

Perfect Wines to pair with your Christmas Dinner

By Sonal Holland New Delhi, Dec 24 (IANSlife): Christmas is here and 'tis the season to be jolly, gather around with family and friends, spoil each other with gifts and most importantly, indulge in a traditional Christmas meal with festive foods and excellent wines.

Choosing wines to match Christmas-special foods should be a pleasure, not a pain. Much is written on the subject, but ultimately the choice of which wine to serve with a particular dish comes down to personal preference. The notion that white meat only goes with white wine and red meat with red wine is outdated. The main idea is to match flavour intensity and weight and not worry much about matching the colour of meat with the colour of the wine. In fact, it is the perfect opportunity to be bold, experiment with wines that you may not have tried before and explore new combinations in food and wine. The idea is to have many different styles of wines open at the table so people can serve themselves depending on what food they are enjoying.

So here are a few suggestions to get started:

Wine for Christmas Starters

Firstly, nothing like Champagne to get the party started. But if you're on a budget, a good quality Prosecco from Italy or a well-made Cava from Spain can be an equally impressive fizz to serve during your Christmas feast. With its vibrant acidity, an oak-aged Burgundian Chardonnay works particularly well with traditional Christmas starters like smoked salmon and butter-brushed prawns. A crisp French Chablis is a classic accompaniment to saline oysters and a flinty Sancerre or a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc greatly complements a dish like butter-poached asparagus.

Rich chicken or goose liver patés paired with ripe, aromatic wines like the German Riesling, Indian Viognier or a Torrentes from Argentina are delightful because of the way their perfumed sweet palate contrasts well with the mouthcoating effect of the paté.

Wines for Christmas Main Course

Christmas simply isn't Christmas without turkey and it has been a traditional favourite since Victorian times. Like most poultry, it is medium-weight and is not powerfully flavoured. Match its weight with a rich white wine like a smoky Californian Chardonnay or a medium to full-bodied red wine with supple tannins. The most powerful flavours are usually found in the accompaniments, so these also need to be considered when choosing the wine. Cranberry and red currant sauces are fruity and sweet and maybe too overpowering for a mellow aged red wine – instead choose a robust and fruity wine which is ripe in tannins, like a top-quality Californian Zinfandel, Beaujolais Cru, reserve-level Spanish Tempranillo, top Chilean Merlot or a Ripasso-style Valpolicella.

If you are serving duck porchetta, a well-matured Pinot Noir works like magic. The duck meat melts in your palate when blended with the silky velvety texture of a well-aged, elegant Pinot Noir. Roast lamb or pork, on the other hand, demands a more structured red wine like a good quality Bordeaux or an equally competent Cabernet Sauvignon from the New World.

For vegetarians enjoying a Porcini Risotto or a vegetable lasagna, my top pick would be a lovely rosé wine, either in still or a sparkling style. The versatility of a well-made rosé can be unparalleled when it comes to off-setting the herbaceous vegetal flavours of a dish. Not to mention, the rosé has the lightness and freshness of a white wine; and the body and juicy flavours of a red wine, thus drawing from the best of both the worlds.

Wines for Christmas Puddings

Christmas Pudding and Mince Pies are delicious with Ruby Ports, aged Tawny Ports and rich Madeiras which flaunt similar dried fruit and sweet spice flavours; these high alcohol wines go very well with rich, chocolate-based desserts too.

Most fruit-based puddings or tarts with some cream and moderate sweetness are enjoyable with sweet uplifting white wines like a Sauternes, Tokaji or a German Auslese style.

For those who can't resist their cheeses, remember to have a bottle of any good red wine with the hard, salty cheese varieties, a bottle of crisp, dry white with the soft, fatty cheeses. A bottle

of sweet wine works wonderfully with pungent blue cheese. A lot of the choice of wines already mentioned will also work with the cheeses on offer.

The most important element about wine and food is to experiment and to be bold about your decisions. I would say that this season throw caution to the wind and experiment. It's not necessary that you follow a pairing chart; experimentation in wines is a must and the only way to create an exciting Christmas party.

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