

## ENJOY DINING AND ENTERTAINING

# 6 tips for ordering wine like a pro

Good news: Connoisseurs aren't the only ones who can order a good wine with dinner  
By **Devorah Lev-Tov** Posted: 02/12/18 Updated: 02/27/18

Going out to dinner with friends, family, or a significant other is all fun and games until someone whips out the wine list and recommends ordering a bottle.

There's more to choosing a wine than deciding between red or white (or rosé, or orange, or pét-nat...). You have to narrow down a grape type, wine region, and price point, which is a big undertaking—even for the most seasoned oenophiles.

But whether you're ordering a glass for yourself or a bottle for the table, there are several fail-safe rules for conquering a restaurant's wine list. Prepare to impress your dining companions—and even yourself—with the six insider tips below. Cheers!

### 1. What grows together goes together

What kind of restaurant are you in—Italian, French, new American? Well, the type of cuisine you're eating will help guide your decision.

"The tried and tested rule, 'What grows together goes together,' rarely fails," says Victoria James, beverage director at Cote, a Korean steakhouse in New York City.

Kristina Sazama, wine educator for Santa Margherita wines, agrees. "Our Chianti Classico Riserva is from the heart of Tuscany where big steaks are part of the local cuisine. And no surprise: Chianti is an amazing match for steak!"

### 2. Ask the sommelier

After all, that's what they're there for.

"The most helpful thing a guest can tell me is, 'I like X, what's similar and goes well with the food here?'" says James.

Sam Borzi, beverage director for BLT Prime by David Burke in Washington, D.C., adds, "To find hidden gems, ask the waiter or sommelier about their favorite wines, new additions to the menu, and any unlisted bottles lurking in the cellar."

If there isn't a sommelier to ask, James suggests identifying the most popular regions on the menu. "They're usually the areas the director feels strongly about, perhaps because it goes best with the food or offers a great value," she explains.

### **3. Consider the climate**

"Knowing where the wine is from will tell you more about what to expect than memorizing hundreds of grapes," says Sazama.

Cooler climates tend to produce fresh, crispy wines, while warmer spots make for bolder, rounder expressions. For example, pinot grigio is from a relatively cool area in northern Italy, so you'll be sipping on some crisp, refreshing vino.

You can also think about the climate you're currently in. Is it cold and rainy? Warm and sunny? "Sparkling wine is perfect for drinking or dining al fresco," she adds.

### **4. Go for a twist on the classics**

Certain foods are known to pair well with certain wines, but that doesn't mean you have to stick to the expected. Not only can trying new variations broaden your wine repertoire, it can give you a taste of international destinations.

Instead of pairing steak with the classic cabernet, James suggests trying a variation of the usual suspect, like syrah or malbec. Craving some white wine? James recommends trading in white burgundy for another variation of chardonnay, like blanc de blancs Champagne.

"Instead of pairing rosé with fish, try a light red like rossese or pinot noir," she says.

### **5. Make the most of your budget**

Don't be fooled by the prices on the wine menu: Expensive wine doesn't always mean good wine. In fact, there are many blends that your palate and wallet will love.

"Look to Italy, Spain, and southern France for budget-friendly alternatives," Borzi explains. And when looking for bubbly, Sazama advises, "Prosecco is the ultimate luxury on a budget." On average, Sazama adds, prosecco costs less than half the price of an entry-level Champagne.



## 6. Taste a bottle for spoilage, not to see if you like it

According to Sazama, the purpose of presenting the bottle to you before opening is to confirm that it is indeed the bottle and vintage you ordered—*not* to show off the fancy label—so read carefully. When you order a bottle of wine, you effectively bought it, which is why it's so important to order well.

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