

WINEBAR

ASK A SOMMELIER YOUR OENOPHILE QUESTIONS ANSWERED. EDITED BY GREGORY LOCKLEAR

Vine-Ripe Summer Wines

Cork and The Bottle Shop's resident oenophile Rebecca Robinson offers wine advice and tasting tips by the glass.



Tomatoes are notorious for being difficult to pair with wines. How can I couple my love for insalata caprese with a refreshing summer red? The quest for pairing red wines with cuisine more naturally suited to whites is a journey I embark upon constantly. Inclined to red wines for their more rustic, earthy aromatics and sultry flavors, I stock my wine cabinet with veggie-friendly reds and the occasional rosé. With their bright, delicate flavors, subtle texture and uber-juicy composition, tomatoes—particularly raw—make a wine-pairer grimace. Dry white wines with a subtly herbaceous quality and bright acidity are ideal, but that's too easy. In pairing with insalata caprese, look no further than Italy's refreshing reds. Barbera is my immediate suggestion due to its berried aromatics, light body and aversion to oak aging. Serve slightly cooler than room temperature to showcase this red's natural acidity and energy.

I am hosting an intimate business lunch for potential clients. Could you offer suggestions on safe and savvy wine selections to seal the deal? Particularly when dealing with potential business clients, choose cautiously and thoughtfully as the wine you suggest speaks loudly about your priorities, taste and cultural savvy. Find a wine that interests you, one that appeals to your tastes as well as those of your client and that falls in an appropriate price range (not too cheap, not offensively expensive). Your choice should also provide an interesting, but not distracting, point of conversation. For lunch I recommend a white, rosé or light red paired to your clients' tastes while venturing a step beyond. If your clients only drink California Chardonnay, try a more boutique offering from Hanzell or Flowers. More European-oriented palates allow for greater creativity. Amiot Guy's 2005 white Burgundies are stunning and unique, Ostertag's Alsatian whites (a personal favorite) are beautifully aromatic and ideal for food pairing. Red wine lovers should try Copain's Pinot Noirs (harmony of fruit expression and subtle oak aging) or Bertrand Ambroise's 2005 red Burgundies. Remember, the wine is an extension of your personality but not a deal breaker—let it be interesting, expressive and just another venue for you, naturally, to shine.

It's official! Lambrusco has replaced champagne as my summer quaff. What are the best ways to serve this sparkling red? Softly sparkling, slightly sweet, lower in alcohol and ruby-hued, Lambrusco is an excellent summer bubbly. Bursting with fruity

aromatics and delectably quaffable, this Italian sparkler cries for sipping as an aperitif or sunset accompaniment. Pair with spicy, sharp cheeses; dark, fruit desserts and milk chocolates; or serve alongside a leisurely Sunday brunch. Accessibly priced and definitely a unique option compared to more traditional proseccos or moscatos, Lambrusco recalls balmy Roman evenings filled with romance. Truly a nectar, enjoy this one chilled and with a loving spirit.

I've noticed that the general alcohol content of wines has been increasing in the last few years, especially in Californian wines. Is this an industry-wide trend and, if so, why? The noted rise in alcohol levels in wines is both a trend and a consequence: a purposeful characteristic of New World winemaking and the natural result of our warming climate. Remember that winemaking is science, the warmer the climate the higher the sugars, the higher the sugars the greater the alcohol post-fermentation—yeast and sugar equals alcohol and CO₂. New World producers leave grapes on the vine long past phenolic ripeness to achieve override aromas, unctuous fruit flavors and nutty, almost port-like, wines that translate into 15–16 percent alcohols, big ratings and equivalent sales. Old World winemakers favor delicacy and balance over fruit extraction, ideally harvesting grapes at more moderate sugar levels, but they have more recently been faced with super-ripe grapes boiled by the sun. Cooler micro-climate vineyards (think Diamond Mountain in Napa or the Pacific-tempered vineyards of Sonoma) are in perfect positions, producing grapes with ripe but not roasted sugar levels, soft skins, balanced acidity and, consequently, lower alcohol levels. ☞



Cork and The Bottle Shop's resident oenophile Rebecca Robinson gleaned most of her wine expertise harvesting, sorting and blending vintages in cellars and vineyards in Brugnairolles, France, and Franschoek, South Africa. This month, Robinson tackles matching wine with the impervious tomato and the art of "sealing the deal" with savvy wine selections. Want to break from the uninspired routine of that conventional table red? Just ask our sommelier.

REBECCA ROBINSON PHOTO BY GENE POLLUX

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