

***Pairing food and wine—
It may be easier than you think
by Kim Riley Tyndall***

Fred and Wilma. Alto and soprano. Salt and pepper. Some pairings come naturally. And, when they do, it's just right. According to Greg Maurer, Executive Vice President & General Manager for Heidelberg Distributing Company, and Richard Blondin, Executive Chef at The Refectory restaurant, pairing food and wines can be equally harmonious.

Maurer says if you have a much-loved recipe and serve it with your favorite glass of cabernet, enjoy! While there are some good matches of food and wine, ultimately, the best match is whatever your palate finds most pleasing. Maurer says the average person is not trained—nor do they care so much—to spend time on pairing. He says, "At the end of the day, personal preference is very much a factor."

That said, Maurer says there are some basic rules and "pairing food and wine requires an education of the mind and palate." He adds, "Sometimes it's helpful to know from the chef's perspective how any dish can affect the flavors when married to a wine."

Blondin says when it comes to pairing, it can be helpful to know the wine's origins. "For example," he says, "in France's Rhone Valley you'll find wines with tastes of peaches, cherries and apricots because that's what is grown there. They share the same soil as the grape, and the grape picks up the aroma." Blondin says that "Naturally, these wines will match with something similar, like an apricot tart."

With that in mind, Maurer says there are some hints to make pairing easier, and he says it doesn't take a lot to dramatically affect how a dish works with wine. Maurer suggests practicing pairing in your own kitchen. Slice an apple and sprinkle it with lemon juice, take a bite and then take a sip of wine. Pay attention to the flavors of both the wine and the food. Do the same thing with the apple and soy sauce or another seasoning. "It doesn't take a lot to dramatically affect how a dish works with a wine."

Blondin and Maurer agree that a simple rule of thumb is that heavier wines work best with heavier foods and lighter wines work better with lighter foods. Blondin says you don't want the intensity of the alcohol to overtake the food, rather the two should work to complement one another. "In general," he says, "people tend to pair seafood with white wines. If you are having something heavier such as game meats like lamb or rabbit, a heavier red wine from California or a French Bordeaux will work well." Maurer concurs, "If you put a light white wine with a

heavy red meat dish, it's like drinking water as opposed to having a bold cup of coffee."

Blondin adds, "It's not always easy to find the perfect match of food and wine but, when you do, you'll get the connection—even if you don't know the rules. The pairing will have you wanting to take one more bite of food or just one more sip of wine. You really have to experience it."