

Jim Clendenen said he learned something from being a pledge in a fraternity. When offered a glass of delicious red wine he always says, “Thank you. May I have another one, sir?” Well, this month I moved and I came across so much wine I never remember buying. I must have been saying, “May I have another one, too?” As I moved the bottles, I started asking myself “What would I drink with this?” As you know, it’s not about the food for me – it’s about the wine and what food goes with it.

If you have to, you can do it in reverse. Here are some wine and food pairings to try. By the way, I am offering obscure food ideas because they are the toughest and nobody writes about them.

Salads: this is a tough pairing but a traditional salad is good with Sauvignon Blanc or Italian whites (not Chardonnay) that traditionally blend Vernaccia, Tocai Friulano, and Sauvignon Blanc. On salads, be careful to avoid vinegary dressings!

Popcorn: If you sneak wine into the movies or drink it at home, try American or Australian Chardonnay. The fatter the wine, the better the match. Popcorn and Champagne make for a real party.

Asparagus: I love broiled asparagus – but one of the first wine pairing rules I learned was don’t mix asparagus and wine. However, in the spirit of adventure, I’ll take a swing at it. Try some New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. These Sauvignon Blancs have veggie and grassy aromas that pair well with asparagus. Put a little cheese- or cream-based sauce on your asparagus and you can go with Pinot Gris from Alsace or Pinot Grigio from Italy. It was only recently that I discovered my 3 favorite food groups were butter/cream, bacon, and eggs.

Artichokes: I am assuming that you are eating this with some kind of accompaniment – butter or dipping sauce or other preparations. If so, Sancerre, Pouilly Fume or whites that have more acid work great. I love artichokes, butter, and Champagne. Winston Churchill said about Champagne, “In victory, we deserve it. In defeat, we need it.”

Sushi: It’s just raw fish. Try a German or Alsatian Riesling or Pinot Gris. The combination of sweet fruit and acid cleans your palate after every bite. If it’s sushi rolls, try a light Pinot Noir – not the big, heavy ones. Village-level Burgundy would be a good start.

Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwiches: On yeah, behave! This one is tricky, but I go full-on red here. Try Australian Shiraz or American Zinfandel. The higher alcohol and sweeter fruit are as good as a glass of milk with this American tradition. If you’ve got a deep cellar, try a 20-year-old-plus Bordeaux. You’ll be surprised.

Egg Dishes: These are one of my 3 favorite food groups. Get some duck eggs if you can. Denise Harvey gets mine for me. Here, California Chardonnays can play a harmonious role if there’s plenty of butter and bacon or mushrooms. If it’s a green vegetable omelet, try white Burgundy. Its stronger earth flavors and acidic structure make a better match. If you want to live on the edge, a lightly chilled Rosé or a cool Rosé Champagne also work wonders.

Remember, the idea is to enhance both the food and the wine by putting them together. If $1 + 1 \neq 3$, then you’ve failed your pairing test. As I’ve said before, think of wine as another item on your plate and offer yourself, family and friends a balanced meal. Try your own pairings – and if you can come up with some obscure pairing that works, let me know. As the Romans said, “In vino veritas.”

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