

WINE AND CHEESE PAIRINGS

At our Wine Appreciation Group (WAG) meetings, we provide cheeses and other nibbles to accompany the wines at each meeting. The problem frequently encountered by those providing the cheeses is knowing which will best complement the wines. Will they enhance the tasting experience of the wines and/or have a 'palate cleansing' effect? Or, worst of all, will they actually conflict with the wine style, making both the cheeses and wines less enjoyable?

Well, there are few definitive answers to these questions, and little science involved, but below are some suggestions culled from many websites and personal experience. I've looked also at the choices of fruit but the evidence is again very far from definitive.

Below are the suggestions, arranged by wine style;

1. **Full-bodied reds (Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, possibly Grenaches)**. These are actually the hardest to match with cheeses. The consensus is that extra-sharp aged **Cheddars, Cheshires, Parmigianos (Parmesans)** or **Pecorinos** are the best, together with aged **Goudas**. The general rule is that the more powerful the wine, the older and sharper the cheese. Choose the oldest of these you can find. They should be crumbly, very firm and somewhat salty. If the wine has tobacco 'notes', a smoked cheese might work. *Blue cheeses are a definite no-no with these wine styles.* Fresh or dried figs go well with these wines; plums and blackberries are also said to be suitable.
2. **Milder reds** are easier to match with cheeses. The cheeses should still be sharp, and smoked cheeses may work. **Gruyere** is said to work with **Pinot Noirs**; **Goudas** and **herbed cheeses** with **Merlots**; **Malbecs** are best with **vintage cheeses** and **Goudas**, and with dried pears. *Again, blue cheeses are not recommended.* **Ewe's milk** cheeses are said to work well with **Merlots** and **Pinots**. Many fruits are said to work with this group: peaches, pears, oranges, strawberries or cherries and, specifically, apples, figs and grapes for **Merlots**.
3. **Young, un-oaked acidic whites** (such as **Rieslings** and **Chardonnays**) apparently go well with many cheese styles. **Washed-rind cow's** and **triple-cream cheeses**, as well as **young Cheddars**, are recommended. Other references include **Ricottas**, **Mozarellas**, **Fetas**, **goat's cheeses** and **Halloumis**, together with **Camemberts**. For fruits, blackberries, guavas, nectarines and Kiwi fruit are suggested. **Pinot Gris** is said to go well with **Ricottas**.
4. **For older, oaked dry wines**, such as **Chardonnays**, **Voigners** and presumably **Semillons**, suggestions include semi-hard cheeses such as **Havartis**, **Edams**, **Emmentals**, **young Cheddars** and **Manchegos**. One personal observation is that **oaked, buttery Chardonnays** go very well with **Bries**. Dried apples, pears and peaches apparently go well with this group.
5. **For fruitier styles of wine**, such as **Sauvignon Blancs**, **Traminers** and possibly **Chenin Blancs**, try some 'stinky' cheeses such as **Epoisse**, **Taleggio**, **Morbier** or **Muenster**, or goat's cheese. Dried apricots apparently go with **Chenin Blancs**. Other fruit suggestions include melons, pineapples, plums, strawberries, peaches and even lemons.
6. **For fortified wines (desert wines), and botyized white wines**, it's almost unanimous that the best cheeses are **blue**, such as **Gorganzola**, **Roquefort** or **Stilton**. Suggested fruits include Kiwi fruit.
7. Finally, for **sparkling ("Champagne" style) wines**, **Camembert** is recommended, as well as **Muenster**. For fruit, consider apples, grapes, pears, mangoes and melon.

You can see from all these recommendations that there is much to explore so far as wine and cheese pairings are concerned. In fact, it might be interesting to have a *cheese tasting*, with *wines as accompaniments*, in a future meeting!

I hope you find this useful.

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