

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



February 2018 – Early Spring

This month's Pair Up is a throwback to my one of my favorite spring meals. Even though it is not officially spring, today is such a beautiful day, I wanted to share this spring meal with you all. Salad, pasta and dessert is a great, simple way to make any meal a celebration. Prepare this meal of spring lamb with fresh ricotta cheese and a hint of mint, and you will agree that spring is on its way.

Spring is a good time to try a new white wine. Look for the Insolia or Inzolia grape made into its eponymous wine from Sicily. The Insolia grape is classically used to make Marsala from Sicily (along with Grillo and Catarratto), but it is also made into a delicate, drier wine. Insolia wine is both floral and tropical with red pear and white grapefruit notes (combine phrases) and, like most Italian whites, it has zesty acidity that will stand up to a salad like the Misticanza Salad dressed with white balsamic vinaigrette. Can't find Insolia? A Sauvignon Blanc will substitute. Add a slice of crusty bread with a spread of cheese and chives, and you have another bridge to pairing greatness.

For the pasta, simmer-up a pot of hearty Lamb Ragu. I love this recipe with its topping of fresh ricotta and mint. Less expected than basil and parmesan, this garnish screams, "It's spring!" Pair the ragu with an Italian Barolo made from the Nebbiolo grape. So very earthy and bright, Italian reds also have slightly higher acidity than Californian. And, they also have a rich gaminess that is perfect with lamb. However, if your cellar is low on Italian reds, try a Pinot Noir; it will fit the acid, earth profile.

Finish your meal with Tiramisu, a classic Italian dessert that is light and decadent at the same time. I prefer serving it with bitter black coffee to provide contrast to the sweetness of Tiramisu. Plus, the heat from the coffee will cleanse any lingering fat from the cream. Consider choosing a Kona Coffee. Island coffees are more typically spicy, with nutty/chocolaty undertones that will sing with the delicate chocolate notes in this dish.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Misticanza Salad with White Balsamic Vinaigrette

INGREDIENTS

For the salad:

- ½ cup sunflower seeds, shelled, raw, unsalted
- 8-10 cups blend of bibb, arugula, and radicchio lettuces
- 1 cup thinly sliced seedless cucumbers
- ½ cup radishes, sliced
- 1 cup halved grape tomatoes
- ½ cup shaved fennel bulb

For the vinaigrette:

- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup white balsamic vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

For the crostini:

- 4 ounces robiola cheese
- 4 tablespoons minced chives
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

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(8) ½-inch-thick slices crusty bread, toasted

DIRECTIONS

Toast sunflower seeds in a dry pan for about 3 minutes. Toss lettuce, arugula and radicchio in a large bowl with cucumber, radish, tomato and fennel. Whisk together all ingredients for the vinaigrette until emulsified.

Mix together robiola, chives and olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Spread the robiola mixture onto the slices of toasted bread to make the crostini.

Lightly dress the salad with the vinaigrette and toss to coat. Sprinkle with the sunflower seeds on top and serve with crostini.

Yield: 8 servings

Lamb Ragu with Pappardelle

INGREDIENTS

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 carrot, finely diced
1 onion, finely diced
1 celery rib, finely diced
1½ pounds ground lamb
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon ground fennel seeds
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon chopped rosemary
1 teaspoon chopped thyme
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 tablespoon tomato paste
½ cup dry red wine
One 28-ounce can diced tomatoes
1¼ cups chicken stock or low-sodium broth
¾ pound pappardelle
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
¾ cup fresh ricotta cheese
2 tablespoons chopped mint

DIRECTIONS

In a large cast-iron casserole, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil. Add the carrot, onion and celery and cook over high heat, stirring occasionally, until slightly softened, 5 minutes. Add the lamb, coriander, fennel, cumin, rosemary and thyme; season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, until the liquid evaporates, 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste. Add the wine and cook until evaporated, 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes and their juices, along with the stock and bring to a boil. Cover partially and cook over moderately low heat until the liquid is slightly reduced, 25 to 30 minutes.

In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook the pasta until al dente. Drain, shaking well. Add the pasta to the sauce. Add the butter and the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil and toss over low heat. Serve the pasta in bowls, topped with the ricotta and mint.

Yield: 6 servings

Tiramisu

INGREDIENTS

6 egg yolks
3 tablespoons sugar
1-pound mascarpone cheese
1½ cups strong espresso, cooled
2 teaspoons dark rum
24 packaged ladyfingers
½ cup bittersweet chocolate shavings, for garnish

DIRECTIONS

Beat egg yolks and sugar in a electric mixer until thick and pale, about 5 minutes. Add

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mascarpone cheese and beat until smooth. Add 1 tablespoon of espresso and mix until thoroughly combined.

In a small shallow dish, add remaining espresso and rum. Dip each ladyfinger into espresso for only 5 seconds. Letting the ladyfingers soak too long will cause them to fall apart. Place the soaked ladyfinger on the bottom of a 13 by 9 inch baking dish, breaking them in half if necessary in order to fit the bottom.

Spread evenly 1/2 of the mascarpone mixture over the ladyfingers. Arrange another layer of soaked ladyfingers and top with remaining mascarpone mixture.

Cover tiramisu with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, up to 8 hours.

Before serving, sprinkle with chocolate shavings.

Yield: 6 servings