

# PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



## *December 2009 – Holiday Appetizer Party*

I have been to parties where the appetizers are so delicious - I am full by the time dinner comes around. This is why I like the idea of a party based solely on appetizers. An appetizer party is less complicated and keeps the guests in motion. The best part... with so many food choices, you have an array of wine possibilities. I like to go with three whites and three reds to keep the selection balanced.

My favorite inexpensive starter pairing is sparkling wine and potato chips. The bubbles are the perfect foil to the salty, crispy chips. Add a creamy dip made with mascarpone cheese in place of sour cream, and you've taken it to the next level. For a bright addition to the menu, Greek dolmas are available at many major markets (Costco) or as take-out (Daphnes). Their tangy acidity demands a white wine with verve. To match regionally, seek out an Assyrtiko, a smoky and lemony wine that comes from the Greek island of Santorini. If you can't find a Greek white, pick up a zippy Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. A rich Viognier will round out the white wine selections. Paired with Crostini topped with creamy brie and Major Grey's Chutney (Safeway), the tropical, spicy, and floral elements will match up beautifully.

As the evening progresses, I like to bring out the dry red wines with some warmer fare. Start with mushrooms and sausage when Pinot Noir is one of your selections. The earthiness of the mushrooms makes a great complement to the earth notes in the wine and the Stuffed Mushroom recipe listed here is one you can make up ahead and pop in the oven just before you need them. Next, contrast the light body and tannins of the Pinot with the heft and weight of a deep Syrah. It will work with the

mushrooms or you can bring out the bright fruit of the wine by pairing it with some Balsamic Caramelized Onions atop good quality hotdogs or sausages stuffed into soft rolls. Cut each dog in half for the right size portion.

Although the party may not have a specific ending, offer up some sweet Port with a pungent Stilton blue cheese and Sugared Walnuts. It is certain to be a welcome pairing as the evening draws to a close.

So, go on. Pair Up!

*Maria Terry is a Certified Sommelier and Wine Educator in the San Francisco Bay Area. [www.LaSommeliere.com](http://www.LaSommeliere.com)*

## **Mascarpone Dip**

Mix together equal parts mascarpone and sour cream and season with your favorite powdered dip mix like Hidden Valley Ranch.

## **Crostini**

Slice a baguette in 1/4" rounds. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle liberally with kosher salt. Bake at 275° for 15 minutes.

## **Stuffed Mushrooms**

### **INGREDIENTS**

- 3 Italian hot sausages, w/o casings
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 large egg yolk
- Olive oil

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24 large (about 2-inch-diameter)  
mushrooms, stemmed  
1/3 cup dry white wine

brown. Remove with a slotted spoon onto newspaper and sprinkle with sugar to coat.

### **DIRECTIONS**

Sauté sausage and oregano in heavy large skillet over medium-high heat until sausage is cooked through and brown, breaking into small pieces with back of fork, about 7 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer sausage mixture to large bowl and cool. Mix in 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, Worcestershire sauce, and garlic powder, then cream cheese. Season filling with salt and pepper; mix in egg yolk.

Brush 15x10x2-inch glass baking dish with olive oil to coat. Brush cavity of each mushroom cap with white wine; fill with scant 1 tablespoon filling and sprinkle with some of remaining 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese. Arrange mushrooms, filling side up, in prepared dish. (Can be made 1 day ahead. Cover and chill.)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake uncovered until mushrooms are tender and filling is brown on top, about 25 minutes.

Yield: 2 dozen

### **Balsamic Caramelized Onions**

Slice onions into thin half moons and sauté in butter over medium-low heat for about 15 minutes until soft and golden brown. Add just enough balsamic vinegar to coat the onions and cook until vinegar begins to thicken. Season with salt.

### **Sugared Walnuts**

Fry nuts in about ¼" of canola oil for about 5 minutes or until just starting to