Paula's Party Picks: Simple Autumn Pairing Plan

USE A PROGRESSIVE WINE LIST TO PLEASE THE PALATES OF PARTY MEMBERS

by Paula Barker

Sommeliers and chefs thrive on matching food and wine at their wineries and restaurants, but individual wine enthusiasts can take the same pleasure when entertaining. Providing pairings at parties can be great fun!

As promised in July's *Sip and Sup*, I plan to offer quarterly seasonal party menus with accompanying wines selected from a progressive wine list. Progressive wine lists are used by restaurants to categorize wines according to flavor characteristics, as opposed to varietal or color, as has been done traditionally.

This concept was developed 20 years ago by Master of Wine, Tim Hanni, who has assisted numerous restaurants and other companies in organizing their wine lists. Tim Hanni was a co-founder of WineQuest, an organization that, among other things, helps companies train their staffs on new wine concepts and aids them in generating their own progressive wine lists. For more information please see www.winequest.com.

This month, I ran into an appealing retailer called *WineStyles* in Walnut Creek, California. The interior is beautifully designed with a winery-like atmosphere.

Photo from WineStyles corporate site

Wines sit in arched niches, which are in columns arranged according to eight flavor groupings that are similar to the categories found on a progressive wine list.

Photo from WineStyles'
Walnut Creek store

I was greeted by warm and gregarious Dyan Cushing, who briefly explained the store's intention and layout.

WineStyles identifies the categories simply as *Crisp*, *Silky*, *Rich*, *Bubbly*, *Fruity*, *Mellow*, *Bold* and *Nectar*. The first four classes tend to include whites, and the wines in the last four are usually red. This arrangement streamlines the selection process for consumers.

WineStyles further defines each category:
Crisp
 - Characteristics: refreshing, clean, bright
 - Flavors: citrus, apple, pear
 - Suggested with salads, flaky fish, shellfish, spicy dishes, cheese

Silky
 - Characteristics: creamy, toasty, adaptable
 - Flavors: vanilla, honey, melon
 - Suggested with pasta, chicken, fish, soft cheese

Rich
 - Characteristics: oaky, buttery, lavish
 - Flavors: caramel, tropical fruit, peach, spice
 - Suggested with creamy sauces, oily fish, turkey, pork

Bubbly
 - Characteristics: effervescent, festive
 - Flavors: apple, mineral, vanilla, toast, nuts
 - Suggested with hors d'oeuvres, desserts, berries, chocolates

Fruity
 - Characteristics: fruit forward, jammy, grapey
 - Flavors: raspberry, blueberry, strawberry
 - Suggested with salads, pizza, pasta, salmon, chicken

Mellow
 - Characteristics: round, velvety, smooth
 - Flavors: cherry, berries, herbs, earth
 - Suggested with pasta, veal, pork, beef, lamb

Bold
 - Characteristics: intense, complex, heavy
 - Flavors: chocolate, coffee, pepper, licorice
 - Suggested with hearty and spicy dishes, complex flavors, hard cheeses

Nectar
 - Characteristics: sweet, enticing, seductive
 - Flavors: raisins, nuts, peaches, cream
 - Suggested with desserts, strong cheeses, cigars

Nectar Category from
Walnut Creek branch

PROGRESSIVE WINE LIST

Below is a condensed version of the Walnut Creek WineStyles' wines, arranged by style category with the assistance of employee Dyan Cushing.

WineStyles Condensed Categories List (alphabetical order per category)

Crisp	Fruity
Brassfield Estate Gewürztraminer, High Serenity Ranch	Domain de Nizas Carignan, France
Chateau Moulin de Mallet, Bordeaux Blanc, France	Grayson Cellars Merlot, Paso Robles
Lagaria Pinot Grigio, Trentino, Italy	John Christopher Cellars Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley
Laxas Albarino, Rias Baixas, Spain	Kaiken Malbec, Argentina
Riverby Estate Riesling, New Zealand	R Winery Boarding Pass Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia
Vourvray La Craie, Loire Valley, France	River Road Syrah, Russian River Valley

Silky	Mellow
Maso Canali Pinot Grigio, Italy	Benvolio Merlot, Italy
Peace Family Vineyard Chardonnay, Australia	Collaboration Meritage, Central Coast
R Winery Pure Evil Chardonnay, South Eastern Australia	Fleur de California Pinot Noir, Carneros
St. Supéry Estate Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley	Geografico Chianti Colli Senesi, Tuscany, Italy
Thomas Coyne Viognier, Livermore	La Playa Merlot, Chile
Villa Wolf Pinot Gris, Germany	Mahoney Vineyards Pinot Noir, Carneros

Rich	Bold
Angeline Chardonnay, Russian River Valley	B3 Shiraz, Australia
Chappellet Chenin Blanc, Napa Valley	El Portillo Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza, Argentina
Hop Kiln Thousand Flowers, California	Foris Cabernet Franc, Rogue Valley
John Christopher Cellars Chardonnay, Livermore Valley	Nelms Road Cabernet Sauvignon, Columbia Valley
Maison Louis Latour Chardonnay, France	Pavilion Cabernet, Napa Valley
Tablas Creek Cotes de Tablas Blanc, Paso Robles	Wente Estate Smith Bench Zinfandel, Livermore Valley

Bubbly	Nectar
Always Bubbly Sparkling Wine, New Mexico	Maculan Dindarello, Veneto, Italy
Ariola Malvasia, Parma, Italy	Rotta Vineyard and Winery Black Monukka, California
Mont-Ferrant Cava Rosé Brut, Spain	Warre's Warrior Special Reserve Porto, Oporto, Portugal

We have had one glorious Indian Summer here in the Napa Valley, interspersed with just enough nippy days to foreshadow the winter. Autumn's first cold days call for soups, stews and squash; hot chocolate, hot toddies and cozy fires. My wish is to inspire you with a menu full of such reminders of the season.

I have paired four of the courses with three wines each from WineStyles' list. First is a wine traditionally suggested for the dish, followed by two alternatives, each from a different style category.

Warm pumpkin goat cheese dip
on toasted baguette slices

Suggested Pairing: Sparkling White

The Wine Selections
1) Ariola Malvasia, Parma, Italy
   (from the *Bubbly* category)

2) Alternative 1- from the *Silky* category
   Villa Wolf Pinot Gris, Pfalz, Germany

3) Alternative 2- from the *Fruity* category
   Grayson Cellars Merlot, Paso Robles

Manhattan clam chowder

Suggested Pairing: Chenin Blanc

The Wine Selections
1) Chappellet Chenin Blanc, Napa
   (from the *Rich* category)

2) Alternative 1- from the *Crisp* category
   Lagaria Pinot Grigio, Trentino Italy

3) Alternative 2- from the *Bold* category
   El Portillo Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendoza, Argentina

Warm wild mushrooms on spinach salad

no pairing: *Rest*!

Grilled pork tenderloin with spicy braised red cabbage

Suggested Pairing: Pinot Noir

The Wine Selections
1) Mahoney Vineyards Pinot Noir, Carneros, Napa
   (from the *Mellow* category)

2) Alternative 1- from the *Crisp* category
   Laxas Albarino, Rias Baixas, Spain

3) Alternative 2- from the *Bold* category
   Foris Cabernet Franc, Rogue Valley, Oregon

Grilled asparagus

Cheesy scalloped potatoes

Pear and berry cobbler

Suggested Pairing: Port

The Wine Selection
1) Warre's Warrior Special Reserve Porto, Oporto, Portugal
   (from the *Nectar* category)

2) Alternative 1- from the *Fruity* category
   R Winery Boarding Pass Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia

3) Alternative 2- from the *Bubbly* category
   Mont-Ferrant Cava Rosé Brut, Spain

Consult the tasting notes of your own alternative wines to determine whether their characteristics will harmonize or pleasantly contrast with the ingredients in your dishes.

I found the following clues in the wines' tasting notes, which assured me my alternatives could work with the dishes on the menu. WineStyles employee, Dyan Cushing also offered assistance with several pairings and provided missing tasting notes, as she can do for you when you create your own menu.

The Dish: Warm pumpkin goat cheese dip on toasted baguette slices.
1) Ariola Malvasia's small bubble structure and creamy mouthfeel complement the pumpkin, while the tartness of the cheese pairs with the soft granny smith apple and toasted pecans.

2) Tasting notes for the Villa Wolf Pinot Gris indicate a creamy finish but lovely, fresh acidity running all the way through.

3) Grayson Cellars Merlot exhibits a cinnamon and spice finish that enhances the pumpkin, since this appetizer does not already have such spices, known to augment pumpkin flavor.

The Dish: Manhattan clam chowder.
1) Chenin blanc is touted to complement seafood dishes, and the Chappellet, in particular, offers crisp acidity balanced with richness for a sound pairing.

2) Because northern Italian whites are recommended with tomato-based chowder, the Lagaria Pinot Grigio fills the bill. Its aroma of citrus and kiwi entices the drinker, while the crisp acid and mineral finish plays smooth on the palate.

3) Argentine cabernets contain an explosive herbal presence that coincides with the spices of the chowder. The mouthfeel of the El Portillo Cabernet Sauvignon is not overbearing and is equipped with balanced acidity for a finish that cleanses the palate.

The Dish: Grilled pork tenderloin with spicy braised red cabbage.
1) Pinot noir tends to be a good pork wine. The Mahoney Pinot Noir's elegant nose of cherries and strawberries coupled with a slightly earthy porcini mushroom undertone, smoky oak and pepper flavor complements the grilled flavor of the pork. The red cabbage appreciates the essence of raspberry on the finish.

2) Crisp whites work well with pork. The Laxas Albarino's ripe tropical fruit brings out the rusty flavors of grilled pork. The delicate mint palate works with the spicy cabbage and offers a softer contact with the pork, providing a prolonged finish.

3) The spicy nose on the Foris Cabernet Franc corresponds with the seasoning in the cabbage.

The Dish: Pear and berry cobbler.
1) Port is an obvious choice for a dark fruit dessert, and the Warre's Warrior Special Reserve is loaded with ripe fruit flavors to boost the berries in the cobbler.

2) R Winery Boarding Pass Shiraz's ripe black cherry plays with a cobbler. The cinnamon and mocha balance the sweetness from fruit in the dessert for drinkers who don't want sweetness in their wine.

3) For those who can't resist a bubbly as their finale to a meal, ripe berry aromas of the Mont-Ferrant Cava Rosé Brut picks up on the berries in the cobbler while, again, leaving out the sugar.

Of course, the purchase of twelve different wines for your dinner party may seem overwhelming! Another option is to offer one alternative wine per course instead of two. Or one could prepare foods with enough in common that one wine from each of three flavor profiles will harmonize with every dish. Discernment will be a challenge, but tasting and testing is always fun!

Remember, any wine can go with any food if the food is properly balanced. If the wine tastes bitter after a bite of a dish, try adding a dash of salt or squeeze of lemon to the food to smooth out the taste of the wine, as suggested by Tim Hanni (see http://www.intowine.com/revolutionary-pairing-theory-developed-rebel-master-wine-tim-hanni). But providing wines from several flavor categories is likely to please nearly everyone.

Look for future articles containing seasonal party menus with pairings.

WineStyles is a franchise operation with 180 stores spanning 19 states and new openings scheduled for 2007 throughout the continental United States, Mexico and other Caribbean islands.

The original concept for the store, opened in 2002 in Coral Springs, Florida, was to simplify the selection of wine inside an inviting, old world atmosphere. In addition to cleverly categorizing wines according to flavor profiles, WineStyles sells most wines for $25 or less per bottle. These two principles attract both the novice and the connoisseur.

WineStyles' experts select wines from large to small vineyards, and provide hard-to-find wines, even special-ordering for customers, if necessary. The stores offer wine-related merchandise and customizable gift baskets. Two tiers of monthly wine clubs are available to customers: The Tastings Series *(two bottles per month, among other perks) and the* Share Our Strength Series *(three bottles per month plus donation to a national charity).*

Marry these beneficial features with a friendly, knowledgeable staff, and you have a winning enterprise!

Walnut Creek WineStyles staff, including Jeff Loo, Sales Manager,
and Dyan Cushing (far right), consultant for this article

For more information, visit www.winestyles.net/walnutcreek or call 925-906-WINE 9463).

Comments? Suggestions? Questions? Write to me! editorpaula@yahoo.com