



“What a Pair”

by Michael Hughes

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There are many classic food and wine pairings that work very well because they've been perfected over generations. But classics always can be more fun when they are played with a little bit.

Take steak and red wine, for example. Most of us think of New York strip or rib-eye when it comes to steak, and usually we reach for a Cabernet Sauvignon to pair along with it. But the cow is a big animal — it has plenty of other cuts to offer.

For a classically delicious pairing with a little twist, visit the Majestic Grille (145 S. Main, 522-8555) and try their Hangar steak with Laurel Glen's Terra Rosa Malbec from Argentina. This particular cut of beef is a bit more "meaty" with a bolder beef flavor and more toothsome texture than many other cuts. Those factors match it well with the dark, deep flavors of black plum and full texture of the Malbec grape. Argentineans are fanatical about their beef and Malbec. One taste of this pairing will make anyone understand why.

Fish and white wine — that seems to be a mantra that is uttered over and over again in restaurants and in the seafood aisles of local groceries. However, it's not as easy as it sounds. The ocean is vast and filled with a multitude of species of fish and shellfish. So where to start when pairing fish and wine?

Think of the strongest flavors on the plate and the weight and texture of the fish itself. At Restaurant Iris (2146 Monroe, 590-2828), the scallops with house-made gnocchi, fennel and vermouth cream, and citrus can be a deliciously interesting dish to pair. The fennel and vermouth add bittersweet tones, the citrus brings acid, and the scallops and gnocchi are lush and rich without being heavy. For this dish, try Chateau Vessiere, a blend of the grapes Roussanne and Grenache Blanc. Both grapes bring a rich texture without being overly heavy, much like the texture of the scallops and gnocchi. The wine's acidity is bright enough to match the citrus and cut through the cream.



One of the best ways to end a meal is with a platter of cheeses and a good wine. Bari Ristorante e Enoteca (22 S. Cooper, 722-2244) has one of the best cheese selections in Memphis. To really experience what they have to offer, order a handful of cheeses and a good bottle of red that will pair across the spectrum of this dairy wonderland.

The cheeses that shouldn't be missed are Gorgonzola Cremificato (a soft delicate blue), Tallegio (creamy, bittersweet, and pungently aromatic), Pecorino Sottolnoce (available only twice a year, wrapped in walnut leaves, grassy and nutty), and Bianco Sottobosco (semi-soft, rich, and laced with black truffles). This varied and unique selection of cheeses needs an equally interesting wine.

I know many wine drinkers are still hesitant to explore dessert wines. One of the best ways to break through that doubt is to sample a good version alongside such varied styles of cheeses. One of the most famous and hallowed dessert wines is Italy's Vin Santo, which means "holy wine." The nutty, honeyed, floral, succulent richness of Fattoria di Felsina Vin Santo carries across the pungency of the Gorgonzola and Tallegio as well as the haunting earthiness of the Sottobosco.