

Wine Advice: Benny's Wine and Food Pairing



The principal behind wine and food pairing is to have both the wine and food taste better together than they would if served separately. It was with this in mind the staff of Benny's restaurant requested I pair wines with the following staff selections.

Cedar Plank Salmon topped with creamy dill sauce and grilled asparagus served atop basmati rice.

There are a wealth of flavours and textures to consider, some more noteworthy than others. Salmon is the prominent flavour here, the creamy dill sauce and grilled



asparagus that accompany this dish compliment the salmon's flavour and texture but do not dominate.

When selecting a suitable and complimentary wine consideration must be given to the weight of wine, the weight and intensity of the food, food preparation and cooking method. Planked salmon is a method of cooking and smoking salmon. Salmon sits directly on a preheated slab of natural red cedar where the fish steams gently on the plank and is infused with woody notes. The moist salmon is served with a creamy dill sauce. The sauce is weighty, not overly aromatic or boldly flavourful but complimentary, the dill contributes fresh herbal character.

Pinot Noir is the best pairing with salmon, so successful salmon and Pinot Noir is referred to as a "classic" wine and food pairing. Despite the difference in preparation, compared to broiled salmon, I believe Pinot Noir, a medium-bodied and lightly tannic red wine with red fruit and earthy flavours and aromas suits this dish perfectly.

The following two selections – both salads – are tricky. So much so that certain sommeliers simply refer to salads as "wine killers".

Veggie Quinoa Salad

Components of each salad and the dressing served in or alongside it must be evaluated in order to identify dominant characteristics and the overall flavour of the salad. You may choose to highlight a particular ingredient but I choose to pair wine with the flavour of the dish.

This Quinoa salad contains grilled peppers, zucchini and red onions with a red wine and feta cheese vinaigrette, flavours that dominate the nutty quality and chewy texture of the quinoa. Vinaigrette is tart and acidic as is salty feta cheese. Fortunately, acidity in food brings out fruitiness in wine making the wine seem less acidic than it is. When pairing with high acid foods select a wine with acidity that is the equal or greater than the acidity of the food.

I chose both a red wine and white wine for pairing with the Veggie Quinoa Salad. The red wine, a light-bodied fruity and tart red wine made from the Gamay grape from the Beaujolais region of France and the white wine, a light-bodied bright, acidic Pinot Grigio from Italy.



Black and Blue Salad

A salad made for the carnivore. Sirloin steak broiled to order with mixed greens crumbled blue cheese and tomatoes, roasted artichokes and Dijon vinaigrette. Are you familiar with the saying go big or go home? This applies here. Go big. The stronger the cheese the bigger the wine, as for the steak – especially when served rare or medium-rare – the same "rule" applies. This salad calls out for a solidly structured red so Cabernet Sauvignon fans this salad is tailored for you.

Grilled stone fruit(peach and plum) with a honey greek yogurt

The flavour and sweetness of stone fruit in this dessert intensifies with grilling while honey adds complexity and richness. Riesling is known for its flavours and aromas of ripe stone fruit, green apple and honey characteristics that mirror the flavours and aromas of the dish. Another recommendation is the ever increasingly popular Moscato with its floral and fruity qualities, also a complimentary pairing.

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