

# Perfect Party Pairings

## Hosting your own wine and cheese soiree

by Allie Walld

Close your eyes and flash forward a few weeks from now. It's the first week of May and you've just spent the past two days drinking wine. Not because you have a problem, but because you've been at the Winnipeg Convention Centre since April 27 for the Winnipeg Wine Festival. But now the festival's over and you don't want the fun to end. With a rush of excitement, you decide to throw your own wine and cheese party.

The only problem with this genius idea is you're not quite sure how to throw your elegant soiree. Suddenly, you wish you had the help of someone with more expertise, and then you realize you do. You have the advice of Carol Herntier, product ambassador with Manitoba Liquor Marts, and Jason Wortzman, director of sales and marketing at

Bothwell Cheese Inc., and they're preparing you for the successful and educational wine and cheese party of the season.

"The key to a good party is making sure you have a variety of styles for people to try and that you have a range of lighter to heavier flavours," Carol suggests. "You could do a theme party with reds, whites, regional, or celebrity wines. Maybe you could do something regional, like serving Italian cheeses with Italian wines?"

If your friends are wine aficionados with finely tuned palates, they might appreciate a regional red wine from Italy, like Chianti, \$25-\$50, or Amarone, \$40-\$50. On the other hand, if your friends are just getting into the wonderful world of wine, they're more likely to be open to a variety of flavours. Your best bet would be to go with a softer wine, like a Chianti, \$12-\$20.

So you've picked up about six bottles of wine, all different varieties, and are on your way home when you realize you aren't sure what kind of cheese you're going to need. Enter Jason with a novel idea.

"It's important to have unique flavours, not just everyday varieties," Jason says. "You could think about smoked cheeses, truffles, green peppercorn, or aged cheeses. Use different styles and go to different extremes with exterior-ripened cheeses, like brie or blue."

You and your five varieties of cheese are on your way home from the store when you remember that Jason told you it's a good idea to have a variety of crackers so that people can cleanse their palates between tastings. You make sure to avoid anything with strong tastes, so they won't overpower the wine and cheese.

If you pair your wine with a complementary piece of cheese, you can avoid competitive flavours altogether. You forget what Carol said about pairing wines with cheese, so you phone her for a quick reminder.

"You might pair blue cheese with a port, Amarone, or Riesling," she tells you. "Champagne and soft brie go well together, and an aged cheddar and a Cabernet are a natural match."

Whatever you decide, be sure you've got an excellent presentation. For a party with 10 people, you'll need two or three

*Wines by famous faces, including a race car driver, a Blues Brother, and Elvis (we knew he was still alive).*



pounds of cheese. Prepare it in chunks, wedges, shapes, or thin slices, and take it out of the fridge at least one hour before you serve it.

“Cheese should be served at room temperature,” Jason reminds you, “because it accentuates the full flavour of the cheese.” And don’t forget to identify each cheese so your friends can note which ones they like with each wine.

While some wines need to be opened to mix with air before serving, all wines should be refrigerated so their best features are accentuated when they’re served. Red wines should be kept at 60°-70° F, whites at 50°-60° F, and sweeter wines at 45°-50° F.

Wine samples should be about two-ounces — enough that you can spit the first sip back into your glass, taste and pair it with a cheese, and think about its characteristics.

The order for serving wine should always follow this rule, in this order: dry before sweet, light before full, white before red, and old before young, otherwise dry wines taste sour, light ones lose their effect, and young ones overpower older tastes.

Now that your party’s ready to go, you can sit back and tell your friends about the annual wine festival. At least this way, you don’t have to wait another year to throw your next party.

## PAIRING WINE WITH CHEESE

**Amarone** (\$40-\$50) with blue cheese

**Cabernet sauvignon** (\$10-\$45) with black truffle, aged cheddar or smoked cheese

**Merlot** (\$10-\$20) with black truffle, blue, gouda, or smoked cheese

**Riesling** (\$8-\$40) with blue, or brie cheese

**White** with Madagascar green peppercorn cheese



## Wine Tasting Tips

**1. LOOK** — Take note of colour; be specific. Look at opacity: is it clear, cloudy, transparent, or opaque? Swirl and check for sediment or cork pieces.

**2. SMELL** — Swirl to enhance natural aromas and quickly smell for first impressions. Deeply inhale for second impressions. Do you smell wood, flowers, or fruit? Aroma indicates quality and unique characteristics. Swirl, letting aromas mix and mingle. Smell again.

**3. TASTE** — Take a small sip and let it circle your tongue. Any first impressions? Take a small breath through your lips, tasting the wine more fully. Is it light-bodied, like water, or full-bodied, like milk? How long does the flavour last after you swallow it?

### Some Celebrity Winemakers/Endorsers:

Bob Dylan, Dan Aykroyd, Elvis Presley, Francis Ford Coppola, Madonna, Marilyn Monroe, Mike Weir, Olivia Newton-John, Sting.



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