

Red Wines of Portugal



Memorial Day is upon us, and with it comes the hallmarks of Friday backups on the Bay Bridge and sunburned tourists on the Mall. Summer is about to get real in Washington. And while we can expect that it will get a tad hotter and a lot more humid around here, we can also expect that many of us will be doing a lot more outdoor grilling this season.

There is something about cooking food outside on the grill that just seems to make everything taste better. I love grilling a wide variety of foods, including everything from fresh fish, chicken and vegetables to traditional grill-fare of burgers and New York strip steaks. I have even attempted – with remarkable success – to grill peaches and nectarines for dessert - just add vanilla ice cream!

And finding the right wine to saddle up alongside the plethora of grilled goodies is half the fun. It gives me a chance to explore new combinations to see what works with the various marinades and sauces that I use when grilling. Traditionally, when I am cooking up fish and poultry, I have a tendency to look for white wines that feature abundant acidity. But if I decide to spice up the flavor profile or throw shellfish on the barbie, then I try to find white wines that have just a touch of residual sugar to help bring all of the flavors into focus. When red meat is on the menu, I reach for bolder red wines that tend to be more fruit-forward on the palate and possess noticeable tannins that can help cut through the fat.

Here are several summer sippers to serve up with your favorite grilled foods.

I have been drinking a lot of Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc wines lately, and I have found the best of both worlds from local wine producer Gus Kalaris' **2013 Truth Cuvee de Fume** from California. This blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc and Semillon is an extremely versatile and food friendly wine that possesses aromas of citrus peel, honeydew melon, lychee and savory herbs along with a whisper of almonds. The palate is racy with an integrated mix of lemon-lime, apricot, honeycomb and fig. There is a beautiful balance between acidity and fruit, a hint of ripe pear with a lively and crisply refreshing finish. **\$15**

Fresh vegetables from our garden receive special treatment on the grill and they get it when we pair them with the **2015 Quara Torrontes** from the Mendoza region of Argentina. The nose offers up aromas of apple blossoms, white peach and apricots. The substantial acidity provides a lovely platform for flavors of lychee, honeydew melon, mango and ripe pineapple. Notes of lemongrass and kumquats file in on the back. The bone-dry finish features abundant acidity and keeps the palate refreshed. Enjoy with grilled zucchini, mushrooms and eggplant. **\$12**

If salmon is on the menu, then Pinot Noir can't be far behind. I think pinots with delicate fruit compliments the rich flavors of the fish. The **2014 Josh Cellars Pinot Noir** from California displays aromas of red currant and Asian spices and elegant flavors of strawberry, cherry and red plum that float on the tongue with finesse and charm. Notes of cranberry play out on the earthy finish where soft-grained tannins provide a smooth end. It is a perfect with cedar plank salmon. **\$15**

In our house, a grilled hamburger has been elevated to an art form. We make every accoutrement a burger could want, so we go a little overboard with the wine we like to have with it. This year, it is the **2013 Pocos Colheita Red** from the Douro Valley in Portugal that has earned pairing rights! Now normally, Tinta Roriz (AKA Tempranillo) would not be the first grape varietal I would think to pair with a burger, but when blended with Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca, this is a match they write songs about. This rich red wine features aromas of earthy dark fruit and cassis on a fragrant bouquet. Generous flavors of blackberry jam, dark cassis, spicy black cherry and white pepper are full and forward in the mouth. Sweet tannins provide enough grip to cut through the fat while allowing the subtle notes of toasty oak to shine on the luscious finish. **\$25**