SELL MORE BEEF. SELL MORE WINE.

The marriage of beef and wine used to be as easy as steak and something rich and red. While that idea remains a favorite classic, today’s menus offer a brave new world of possibilities—and today’s beef might mean anything from Thai steak salad to fajitas or Tuscan braised short ribs. As for wine, thousands of brands are now available in the United States. At no other time in history have the possibilities of pairing beef and wine been so thrilling, so delicious, so limitless. So how can you make sense of all the options?

The truth is, there are no rigid rules. Extraordinary flavor affinities do exist, but they are not the predictable result of scientific principles. Rather, great matches are born from instinct, imagination, and a lot of fun experimentation. And when they happen, “wow” moments of beef and wine are like sensory fireworks. From a taste perspective, they’re the equivalent of 1 + 1 = 3.

One thing is certain. Beef and wine share more than just flavor affinities. They’re both about experience. More than most foods and most beverages, beef and wine are sensual and deeply rooted in pleasure and satisfaction. That adds up to a simple, powerful strategy for building check averages: sell more beef, sell more wine. It’s a synergy that can give a boost to two of the highest-ticket items on your menu. And the more you know about pairing, the better it works.

UPSELLING TIPS

• Feature one or two wine recommendations on the menu, adjacent to beef menu items, consider one that’s by the glass and one by the bottle.

• Conduct waitstaff tastings of great beef and wine pairings, the more your staff enjoys a pairing, the more likely they will be to sell it.

• Train staff to get in the habit of suggesting by the glass offerings with beef dishes, and provide plenty of descriptive language for them to bring the pairing to life. “We’ve got a really juicy, soft zinfandel that’s perfect with that, for $X a glass.”

• Offer a taste of a by the glass wine when you bring the beef dish to the table. Tasting the wine with the beef dish is worth a thousand words and will likely lead to a sale.

• Pair two different wines with two different beef cuts and offer as a small plate with wines to match.

• Invite winemakers to participate in special winemaker dinners focused on wine and beef dishes.

• Invest in supplemental education for your beverage manager so that he or she is well informed, can keep up with trends and is able to train staff to be comfortable suggesting beef and wine pairings.

• Offer wine flights of three or four small servings of wine so guests can experience the interplay of several wine flavors with their beef dish.

Karen MacNeil is a writer, educator and winner of two James Beard awards. She is the author of the award-winning book The Wine Bible; the host of the Emmy Award-winning television show Wine, Food, and Friends; and the chairman of the Wine Studies Program at the Culinary Institute of America, Greystone.

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More than 50% of full-service restaurants surveyed say steak has a positive impact on the sale of wine.

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*Funded by the Beef checkoff

ADVICE FROM World-renowned Wine Expert
Karen MacNeil
Author of The Wine Bible

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wines, here are some of the principles I've found:

**PRINCIPLES OF PAIRING**

**BEEF & WINE:**

- **As any good cook knows, coffee and basil do not marry well.**
  - So trust your instincts when it comes to beef and wine. Beef’s density
    and cream have an affinity for each other that coffee and basil do not.
  - Similarly, pot roast feels just right with a juicy, humble wine.
  - An outfit of tannin is a compound that comes from grape skins and seeds. Some grape varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and cabernet franc, have naturally high tannin in this compound. Tannin acts as the wine’s structure, and wines that are high in tannin are usually described as “big.” Tannin tames bitter (like dark chocolate or espresso) and feels dry (like fine-gauge sandpaper).
  - High-tannin wines taste best with dense foods that are rich in both protein
    and marketing (like beef), which offcut this bitterness and dryness.

- **Don’t forget rosés. Rosé wines, often overlooked, are wonderful with a
  certain kind of food.**
  - Beef dishes with bold/outrageously fruity gewürztraminers.

- **Beef dishes with a significant fruit component to them—a moroccan
  tagine made with dried fruit, for example—often pair beautifully
  with fruity red wines like gamay (the grape that makes beaujolais) or
  Australian shiraz.

- **For a wine to be at its best, it must taste neutral.**
  - A good rule of thumb is: the more expensive and rare the wine is,
    the more complex the food should be. A well-marbled piece of beef
    should not be served with a light-bodied wine. Instead, choose a
    high-quality but simple dish, such as a fine steak.

- **A balance salty with sweet.**
  - Salty foods dull the flavor of many wines, making them taste neutral.
  - Some grape varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot, are naturally high in tannin. Tannin tames bitter (like dark chocolate or espresso) and feels dry (like fine-gauge sandpaper).
  - High-tannin wines taste best with dense foods that are rich in both protein
    and marketing (like beef), which offcut this bitterness and dryness.

- **Watch “weight” when pairing.**
  - Beyond the intensity of the flavor, the sheer weight of the beef dish
    and the weight (or “body”) of the wine should be in harmony.
  - A lighthearted wine will feel as weighty as soapstone in a meaty dish.
  - A full-bodied wine will feel like half-and-half. If the beef is heavy
    and substantial, it will work best with a wine that’s rich in body.

- **Fruitiness in food and fruitiness in wine have natural synergy.**
  - Tannin can be beef’s best friend. Tannin is a compound that comes
    from grape skins and seeds. Some grape varieties, such as cabernet
    sauvignon, merlot, and cabernet franc, have naturally high tannin in
    this compound. Tannin acts as the wine’s structure, and wines that
    are high in tannin are usually described as “big.” Tannin tames bitter
    (like dark chocolate or espresso) and feels dry (like fine-gauge sandpaper).
  - High-tannin wines taste best with dense foods that are rich in both protein
    and marketing (like beef), which offcut this bitterness and dryness.
  -** Do the out of beef matter when choosing a wine?**
    - Yes. Certain cuts of beef like flank steak and chuck are often very
      flavorful. They need a wine that’s bold and lip-smacking.
    - The most recently matured wines can also make a difference. For
      example, a youngish wine from Argentina—such as frizzante
      malbec—or the south of France. However, when a fine New York strip or prime rib
      is being served, a more complex, expensive wine (such as a top-flight
      burgundy from the côte d’or or the côte de Beaune) would be best.

- **How do seasonings and spices impact a wine choice?**
  - Seasonings and spices often act as a bridge to wines. As a simple
    example, sprinkling beef with some cracked black pepper helps the dish
    marry well with syrah/shiraz, which has a black pepper–like flavor. Herbs
    and spices (such as cumin, coriander, and cayenne) can counterbalance a food’s
    saltiness, but another brilliant strategy is to juxtapose that saltiness with a touch of sweetness.
  - A good wine choice is an enormous asset with certain beef dishes—especially
    those that bring out the fruit flavors hidden in wines.

- **Which wine varietal overall is most “beef flexible”?**
  - Cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, and cabernet
    franc/shiraz are naturally high in tannin. In this way, cabernet
    “mirrors” beef, creating a whole that’s greater than
    its part, beef has a flavor that’s bold and yet refined at the same time.
  - The taste neutral. A good rule of thumb is: the more expensive and rare
    the wine is, the more complex the food should be. A well-marbled piece of beef
    should not be served with a light-bodied wine, since the wine will taste too flat
    next to all that beef flavor. Instead, use a powerhouse—a wine that’s muscular enough to
    balance the richness.

- **Are white wines an option with beef?**
  - Yes—depending on the dish, many white wines work very well, as do
    rosés. Tannins with beef and salad dishes are far more compatible.
  - As a general rule, select wines with greens and vegetables
    tend to work best with a wine that’s fruity and
    insipid. Save the blue cheese for dessert and serve it with a sweet
    fortified wine such as port.

- **There are a few best wine bets when the beef dish is humble (e.g., pot roast).**
  - One of the best wine bets when the beef dish is humble (e.g., pot
    roast) is a chilled dry rosé. Pot roast feels just right with a chilled dry
    rosé and the freshness and acidity of white wine. This
    combination is an enormous asset with certain beef dishes—especially
    those that bring out the fruit flavors hidden in wines.

- **What if the wine is rare and expensive, what sorts of beef dishes would work best?**
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- **How does pairing work affect wines?**
  - Since fat is a carrier of flavor, matching beef with a wine that’s
    fatty, no-fuss cuts of beef, like ribs, can pair humble, flavorful, no-fuss
    cuts of beef, like ribs, with humble, flavorful, no-fuss wines—juicy, inexpensive reds
    from Argentina, Spain or the south of France.
  - When a wine is treated in this way, it can pair humble, flavorful, no-fuss
    cuts of beef, like ribs, with humble, flavorful, no-fuss wines—juicy, inexpensive reds
    from Argentina, Spain or the south of France.
BEEF & WINE: PRINCIPLES OF PAIRING

After years of pairing different beef dishes and hundreds of different wines, here are some of the principles I’ve found:

• Pair great with great, humble with humble. Aged prime rib is far more satisfying when it’s served with intense flavors and textures. Similarly, pot roast flashes doesn’t just right with a juicy, humble wine.

• Work with natural flavor affinities. As any good cook knows, coffee and wine have an affinity. Use this to your advantage. So too your instincts when it comes to beef and wine. Beef’s density and deep flavors have an affinity with rich, powerful wines. Fragile meat and delicate flavors are more likely to be enjoyed with medium- to light-bodied wines or extremely light-bodied ones may taste out of place.

• Complex wines go with simple preparations. Many of the greatest Bordeaux or California cabernet sauvignons are best enjoyed with a high-quality but simple dish, such as a fine steak.

• Robust seasonings require robust wines. Beef dishes with bold/ pungent flavors tend to be paired with wines that have a considerable character to them. Similarly, wines that are complex and rich in flavor also tend to have a lot of tannins and acidity. A wine with a lot of tannins, which can counterbalance a food’s saltiness, but another brilliant strategy is to use a wine with a lot of acidity. For example, sparkling beef with some cracked black pepper helps the dish pair well with salad and sour cream. It has a black pepper–like flavor. Herbs and garlic play a big role in the seasonings for many of these dishes. A potent herb like oregano can counterbalance a food’s spiciness, but another brilliant strategy is to use a wine that is rich in flavor and texture. A wine with a lot of acidity, such as a dry riesling, can also be a great choice for these dishes.

• Watch “weight” when pairing. Besides the intensity of the flavor, the sheer weight of the wine and the weight of the food have an affinity. A high-quality dish and a high-quality wine. The sum of the parts. Cabernet sauvignon also possesses a considerable amount of tannin, which gives it the structure and intensity to pair well with beef.

• Tannin can be beef’s best friend. Tannin is a compound that comes from grape skins and seeds. Some grape varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and pinot noir, are naturally high in tannin. Tannin acts as the wine’s structure, and wines that are high in tannin are usually described as “big” Tannin tannins buffer the (dark chocolate or espresso) and feels dry (like fine-gauge sandpaper). High-tannin wines taste best with dense foods that are rich in both protein and marbling (like beef), which offers this bitterness and dryness.

• Don’t forget rosés. Rosé wines, often overlooked, are wonderful with a wide range of foods. For example, rosé wines pair well with desserts. Rosé wines have a lighter, fresher taste than red wines, so they’re a great choice for pairing with desserts. Similarly, rosés have the earthy, bold red-fruit characteristics of red wines and the freshness and acidity of white wines. This wine is often an answer to a food pairing like seafood, fish, or poultry.

• Many of the greatest wines or extremely light-bodied ones may taste out of place.

• Balance salty with sweet. Salty foods diffuse the full flavor of wine, making them taste neutral. This is an important consideration for pairing beef dishes seasoned with a significant amount of soy sauce. Acidic wines can counterbalance a food’s saltiness, but another brilliant strategy is to use a wine that is rich in flavor and texture. A wine with a lot of acidity, such as a dry riesling, can also be a great choice for these dishes.

• Instead, opt for a powerhouse—a wine that’s muscular enough to balance the sum of the parts. Cabernet sauvignon also possesses a considerable amount of tannin, which gives it the structure and intensity to pair well with beef.

• Tannin in beef and wine is a classic match. What makes them taste so good together? Beef and wine have an undeniable affinity for one another. The profound, meaty, complex, rich flavor of beef is complemented by a beverage that’s equally complex, savory and rich. Nothing fits the bill better than wine. There is also the all-important issue of texture. Mouthfilling concentrated flavors of beef and wine.

4. How do seasonings and spices impact a wine choice?

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6. Are white wines an option with beef?

Yes—depending on the dish, many white wines work very well, as do rosés. Thai beef salads and beef steaks are perfect with mineral-rich wines. Serve Thai beef salads with greens and vegetables or terrine with sauvignon blanc, which has a “green” flair of their own. And with garlicky beef dishes, a dry rosé is a must-try experience.

7. How does marbling affect wine?

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• Train staff to get in the habit of suggesting by the glass offerings with beef dishes, and provide plenty of descriptive language for them to bring the pairing to life. “We’ve got a really juicy, soft zinfandel that’s perfect with that, for $X a glass.”

• Offer a taste of a by the glass wine when you bring the beef dish to the table. Tasting the wine with the beef dish is worth a thousand words and will likely lead to a sale.

• Offer wine flights of three or four small servings of wine so guests can experience the interplay of several wine flavors with their beef dish.

• Pair two different wines with two different beef cuts and offer as a small plate with wines to match.

• Invite winemakers to participate in special winemaker dinners focused on wine and beef dishes.

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