

ENTERTAINING IDEAS

Choosing the Perfect Bottle of Wine for Any Occasion

(NAPSA)—Whether you are having wine at home or as part of a meal in a restaurant, choosing the right type need not be a bewildering experience as you face the multiple shelves in a grocery store or extensive restaurant wine list. Being knowledgeable about wines is not only for the enthusiast or connoisseur. Affordable quality varietals and a few basic tips can help anyone navigate the maze and look like an expert to family, friends or business colleagues.

Red or White?

Finding the perfect wine companion to complement food might seem difficult. Many fall back on the “old rule” of a red wine with meat and a white wine with fish and chicken.

With so many different styles of cooking and a new relaxed approach to dining in or out, it's more acceptable today to go with a wine you like.

“Wine should be enjoyed with food without fear of rules, so these days it is much more important to go with what you like,” says Doug Gore, award-winning wine maker for Columbia Crest, one of the largest domestic wineries. “The red varietal Merlot has increased in popularity more than anything because it goes equally well with a variety of foods, from meat dishes to grilled salmon, as well as being a great accompaniment to party appetizers.”

Experimenting with different affordable wines and food at home will stand you in good stead when you are out in a restaurant.

Price and Quality

Price is by no means a guarantee of quality and quality does not have to come with a hefty price tag. To ensure the flavor and quality you are looking for, follow some of these suggestions:

- Read the neck tags on bottles describing the flavors and qualities of the wine.



Choosing an affordable, quality wine to match your tastes can make meals more enjoyable.

- Work with the on-site wine consultant in retail stores, in the same way you would with your butcher, to ask for their recommendations. In a restaurant ask the server or sommelier. They've stocked it so they should be able to guide you and don't be afraid to ask what they enjoy.

- Winery Web sites that offer information on different types of wine and great food pairings to try at home are another good source of information.

- Check how the wine scored in a wine industry publication such as *The Wine Spectator* (80-100 indicates a high-scoring wine). They rate all price categories of wine and these scores often show up on packaging at retail. For instance, Columbia Crest's Grand Estates Chardonnay garnered a 91 score, and retails for around \$10 a bottle nationwide.

Wine Varietals

Also helpful is knowledge of the most popular three varietals.

- Chardonnay has become the most popular type of white wine. If it is described as oaky, nutty or smoky, you can expect it to be a bit drier. Descriptors such as apple, pear or coconut are typical for this variety.

- Cabernet Sauvignon is often described as rich with tannins, meaning you'll experience a full-flavor. This is why this red wine works best with stronger flavored foods and meat dishes.

- Merlot is a softer, lighter red wine and often is described with fruit descriptors, such as cherry and raspberry.

Serving Suggestions

When ordering wine by the bottle, remember there are between five to six glasses of wine in a standard size bottle of wine (750 ml). So for a party of four, one bottle would provide everyone with at least one glass of wine with dinner.

In a restaurant setting it is always important to be inclusive of everyone's tastes. Ask what food items your guests are choosing and whether they would prefer a red or white, dry or sweet wine. For a mixed table it's easy to order two different types of wine.

When planning a gathering at home, a good rule of thumb is to plan for half a bottle of wine per guest and to also provide a mineral water option to clear the palate, especially when you are having different types of food.

Choosing an affordable, high quality wine, like those from Columbia Crest, gives you the opportunity to decide on the varietals that match your taste buds and make that next meal even more enjoyable and memorable.

One final thought: Don't forget that as the wine-choosing host, you should also ensure your guests or colleagues always drink responsibly.

You can learn more online at www.columbia-crest.com.