

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



December 2011 – All Port Dinner

The holiday season is the time to splurge. We buy expensive gifts, eat decadent food and drink special wines. This dinner features port-style wines paired with rich foods like roast duck and Chocolate Lava Pudding Cups. It will make any occasion special.

Port-style wines are named for their birthplace, Portugal. The style was created when Portuguese producers needed to prevent the spoilage of their wine on the long journey by ship from Portugal to England. The solution was to add alcohol to the wine before just before the sugar had all fermented out. Now, port-style wines are made all over the world and California creates some of the most delicious.

St. Barthelemy Cellars, located in the Vaca Mountains, produce only port-style wines, and they make it out of almost every red grape grown in California. I had never tasted pinot noir or barbera grapes made into port wine until I had St. Barthelemy wines. It is truly a winery to seek out and visit.

The best port wine to pair with a starter salad is barbera port because barbera is a high acid grape. As a port, it is the perfect balance of sweet and sour. But if you can't find a barbera port, try a traditional Portuguese Ruby port. Use arugula as the base of your salad and add morello cherries, a tangy blue cheese and dress the salad with the Sweet Walnut Dressing listed here. The wine's acid will stand up to the vinegar in the dressing, and the bitterness of the walnuts and arugula will be balanced by the sugar in the wine.

The tannins and alcohol in port are tamed by the fat and salt found in Roast Duck with Port-Cherry Sauce. Port-style wines made with syrah, cabernet or merlot are all good pairing partners. The cherry-

port reduction will complement the sweetness and echo the fruit found in a port-style wine. The full recipe for this dish can be found on my website (www.LaSommeliere.com).

Rarely do I recommend chocolate desserts and wine, but port-style wines are the exception and zinfandel port is exceptional with dark chocolate. I find these gooey pudding cups have just the right texture and flavor.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Sweet Walnut Dressing

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp. peanut oil
¼ cup walnuts, chopped fine
⅓ cup honey
¼ cup maple syrup
½ cup Italian dressing

DIRECTIONS

On a low flame, sauté walnuts in oil until slightly brown. Add honey and maple syrup to pan. Simmer 5-7 minutes. Remove from flame. Add Italian dressing and mix well.

Yield: About 1 cup

Chocolate Lava Pudding Cups

INGREDIENTS

4½ ounces best-quality bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
8 tbsp. unsalted butter
3 large eggs
¾ cup sugar

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¼ cup all-purpose flour

DIRECTIONS

Melt the chocolate and butter in a double boiler above simmering water. Whisk every now and again until melted. In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, sugar, and flour until just blended. Gradually whisk in the melted chocolate into the mixture. Set aside.

Grease 4 (1-cup) ramekins with butter and add flour to cover the butter, tapping the ramekins to get rid of excess. Preheat the oven to 400°F about half an hour before you want to eat the puddings. Plan to cook just before serving.

Pour the mixture into the ramekins and put them on a baking sheet in the oven for 10 to 12 minutes. They will be done when the tops are firm, cracking slightly and the edges are set. Serve immediately.

Yield: 4 (1cup) servings

(on website)

Roast Duck with Port-Cherry Sauce

INGREDIENTS

Duck:

2 (5 to 5 1/2 pounds each) ducks, innards and wing tips removed

6 quarts chicken broth

Kosher salt

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Sauce:

12 dark sweet cherries, thawed, halved

1 cup chicken stock

1 cup beef stock

½ cup Port

1 fresh thyme sprig

DIRECTIONS

Allow ducks to come to room temperature for 20 minutes. With a fork, prick the skin without piercing the meat. This will allow the fat to drain off while the ducks cook.

Meanwhile, in a very large stock pot which can hold the 2 ducks, heat the chicken broth with 1 tablespoon of kosher salt until it boils. Add the ducks very carefully and bring the stock back to a boil. If there isn't enough stock to cover the ducks, add the hottest tap water to cover. If the ducks float to the top, place a plate on top to keep them immersed. When the stock comes back to a boil, lower the heat and simmer the ducks in the stock for 45 minutes.

When the ducks are finished simmering, skim off enough duck fat from the top of the stock to pour a film on the bottom of a 14 by 18 by 3-inch roasting pan. This will keep the ducks from sticking when they roast.

Carefully take the ducks out of the stock, holding them over the pot to drain. Place them in the roasting pan, pat the skin dry with paper towels, and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon of salt and the pepper. If you have time, allow the ducks to sit at room temperature for 30 minutes to allow the skin to dry.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 500 degrees F. (Be sure your oven is very clean or it will smoke!) Roast the ducks for 30 minutes.

While the duck is cooking, make the sauce. Bring cherries, chicken stock, beef stock, Port and thyme sprig to boil in heavy

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medium saucepan over high heat. Simmer until mixture is reduced to 1/2 cup, about 15 minutes. Add cornstarch mixture to Port-cherry sauce. Bring to simmer, whisking constantly. Add butter 1 piece at a time, whisking until butter is melted before adding next piece. Season sauce to taste with salt and pepper.

Remove duck from the oven and allow them to rest, covered with aluminum foil, for 20 minutes. Serve warm with sauce.

Yield: 4 servings