

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



March 2019 – The Ides of March

What would Julius Caesar have ordered as his last meal had he believed the seer who told him he was about to be assassinated? Perhaps he would have ordered this delicious meal that starts with little Italian toasts, features both red and white Italian wines, and culminates in a decadent Italian cream cake.

To start, it would have been worth Caesar's effort to seek out a Greco di Tufo from the wine region south of Rome called Campagna. This crisp white wine is pale lemon in color and has aromas of hazelnuts, butterscotch, and mandarin orange liquor. It pairs perfectly with crostini topped with creamy brie cheese, sweet/tart apple, and crunchy hazelnuts. The nutty flavor of the wine echoes the toasted nuts, and its full body matches the weight of the cheese.

A little closer to home, Rosso di Montalcino would have been a local Tuscan wine for Caesar. It is made from the classic Italian Sangiovese grape, specifically, the Brunello clone. This wine comes in two versions, the Rosso and the eponymous Brunello. The Rosso is lighter in style than the more expensive Brunello because it is aged only one year and comes from younger vineyards. As a bonus, the Rosso's lighter style is welcome paired with pasta dishes. If Caesar was a seafood fan, he could have chosen Linguini with Shrimp, Tomato, Asparagus, with Saffron Cream to enjoy with his glass of Rosso. Its dark earthy flavors complement the saffron, while its bright acidity stands up to the tart tomato and cleanses the fatty cream from the palate.

Had Caesar loved coconut as much as I do, he would have delighted in this Italian Cream Cake, which has coconut in the cake as well as in the cream cheese frosting. It is way too sweet for wine, but paired with a

dark, bitter espresso, its sweet, tangy flavors may have been just the incentive to keep him home and skip the trip to the senate altogether.

So, go on. Pair Up!

Maria Terry is a Certified Sommelier and Wine Educator in the San Francisco Bay Area. www.LaSommeliere.com

Crostini with Brie, Apple, and Hazelnut

INGREDIENTS

1 French baguette, thinly sliced
Olive oil
Kosher salt
6 oz. Brie cheese, thinly sliced
½ cup freshly grated granny smith or other tart apple
½ cup hazelnuts, toasted and roughly chopped
½ teaspoon cinnamon
Salt & pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Slice bread on the bias, about 24 slices, place on baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with salt. Toast bread for about five minutes.

Mix apples, hazelnuts, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Set aside.

Top each bread slice with cheese and return to oven until the cheese is warm.

Top each bread slice with a tablespoon of apple-hazelnut mixture. Serve warm.

Yield: 6 servings, three each

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Linguini with Shrimp, Tomato, Asparagus, with Saffron Cream

INGREDIENTS

½ lb. linguine
4 oz asparagus
1-2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 lb. shrimp, peeled and deveined
2-3 Campari tomatoes, quartered
1-2 cloves of garlic, minced
½ cup white wine
¼ cup chicken stock, warmed
Pinch of saffron threads, crushed
½ cup heavy cream
2 Tablespoons butter
Salt and pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Boil water for pasta and cook according to package directions. Add asparagus during the last 3-5 minutes or so of cooking. Drain and set aside.

While water is boiling for pasta, heat oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add shrimp, tomatoes, and garlic. Season with salt and pepper and sauté until shrimp turn pink and are cooked through. Set aside.

Add the saffron to the warmed chicken stock, allowing the flavor and color to bloom. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan over medium heat, simmer the wine and reduce by half. Add the cream and chicken stock, season with salt and pepper to taste, and bring to a simmer. Whisk in butter.

Toss pasta, asparagus, and shrimp with sauce and serve.

Yield: 4 servings

Italian Cream Cake

INGREDIENTS

1 cup buttermilk
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ cup butter
½ cup shortening
2 cups white sugar
5 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup flaked coconut
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 cups all-purpose flour

Frosting

8 ounces cream cheese
½ cup butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
4 cups confectioner's sugar
2 Tablespoons light cream
½ cup chopped walnuts
1 cup sweetened flaked coconut

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease three 9" round cake pans. In a small bowl, dissolve the baking soda in the buttermilk; set aside. In a large bowl, cream together ½ cup butter, shortening, and white sugar until light and fluffy. Mix in the eggs, buttermilk mixture, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1 cup coconut, baking powder, and flour. Stir until just combined. Pour batter into the prepared pans.

Bake in the preheated oven for 30 to 35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean. Allow cooling.

Frosting: In a medium bowl, combine cream cheese, ½ cup butter, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and confectioner's sugar. Beat until light and fluffy. Mix in a small amount of cream to

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attain desired consistency. Stir in chopped nuts and remaining flaked coconut. Spread between layers and on top and sides of cooled cake.

Yield: 12 servings