

## Pairing Cheese and Wine

There are no “rules” in pairing cheese and wines, and much depends on personal likes and dislikes. Like having a good cheesemonger, having a good wineseller is equally important and should be someone whose opinions you trust and whose knowledge of wines is good. In many cases, you will discuss many characteristics found in both wine and cheese. Good cheese and wine pairings take some thought, and it’s important to consider both the wine and the cheese’s texture and flavor profiles before making final selections. Remember, the goal is to create harmony and balance between the wine and the cheese and not overpower one with the other. Excellent resources for American cheese and cheese/wine pairing practices are *The New American Cheese* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2000) and *The All American Cheese and Wine Book* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2003), both by Laura Werlin.

1. Keep pairings simple: pick one distinct wine and one distinct cheese that pair well. For example, full-flavored cheeses, such as creamy washed rind cheeses require medium to full-bodied wines, such as Merlot, Zinfandel, or Syrahs. Likewise, pair light cheeses with light wines, such as Rieslings, Pinot Gris, or Pinot Noirs.
2. Pair wine and cheese according to the area of origin or even on the local region. Just as the growing conditions impart particular characteristics (called “terroir”) to a region’s wines, these same characteristics may be imparted to the cheeses through the vegetation on which the animals graze.
3. Do not limit yourself only to still table wines, but branch out and try sparkling wines, late harvest and sweet wines, as well as fortified wines such as sherries and ports. In particular, blue cheeses pair extremely well with dessert wines such as late harvest Viogniers and Rieslings and Muscat wines. Also, creamy cheeses pair well with with sparkling wines and Champagne, as the bubbles help to cleanse the palate and refresh it for another bite.
4. Explore the varieties of cheeses based on their sources of milk. For example, fresh goat cheeses are mild, lemony, and somewhat acidic in their flavor profiles and creamy in texture. They pair well with crisp white wines, such as a Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Gris, and especially Rieslings. Aged sheep’s milk cheeses pair well with Gewurtztraminers and fruity Zinfandels. Aged cow’s milk cheddars go well with sherries.
5. Remember that wines aren’t the only beverages that go well with cheese! There is an ever-growing number of artisanal and craft beers, as well as craft ciders available that create interesting and fresh flavor combinations, which can also inspire you to experiment and broaden your culinary knowledge.