

The Grapevine



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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

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Wines for Easter

Easter is Sunday the 15th and many of us will be sitting down at the dinner table with family and friends to celebrate this holiday and the eventual arrival of Spring.

Ham has been a traditional entrée for Easter for much of our recorded history. Because ham is dried, smoked and cured, it was meat that could store well over the winter and provide a tasty celebratory meal at the beginning of spring.

Because ham has a salty flavor, it is best to choose a wine with little or no tannin. My favorite pairing for ham is Riesling. Much as pineapple and Canadian bacon go well together on a pizza, the green apple fruitiness of Riesling sets off the salty flavor and meaty texture of ham. Along that same line, Colombard from Gascony in France perform the same way with tangy fruit flavors that make the mouth water for another bite. This month's Wine Club white, the **La Taste White** would be a good match for ham. Tiffany has also put out a great display of Easter friendly wines including some of the new vintage Rose's that will make a great match both visually and taste wise for Easter.

If you want a red wine with ham, I would suggest a Pinot Noir. We have some great bargains with the **Prophecy Pinot (\$11.95)**, **Block Nine Pinot Noir (\$12.50)** and the **Austerity Pinot (\$14)**. All of them have good red fruit and a tangy feel that really sets off the flavors of both the ham and the wine.

Another traditional Easter entrée is lamb. I think even before the Christian era, lamb was a sign of spring. This year many a Passover table and Easter dinner will feature lamb. Our plan at Chez Badenoch is to slow cook a leg of lamb on the grill. I have a family recipe that involves a marinade of red wine, olive oil, garlic and rosemary that always seems to work well.

A few sprigs of rosemary on the coals add a pine nuance to the meat as it cooks. MMM-mmmMM!

Because lamb has a fair amount of fat in it, I think Syrah and Bordeaux style blends have the right amount of tannin to cut through and refresh the palate. **The Rt. Revered V Syrah** from this month's Wine Club, the **Foundry Red (\$19.95)** from Walla Walla and the **Lafage Narassa (\$16.95, 93 points Wine Advocate)** are all great matches for lamb.

Easter brunch is also an option for many folks. With so many dishes, it is sometimes difficult to pick the wine that goes with everything. My suggestion is sparkling wine. If you choose Spanish Cava or Italian Prosecco, you will have the option of mixing it with orange juice for Mimosas or just enjoying a flute with brunch. California sparklers go well with egg dishes and as always, I recommend the **Roederer Estate Anderson Valley (\$24.95)** for its toasty nose, bracing bubbles and clean finish. We also have the **Scharffenberger Brut** on sale for **\$18.95**.

What makes wine Kosher?

April is the month where two religious holidays are celebrated. Christians and egg lovers celebrate Easter while Jews observe Passover. For Jews, Passover commemorates the miracle where the angel of death spared Hebrew slave households right before they left their bondage in Egypt. The Passover meal of bitter herbs, lamb, unleavened bread and wine teaches young people about the bitterness of slavery, the sacrifice and the hurried departure to freedom from Pharaoh's army. Wines for Passover must be approved for ceremonial use and bear the "K" in the circle that signifies them as Kosher. The label also bears a "P" denoting wine acceptable for the Passover celebration.

Kosher wines must be made under the supervision of a rabbi and only handled during vinification by Sabbath-observing Jews.

There are two types of kosher wine. The first is *mevushal* wine which is boiled or flash pasteurized before fermentation. *Mevushal* wine is considered morally pure. Thus, observant Jews can share these wines in a social situation with non-observant Jews and non-Jews. Non-*mevushal* wines can only be handled and consumed by Sabbath observing Jews. If they are touched, even accidentally, by non-observant Jews or non-Jews, they are no longer considered kosher.

Since Passover is this month, many Jews around the world will be drinking wine along with the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs and lamb as part of the Seder or Passover meal. Many will be drinking wine labeled "Kosher for Passover" to keep the strict dietary law. Although we have a limited selection in Montana, there are good kosher wines available at the Wine Gallery for Passover observance.

Fake News about Wine

Politicians have a penchant for presenting "alternative facts" but often the folks that repeat "fake news" are only repeating what they hear. Every week someone comes into the store and repeats a wine myth that just isn't true. Here are a few of the most common ones I encounter:

Alcohol kills brain cells. This one has been repeated so often, it goes under our collective wisdom category. The truth is that neither wine nor alcohol kills brain cells. That isn't to say that brain chemistry isn't altered by alcohol or that the dendrites that pass chemical messages along aren't discombobulated temporarily. Almost all effects of alcohol on the brain are reversible and no brain cells are killed. In fact, wine drinkers are less prone to Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia than are non-drinkers. Further, elderly people who have a glass of wine or so per day do better on cognitive tests than non-drinkers.

Sulfites are bad. There are a bunch of sub-myths that come out every week along with the "sulfites are bad" myth.

The first one is that sulfites cause **red wine headache**. The .4% of our population that has sensitivity to sulfites suffer respiratory distress not a headache. If you think you have sensitivity to sulfites, eat a handful of raisins or a dried apricot. Both will deliver a dose of sulfites ten times what you'd get in a glass of wine. If you have the sulfite sensitivity, you will have a rash, trouble breathing and maybe diarrhea. Many foods contain sulfites and I can guarantee you won't get tea headaches, shrimp headaches, cheese headaches, or yogurt headaches, and all of those foods have more sulfites than wine. If you get a headache from red wine but not white wine, you do not have sulfite sensitivity; white wines generally have more sulfites than reds.

Another myth I hear is that Europeans don't add sulfites to wine. The fact is that they have been adding sulfites to wine since Roman times. Sulfites are powerful antioxidant and antimicrobial materials. If the Europeans didn't use sulfites in their 400 year old wineries, they would be owners of 400 year old vinegar factories. The French and Italians in particular would not be able to produce shelf stable wines that last over 2-3 years much less the 15-30 years for the best Bordeaux and Barolos. European wines contain an average of 80 parts per million of sulfites. That is exactly the same as the average American wine. In fact in the US, organically made wines have no added sulfites; in Europe, it can still be labeled "organic" and have added sulfites. That goes in the "good to know" category for me. To sum it up: think of it this way: Wine is 99.992% sulfite free.

All that said; **red wine headache is not a myth**. Several compounds have been implicated in causing this nefarious reaction. Tannins are found in grape skins and therefore tannins are found in red wines. One of the functions of tannin is to cross link proteins and there is some speculation that this happens in the brain and may cause some pain. Red wine also contains glycerin (glycerol) which can cause stuffy nose, a flushed face and a headache within minutes of ingestion. Histamines and histamines can also cause similar reactions. If you ever find the exact cause for red wine headache, you will be nominated for the Nobel Prize. We just already know it isn't sulfites.

The more expensive a wine is, the better it is. Ok, there may be a little truth to that correlation but it isn't a hard and fast rule. In my opinion, there is a stronger correlation between a low price and a low quality wine. If you buy the lowest priced, most inferior grapes, it is just about impossible to make good wine.

I think the brands that have proven themselves over the years as good producers will make the best wines regardless of price. There are good wines at every price point and there are some pretty wretched ones all up and down the scale. On the other hand, having the best land for vineyards and the best growing conditions hasn't made any winery immune to making a

stinker every once in a while. Work on finding the good ones. Laurel or I can help you find the best wines for your palate and your pocketbook.

Blended wines are inferior to 100% varietals. Again the rule is flawed. There are plenty of examples of single varietal wines notably Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. However, wine labeling laws in the U.S. generally require only 75% of the wine in the bottle be made from the grape on the label. It is not uncommon to find wines from Washington State that are labeled “Cabernet Sauvignon” that contain 80% Cabernet and the balance a blend of Merlot, Cab Franc and/or Malbec. Read the label or ask Laurel if you have questions.

The reason many wines are blended is because the flavors and characteristics of blending grapes balance and enhance the flavors of the other grapes in the blend. Cabernet and Malbec both have a great attack. However, Cabernet has a weaker middle palate and a strong finish. Malbec also has the strong attack but keeps up a strong mid-palate and finishes short. Blended together, these grapes have a wonderful richness from start to finish.

Another way to think about the blending process is a musical analogy. A violin sounds very good by itself and the violin section often carries the melody in a symphony orchestra. However, the addition of the other strings, the woodwinds, brass and percussion make the overall orchestral experience much richer than a solo violin or the violin section just playing the melody. Wines can be mixed into a harmonious and balanced blend that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Wine has gluten in it. This one is an urban myth that started with someone conjecturing that wheat based glue used in barrel making could contaminate wine. First of all, no one has yet found a barrel that has a wheat based glue and even if they had, the nano-parts of gluten in the wine would be less than what you’d encounter passing a bakery. I am not aware of gluten being involved in any part or as any ingredient in the wine making process.

Wine only gets better with age. Women may get better with age but the same isn’t always true of wine. About 95% of the wines sold today are ready to drink today and will only marginally improve in the next few years. Reds in particular have a life of about 10-12 years after which they lose their fruit flavors and balance. After 20 years they are mostly a brownish blend of alcohol and acid with no other flavors to offer. The exceptions are the top Bordeaux wines and Italian Barolos. Both of these wines are rich and tannic in their youth and age well due to the anti-oxidant properties of the tannins, the acids in the wine and the antiseptic qualities of alcohol.

Check our website

Go to bozemanwinegallery.com to keep up on current events, this week’s specials on gourmet foods as well as the best wines available.