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## WEDDINGS AND WINE: A FINE MARRIAGE

*By Trisha Conover*

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# Weddings and Wine

by TRICIA CONOVER



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**Wine has been served** at weddings since the Greeks and Etruscans first settled in Italy. The perfect wine will make your day more memorable. Choosing the perfect wines for a wedding is an important detail that will make your special day more memorable. Today, wine plays an increasingly larger role in the sophisticated wedding. Whether you are planning for a party of 25 or 300, many questions are the same. What to buy? How much to buy? How do you match food to wine?



PLANNING

## Weddings and Wine

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Every wedding has a budget, whether it is \$2000 or \$250,000. What is your budget? Brides and grooms should arrange to sample the wine for the reception in advance, much like sampling the cake and food served. Consider these major factors in your selections:

- **The Time of Day** — Guests tend to drink less in the afternoon than the evening; and they tend to favor lighter wines in the afternoon. The evening calls for more full-bodied choices.
- **Season of the Year** — What wines match with seasonal foods? In the sunny, summer outdoors, you might consider serving a light, refreshing wine like a Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir or Provence-style dry rosé. In the winter, pair your formal dinner with a full-bodied, powerful red like Cabernet Sauvignon or a Super Tuscan.
- **Location of the Wedding** — Are you having the wedding outside or inside? At a vineyard or country club? Is the reception formal or informal? Vineyards and wineries like Gundlach Bundschu in Sonoma, CA, offer scenic settings; some winemakers can personalize the bottles with your names and date of the ceremony. These bottles make memorable gifts. The location of the wedding may dictate if you can bring your own wine or not. Wineries may insist on using only their wines. Many restaurants, hotels and clubs require you to purchase wine from them at a markup. You may not have to only choose wines off their wine list, as many can make specific purchases of your choosing.
- **Your Guests** — What do you and your guest normally drink? Beer, wine or cocktails? Do you want to have a blend of offerings? Do they drink Italian, French, American, Australian, Spanish, New Zealand wines?
- **How much to Buy** — A guideline for the price per bottle of wine for dinner should be double the cost of the main course and in proportion to the cost of your whole event. Did you book an informal setting or a Michelin 3-Star venue? Your wine choices would vary between a Prosecco or Asti to a vintage Champagne with many choices in between. How much wine should you provide? Imagine your embarrassment should you run out of one of the wines you are serving before getting to your last guests! Plan carefully. Each bottle (25 ounces) of still wine yields five glasses of wine. During a two-hour reception a guest will consume 12 to 15 ounces. During a four-hour reception/dinner, guests on average, consume one bottle of wine. Guests tend to leave wine in their glasses after sampling each choice. A bottle of sparkling wine for toasting yields eight half-glass servings of a sparkler in a flute. Take advantage of case discounts of 10 percent to 20 percent, if offered. If cocktails are going to be served, guests tend to drink less wine. Leftover wine can usually be returned if unstained or given as gifts to the wedding party as a special memento.
- **Reception Timing and Choreography** — Consider how the reception is staged in your planning. Do you want to serve an aperitif first? Often, the bridal party is kept apart from the reception for an hour for photographs. Consider serving guests cocktails or wine during the wait. The first impression sets the stage for what is to follow. Do you want the servers to greet your guests with flower-laden trays of white wine? When will the toast and speeches occur — at the introduction, during the dinner or during the dessert/cake cutting? This timing will help decide whether to serve a brut (dry) sparkler for the toast or demi-sec (sweeter) sparkler with the dessert.
- **Multiple Wine Selections** — Many couples elect to offer white, red, rosé and sparkling wine choices. Many wedding planners recommend serving equal amounts of white and red. A compromise to consider is a crisp and fruity Provence rosé like Brad and Angelina's Château Miraval Côtes de Provence or the Washington State Seven Hills rosé. Rosé works exceptionally well for a warm season wedding. Instead of picking a familiar brand wine take the time to select a wine that will make your guests ask, "Where can I buy that?"

## A Wine Sampler for a Formal Indoor Spring/Summer Wedding:

**White:** Greg Norman Chardonnay (Australia), Ferrari Carano Fume Blanc (Sonoma Country, CA), Oregon's King Estate Pinot Gris, Walt Wines Chardonnay (Mendocino, CA), Chateau Fuisse Tete de Cru, Louis Jadot Pouilly-Fuisse (France)

**Red:** Chateau Montrose (Bordeaux, France), Torres Salmos (Priorat, Spain), Markham Merlot (Napa Valley, CA); Pinot Noir: Willamette Valley (Chehalem, OR), Louis Jadot, Maison Joseph Drouhin Burgundy (France), Malbec de Angles (Argentina)

**Rosé:** Chateau Miraval (Provence, France), Charles & Charles (Walla Walla, WA), Seven Hills (Walla Walla, WA), Guigal Côtes du Rhône Rosé (France)

**Sparkling:** Bellavista Brut Franciacorta DOCG (Italy), Bollinger NV Champagne (France), Schramsberg's Blanc de Noir (Calistoga, CA), Mionetto Prosecco (Italy), Recaredo Cava (Spain)

**Dessert/Cake:** Veuve Clicquot Demi-sec (France), Schramsberg Cremant Demi-sec (Calistoga, CA), Castello di Verrazzano Vin Santo (Italy), Pacific Rim Vin de Glaciere Ice Wine (Columbia Valley, WA)

## A Wine Sampler for an Informal Outside Spring/Summer Wedding



Photo courtesy of Chimney Rock Winery

- **The Menu** – The menu will help determine the appropriate wine to serve. A good rule of thumb: “rich with rich” and “humble with humble.” Lobster or salmon calls for a full-bodied Chardonnay or rich white blend like Chimney Rock Elevage from Napa Valley, CA. A hearty steak pairs well with a full-bodied red wine selection. Big reds from Europe include Italian Super Tuscan, Spanish Rioja, Spanish Priorat and French Bordeaux. New World full-bodied reds include Chilean Cabernet, Argentina Malbec, a U.S. or Australian Merlot or Syrah/Shiraz and a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. Torres Salmos Priorat is an exceptional Spanish choice. Pinot Noir is extremely flexible with either white or dark meat. A more casual menu like a barbeque, macaroni and cheese bar or today’s trendy food truck grouping may call for a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, Italian Rosso or U.S. Red Zinfandel. A brunch reception calls for a lighter white, dry rosé or a frizzante wine like a Vinho Verde or Moscato d’Asti. A Prosecco Bar also pairs well with a brunch reception, offering a colorful and delicious blend of Prosecco topped with a choice of Elderflower liquor, Framboise raspberry liquor or even Violetta Violet liquor.

- **Champagne and Sparkling Wine** – The toast to the bridal couple is one of the most memorable and photographed events of the wedding. Pouring a half glass of a sparkler for the toast is perfectly acceptable. Sparklers do not have to be expensive to be delicious. Good alternatives to Champagne include an Italian Prosecco or Franciacorta, a fine Spanish Cava like Recaredo Rosé, or an American sparkler like the Napa Schramsberg Blanc de Noir or New Mexico’s Gruet Brut. If Champagne is desired, a mid-price selection to consider is the Bollinger Brut Special Cuvee NV. The British royal family celebrated Will and Kate’s marriage while sipping the “Bolly.” Great value Champagnes come from producers like Pierre Gimonet & Fils, Pierre Péters, Pol Roger and Jacquart. For an unusual feature a consider having toasters do what Master Sommelier Catherine Fallis does in her dramatic sabering ceremony opening the first bottle.



Photo courtesy of Risata Wines

**White:** Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc, (New Zealand), Martin Codax Albarino (Spain), Anselmo Mendes Vinho Verde (Portugal), Hall Wines Sauvignon Blanc (Napa Valley, CA), Chateau St. Michelle Chardonnay (Columbia Valley, WA)

**Red:** Podere Brancaia Tre Rosso Toscana (Italy), Spottswood Red Zinfandel (Napa Valley, CA), Tablas Creek GSM Rhone-style blend (Paso Robles, CA), Concha y Toro Cabernet (Chile)

**Rosé:** Chateau d’Esclans Whispering Angel (Provence, France), Seven Hills Winery (Walla Walla, WA)

**Sparkling:** La Marca Prosecco (Italy), Gruet Grand Rosé (Albuquerque, NM)

**Dessert/Cake:** Ceretto’s Moscato di Asti (Italy), Chateau Guiraud Sauternes (France)

### A Wine Sampler for a Formal Indoor Fall/Winter Wedding

**White:** Chimney Rock Elevage (Napa Valley, CA), Saintsbury Chardonnay (Carneros, CA), Merry Edwards Sauvignon Blanc (Sonoma County, CA), Antoine Jobard Meursault (France), Zaca Mesa Viognier (Santa Ynez, CA)

**Red:** Shafer One Point Five Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley, CA), Gary Farrell Pinot Noir (Sonoma County, CA), Pedernales Tempranillo (Stonewall, TX),



- **Cake and Dessert Wine** — The rule-of-thumb in dessert pairing is “the wine must be sweeter than the dessert.” If a sparkler has less than 1.5 percent sugar, that dryness makes the wine taste metallic and bitter with a sweet dessert. A demi-sec bubbly will complement the cake. If the toast is made as cake is served, select a sweeter sparkler like the La Montina Franciacorta “Demi-sec” Sparkling Rosé DOCG, Schramsberg Cremant or a Moscato d’Asti. If a still dessert wine is preferred, serve a wine like Pacific Rim’s Vin de Glaciere Ice Wine or the traditional Italian choice, Vin Santo.

It’s also important to consider the wine glass. Wine glass shapes have been made to accent specific grape varietals, enhancing bouquet and flavor. Ask your reception venue if they offer wine glass size choices. Make sure the wine you serve is at the proper temperature, too. Most whites and rosés are served too cold and most reds are served too warm. Sparkling wines should be between 40° to 50° F, white and rosé wines at 50° to 60° F and full-bodied reds between 60° and 70° F.

If you need assistance selecting wines for your wedding, a great resource is your local wine shop or a local sommelier. Free internet websites like *snooth.com* feature wine reviews. *Wine Enthusiast*, *Decanter* and *Wine Spectator* offer news and reviews of best-buy wines.

Be aware that some caterers and venues do not allow you to supply your own wines. Beware of hidden charges from hotels, restaurants and banquet venues that mark up the price of their wines. Savings can come from supplying your own wine for your Big Day, but check on the “corkage fee” that might be assigned, which covers glassware and staff service. This charge may range from \$5 to \$25 per bottle.

The wine selection at your wedding can create a lasting memory. Honor your marriage in the coming years at anniversary and life celebrations by cellaring your special wine and toasting your wedding memories. Salute!

Wolffer Estate Merlot (Long Island, NY), Brys Estate Pinot Noir (Traverse City, MI), Torres Celeste (Spain), Casato Prime Donne Brunello (Italy), Cesari Amarone (Italy), Hall Wines Kathryn Hall Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley, CA), Chateau Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande (France)

**Rosé:** Chateau d’Esclans Whispering Angel (Provence, France), Chimney Rock Rosé of Cabernet Franc. (Napa Valley, CA)

**Sparkling:** Recaredo Cava Rosé (Spain), Iron Horse Ocean Reserve Blancs de Blanc (Sebastopol, CA), Veuve Clicquot (France), Tattinger Brut La Francaise (France), Bollinger Brut Special Cuvee NV (France).

**Dessert/Cake:** Chateau Guiraud Sauternes (France), Jacquart Champagne Demi-sec (France), Dr. Konstantin Frank Late Harvest Riesling (Finger Lakes, NY), La Montina Franciacorta “Demi-sec” Sparkling Rosé DOCG (Italy).