

# Pairing Guests *and* Wine

ENJOYING WINE SEEMS UNIVERSAL, yet some wine lovers share unique challenges. I want to tell you about two such common malaises and a solution to same. I have a severe case of “wine acquisition” disease, but admittedly want no cure. The condition does seem benign, but is known to “ramp up” to an out of control situation in some people. The good and the bad news is that it is rarely contagious and thus only a minority is known to be afflicted. The good effect is obvious, but the negative is that there are generally few people with whom to share the wine if the condition is full blown.

This phenomenon has been well-presented to me over the past forty years, and as a result I have few people with whom to regularly share wine. Each of these people lament about this “loneliness at the top” of the wine pyramid and note that they and their few similarly-affected friends also suffer from this loneliness. To read a different slant on this phenomenon, look at Matt Kramer’s article in the March 31, 2011 issue of *Wine Spectator*, titled “The Dirty Little Secret.” As he notes, “What you really want is just the right guest for just the right wine.”

This whole issue is a big enough problem but is compounded when the hosts of the dinner party are knowledgeable about wine and food preparation as well as the pairing thereof. My wife Pat is accomplished in the kitchen and our collective wine and food pairings often seem to intimidate many of our guests. As we discussed for the umpteenth time recently, she thought it would be interesting to have our guests bring an appetizer and two bottles of the same wine to complement it.

The supporting logic was that while not everyone is an accomplished chef, most or many may have developed some recipes of which they are proud and would like to share with friends. A corollary might state that through experimentation a complementary wine might be known by

the couple bringing the dish. If everything worked perfectly, the host and hostess would not have to do all the work and everyone could learn through sharing.

The only problem with the idea lay in identifying the guests. Due to the earlier noted dilemma, few of the guests were bona fide wine fanatics, but I knew all of them to some degree. Few guests knew any of the others. In order to energize the guests, we developed an “ice breaker.” Each guest was given a listing of the other guests with an identifying and modifying attribute randomly listed on the same page. Through conversation, guests had to identify each person. This idea seemed to work well and most enjoyed the chance to play sleuth and get their answers.

We withheld wine until the guests had a good start (talk about an incentive to get started) identifying each other and then with the introduction of the ‘social lubricant,’ and the accompanying appetizers, the party took off.

The only decision making required – other than what foods to eat – was the placement of the appetizers and wine in some appropriate order based on heaviness of the food or the intensity of the wine. We had three ounce cups for each wine so that all guests had at least a fighting chance of pairing some of the wine to accompany the foods. I noticed that some people tried multiple wines with the same dish so perhaps they discovered something they liked better than the original pairing.

The only change I would consider making would be to integrate the soups (we offered four main course soups) into the line-up of appetizers as many guests were almost full by the time the soups were served. Finally, the dessert consisted of milk, bittersweet, and dark chocolates with accompanying complementary wines.

The net result of the party seems to be that it was a success. Everyone learned new food and



*Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at [profwino@comcast.net](mailto:profwino@comcast.net).*

wines and the pairings thereof, and probably most important, all of the guests met some new and interesting people, and Pat and I got to know some of our friends even better. Whether your case of “wine acquisition” is severe or mild, we hope you find our solution to pairing guests, foods and wines useful and a great way to celebrate the warmer weather ahead. A Santé! 🍷