

Explore the Fruits of Your Cellar with a Cheese and Wine Tasting



Now that you have a curated collection of wines that reflect your palate and personality, it's time to uncork the bottle, set out the cheeseboard and stage a delectable cheese and wine tasting to showcase your cellar's treasures.

Artisan cheeses and fine wines are meant to be shared together for good reason. Both have followed a similar path of development and the communal enjoyment of each other dates back about 4,000 years. Look at the similarities. As products of fermentation, they both began as a means to store food. Both are made from living (microbial) substances and both improve with age. And most importantly, both are crafted with passion and skill by their makers.

My interest in wine and

cheese developed long before joining Revel Cellars, when I worked as a fromagère under the tutelage of renowned Maître Fromager and author, Max McCalman. This experience allowed me to savor and analyze some amazing wine and cheese pairings. Believe me, I've had my share of clashes too, but tasting both bad and great combinations has given me the ability to reasonably predict the outcome of a specific wine and cheese coupling.



Pairing Strategies

There are a few basic wine and cheese pairing strategies that can be applied to help you select suitable partners. An age old maxim holds that if you pair the wine from a certain terroir with the cheese of that same locale, you will likely have a perfect pairing of the two. The term "terroir" denotes a sense of place that has specific geological, soil and climate characteristics. "What grows together, goes together," is certainly a great starting point in finding those "matches made in heaven."

Regional pairings are definitely worth exploring but they are only a starting point. Try to figure out how the terroir is expressed in the wine and the cheese then determine whether there is any basis for suspecting they might find happiness together.

A few of my favorite terroir based pairing recommendations include:

- Zamorano and Manchego, a pair of traditional Spanish sheep's milk cheeses combined with the plum, tobacco, herbal and vanilla notes of a Rioja Reserva.
- Loire Valley goat cheeses such as Selles Sur Cher and Sainte Maure de Touraine whose citrusy tang and mineral backbone perfectly merge with a crisp Sancerre.

- Taleggio teamed with Barbaresco, providing an inter play of the wine's rich, spicy flavors and perfumed sweetness with the fruity and pungent notes of the cheese.
- Sapore del Piave, a hardy cheese from Veneto, Italy tempered with Amarone...an Italian wine of great structure, complexity and elegance with a hot and spicy bouquet and aroma of dried fruit.
- Roquefort and Sauternes – Contrasting and balancing salty with sweet is a tried and true strategy. Roquefort is salty, pungent, and spicy. The texture is also very rich. One of the best ways to match this depth of flavor is with a fortified wine like Sauternes. The wine and cheese both possess the same flavor intensity. The Sauternes with its honeyed sweetness, unctuous texture and viscosity harmonizes with the creamy mouth feel and salty tang of the blue.

Speaking of the blues, my favorite blue in the world is Rogue Creamery's Rogue River Blue, made in Oregon. This special raw milk cheese is made during the Autumnal and Winter Equinox and is only available for a limited time between October and March. It is wrapped with Syrah leaves macerated in pear brandy and aged for up to a year. It has a fruity taste with notes of wild berries, but is also earthy, spicy, grassy, creamy and vibrant! Many wines will complement the Rogue, but it needs to have depth and character. The gorgeous Soter Vineyards 2018 Pinot Noir from Mineral Springs Ranch and the Cayuse 2018 Cailloux Vineyard Syrah, both provide the perfect foil for this complex and elegant cheese.

Tasting cheese and wine together:

When considering a pairing, determine the fullness, the persistence and the length of flavors in the cheese and the wine. Think about the impression they leave and how big of a personality they have. By tasting the wine first, then tasting the cheese, then tasting the two together you will see how the aroma and taste profiles can blend and complement, or oppose.

No matter how you come to your own decision about how a cheese and wine are going to come together in the end, the journey will undoubtedly be one that is exciting and entertaining. All you need is a selection of several artisan cheeses with differing textures and milk types, some crisp crackers or French baguette and a circle of great friends to bring it all together.

Cheers!

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