

Annual Pizza Wine Review



Every fall, My wife and I jump back into the same hectic routine. School is back in full swing, work is heating up and the weather is cooling down. There are some evenings when trying to navigate through rush hour traffic to make it home in time to prepare a home-cooked meal just isn't in the cards. That's when we run up the white flag and surrender to the siren call of carryout pizza and a good bottle of wine.

Each year, Cindy and I look back on some of the wines that we have enjoyed over a slice or two of various combinations of toppings and take notes on our favorites. And while we may not always agree on the type of pizza we like to unwind with, we do agree on three simple rules for "pizza wines." The wine should be able to mix and mingle with a variety of toppings, it has to cost \$20 or less, and it should be easy to find in local wine shops. So, in an attempt to help reduce the stress of having to make one more decision at the end of a busy day, we offer our annual picks for the perfect wine to go with pizza.

Cindy really likes white pizzas, particularly with caramelized onions. White wines with crisp acidity tend to cut through the richness of the cheese while fresh fruit flavors accent the toppings, so her selections run to the fresher, brighter end of the spectrum.

I know that it seems like heresy to recommend a Pinot Grigio that is *not* from Italy, but the **2011 Estancia Pinot Grigio** from California is a great pizza wine. Its aroma is intense, full and fruity, while the flavors of tropical fruit and citrus are dry, velvety, and particularly well-orchestrated on a full body. It is kept crisp and refreshing on the finish thanks to abundant acidity. Perfect with white pizza or Margherita. **\$10**

The **2011 Robert Mondavi Fume Blanc** from Napa Valley, California is an exceptionally well-balanced, fruit-forward wine that's perfect on its own or as an accompaniment to seafood-based topped pizza. The citrus-oriented nose of bright pineapple, nectarine and peach are repeated on the palate, where this wine just shines. The pleasant acidity and distinct notes of passion fruit and vanilla on the finish provide a layer of complexity. **\$18**

My favorite pizzas are usually red sauce-based and piled high with an assortment of meat toppings. This combination adds up to a lot of spicy flavors and greasy goodness, so I am seeking out Italian red wines that will be able to stand up to the flavorful challenges of various spices.

My new "go to" pizza wine this year is the **2011 Terre del Barolo Barbera D'Alba** from Piedmont, Italy. Made from 100 percent Barbera, which is traditionally used in blends to add color and acidity, it is now more frequently bottled as a varietal wine. This version features aromas of red berries and spicy licorice on the nose while flavors red fruit notes of cranberries, redcurrants, and cherries are balanced in the mouth by subtle tannins and bright acidity. **\$11**

For a more traditional pie, I like a traditional Italian red wine, like the **2010 Antinori Santa Cristina Toscana** from Tuscany, Italy. Made from a blend of 85% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, the wine is straight forward and uncomplicated. The subtle aromas of red cherry and violets on the nose combine with soft flavors of cherry, red currant and earthy plum in the mouth. Firm tannins and good acidity provide great balance and structure. I call it Italy in a glass. **\$12**