a couple of people and a pizza) to the elaborate (a five-course meal with a large guest list), each dinner scenario revolves around one basic wine concept...pairing. For the experienced wine drinkers, wine pairing is easily done, but for those who are less in tune with the concept there are plenty of resources to help. Although everything from books to websites to phone apps can help, probably the easiest thing to do is drop by an NB Liquor Selection store and speak with a product advisor. We can find excellent matches for all your dinner needs.

Another way to work a wine and food angle is to have an instructional gathering. This requires getting a Sommelier/Chef (or someone knowledgeable in both areas) to cater the event. Everything from the basics of pairing, contrasting pairing, cause and effect pairing, and cooking with wine can be addressed. This provides for a wonderful evening of learning, dining and wine enjoyment.

Finally, a great way to host with wine and food is to have an international theme night. Essentially, this entails picking a country and having all the food and drink come from that nation. We certainly see it here at the stores already, as people come in looking for wine for an Italian night or other nation. My challenge to you is to come in and choose the wines before making the menu. For example, pick out several Romanian wines and then create a traditional Romanian dinner around those wines. This allows people to experience foods and wines outside their comfort zones and makes for a fun and experimental evening.

Now let us switch things over to events that are purely wine evenings. There are three types of wine events I would like to touch on today: brown bag mystery tasting, Bring Your Own Wine international tasting, and new wine tasting.

The brown bag mystery tasting is a currently in vogue. The host (you can make this a "bring your own wine" event as well) provides a line-up of wines (usually the same varietal or blend) from various price ranges and brown-bags them to make the tasting blind. This is a fun way to sample and compare wine as if you were a judge at an event. You may be surprised by some of the things that you end up choosing as your favourite.

The Bring Your Own Wine international tasting is a great way for a host to have a great event without breaking the budget, and getting lots of variety of choice. Simply choose a nation (or even a sub-region like Venetia in Italy) and instruct all your guests to get a bottle from that area. This can be combined with the brown bag event for lots of fun.

Finally, the last suggestion is to do a new wine tasting. New countries, new grapes, and (most importantly) new brands all figure into making even the most jaded wine fan interested. The best way to get access to new brands is to visit your local NB Liquor store and inquire about new products. Here are

My picks this week are from the recent 2011 World Wine & Food Expo:

Castel Starmina Riesling (Romania): An interesting drier-style Riesling that exhibits a powdery characteristic with hints of lemon and slight floral touches. Enjoy with a nice tuna fish steak. **\$13.99**

Mac Murray Ranch Pinot Gris (USA): A gorgeous Pinot Gris that you would almost swear came from Alsace. A lovely medium body with a hint of oak and flavours of peach, citrus and spicy pear. Enjoy alone, or with your favourite chicken dish. **\$29.49**

Deakin Estate Pinot Noir (Australia): A light, fruit-forward Pinot Noir that features plenty of cherry, mulberry and light malt flavours. Great for a night in with friends. **\$12.99**

William Hill Cabernet Sauvignon (USA): Dark and full-bodied, this California Cabernet Sauvignon comes with an intense fruit presence featuring flavours of dark cherry, blueberry and ripe plum. The reasonably lengthy finish showcases hints of vanilla and dark spices. Enjoy with all your beef dishes. **\$25.29**

In the Spirits was written by Jeff Budd, product advisor, NB Liquor, Vaughan Harvey Blvd. Moncton