

Stuffed mussels, wine make delightful pair

BY DAVID CAMPICHE

Wine is not the ultimate beverage but one of the finer choices.

Wine is the social drink. Wine couples with food — and food with wine. Wine can be mystifying.

Often, one walks down long grocery store aisles or in a wine cellar and contemplates which bottle and varietal should be picked for pairing with meals like fresh halibut fillet. There are many questions and fewer answers.

But the first answer is simple: Drink what you like, what brings you pleasure. And most important of all — in my humble opinion — is to drink in celebration; to imbibe while eating carefully or lovingly prepared food. Drink with friends, family or best yet, with your partner.

But which wine with which food: That answer is an open book.

The predictables are easy enough. With seafood, choose a white wine. With red meats, a red. Poultry is a bit more complex. A chardonnay is a reasonable guess but so is pinot noir, a lighter red wine full of complexities.

And then there is salmon. A few critics proclaim that a pinot noir is a fine match. I agree, but, as David Lett of Eyrie Vineyards (the first commercial wine in Oregon) once proclaimed, “Pinot gris (a viscous dry white) is the perfect match for salmon.” Indeed, it is a match made in heaven. The viscous silky feeling of the wine tends to match the texture and oiliness of the salmon.

Curry loves a sweet riesling or a gewurztraminer. That holds true of most spicy food. Many people don't believe that wine is a particularly good match with spice. I dis-



ABOVE: Stuffed mussels, after being steamed and cooked in the oven. **RIGHT:** The ingredients used for creating stuffed mussels.

agree. I believe there are few foods that don't partner well with wine.

And there is champagne, the beverage that

seems to make all food happy. Great with appetizers, its limitations are few. Seafood loves the bubbly companion. So does Sunday brunch: a seafood omelet or a soft scramble with porcini mushrooms and gruyere. Even fresh croissants and jam pair with the bubbly. Or maybe, just sipping on a warm spring afternoon when friends just happen by, unannounced at dinnertime.

One of my sons dropped by a bucket of ocean mussels. They were welcomed and the biggest I ever saw. I steamed them open with 1 cup of white wine, a half-stick of butter and fresh herbs from the garden: fennel, rosemary and oregano. The resulting broth happens to be a sublime base for chowders or a sauce reduction for a fish fillet.

For pairing wine with mussels or clams, how about champagne or a cold pinot gris. If you find one, a chenin blanc is pleasant. And I already mentioned gewurztraminer. So you see, the wine world roils with choices.

I don't believe that cabernet sauvignon is a good match for seafood. Nor is a merlot or most reds. But pinot noir is.



And as to those huge orange mussels, here is a recipe for a seafood stuffing, a sublime mixture of pleasure to be stuffed back into those cleaned recycled shells — a handsome presentation — and baked at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 minutes.

Stuffed mussels

Ingredients

- 4 pounds of steamed mussels, shelled and chopped
- Half of a small onion, diced finely
- ¼ of a fennel root, fine diced
- 1 brimming teaspoon of finely diced ginger
- 1 tablespoon of fresh garlic, finely diced
- 2 stalks of finely diced celery
- ½ cup of Panko breadcrumbs
- ½ yellow sweet pepper, diced
- ¼ cup of diced water chestnuts
- ½ cup of Gruyere cheese, grated
- ¼ cup of grated Parmesan for the topping
- Salt to your taste
- A pinch of curry
- A pinch of cayenne
- 1 tablespoon of fresh fennel
- ¼ cup of mayonnaise
- Butter and/or olive oil for sautéing

Preparation

This is easy. Chop and dice finely the designated ingredients, excluding the breadcrumbs and cheese. Sauté lightly in virgin olive oil or butter. Transfer to a work bowl. Salt. Add the mayonnaise, breadcrumbs and some grated gruyere cheese to bind. Spoon into the shells. Grate a bit of parmesan on top and stick into a hot oven for 10 minutes.

Serve immediately with the champagne or pinot gris. Hopefully, you can enjoy your meal and drink outdoors. Santé.

Photos by David Campiche

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Sheryl Teuscher, LACP, LUTCF, CPIW

Representative
112 West B Street
Rainier, OR 97048-0310
countryfinancial.com/sheryl.teuscher
sheryl.teuscher@countryfinancial.com
503-556-0186

Auto and Home policies issued by COUNTRY Mutual Insurance Company®, COUNTRY Casualty Insurance Company®, or COUNTRY Preferred Insurance Company®, Bloomington, IL.
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