

Wine Advice: An Apple A Day?



There was a time when thoughts of cider brought to mind the non - alcoholic apple cider found in grocery stores, the sort that could be served on its own, or as an ingredient in apple cider sangria in the summer and hot buttered cider or hot apple cider with dark rum and lemon in the cooler months.

I, and many others, have broadened my horizons and discovered a “new” kind of cider. Ciders made from fermented apple juice, only available in liquor stores and outlets.

Consumers have “discovered” cider much as they have craft beer. The consumption of cider has increased dramatically (over 250% over the last seven years) ,as has production which has resulted in a cider apple shortage. Apples used in cider production are apple varieties used specifically for cider production. These apples are often referred to as “spitters” due to their bitter astringency and acidic profile. Biting into a cider apple is comparable to the experience of biting into an under-ripe crab-apple.

Over the years orchards planted with cider-making apple varieties were uprooted and replaced with apple varieties

suitable for eating and baking, apples referred to as grocery-store apples. Some cider apple orchards were lost during the time of prohibition or temperance and in many cases not re-planted. Simply put, apple production is driven by consumer demand and the majority of consumers are wanting grocery store apples for eating and baking not tannic, acidic apples for cider production.

The type of cider apple/apples used in cider production (most ciders are blends) dictates the colour, body, flavour, mouth-feel, tannin and acidity and the balance of the finished product. The sweetness level of the fruit ultimately determines the alcohol content of the finished product although a producer may add a source of sugar or fruit before a second fermentation to boost alcohol content.

Pairing cider with food is relatively straight-forward, whether summer, fall or winter fare. Look to foods complimented by apple flavours such as pork chops, pork belly, pork roast, ham, sweet potatoes, root vegetables, butternut squash and soft cheese. Select weightier, more full-bodied cider as a pairing partner for a traditional Thanksgiving meal of ham and turkey, especially if the stuffing contains sage. Apple pie and crisp are complimented by ice cider, a beverage that is higher in alcohol and sweetness.

It is true that weightier more-full-bodied ciders are best with weightier foods while lighter more delicate and fragrant ciders are best suited to summer fare. Perhaps the most important considerations when pairing cider with food is to determine both the level of tannin and the sweetness level of the beverage. Ciders sweetness level ranges from dry to very sweet. Some ciders contain various flavours and aromas such as ginger, hibiscus, cherry or rhubarb which broaden pairing possibilities.

Popular and widely available ciders include the brands Samuel Smiths Organic,



To pair, look to foods complimented by apple flavours such as pork chops, pork belly, pork roast, and ham.

Strongbow, and Angry Orchard. Some cider producers you will recognize as they produce other alcoholic products. Beer producers Molsens and Stella Artois are two. Many ciders come in packs, some variety packs, which offer a nice introduction to the beverage. The four can, 200 ml each, mini-variety pack from Strongbow costs \$4.95 and contains Strongbow Original Dry, Strongbow Dark Fruit, Strongbow Ginger and Strongbow Dry Pear. Other flavoured products include Angry Orchards rose cider with hibiscus and the well-known cider producer Somersby offers a red rhubarb flavoured cider.

Lots to choose from. Where to begin?



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