

## PIZZA PAIRINGS

The recently announced Pizza Party on March 18 reminded me that it has been a few months since my last wine column and inspired me to discuss some lesser known wines that would be perfect with various pizzas. The word "pizza" (Italian: [ˈpittsa]) first appeared in a Latin text from the town of Gaeta, north of Naples, in 997 AD; the text states that a tenant of certain property is to give the bishop of Gaeta "duodecim pizze (twelve pizzas) every Christmas Day, and another twelve every Easter Sunday." The area around Naples is to this day considered by many to have the best pizza in Italy.

Some people think "pizza" and immediately reach for the Chianti. If you are in that group, you are missing out on some truly delightful wine experiences. Here are some terrific examples that may not come immediately to mind. As with any wine pairing, consider the complete dish you are having. Believe it or not, there are pizzas besides pepperoni or cheese. I've had pizza with smoked salmon and cream cheese or figs, so your wine choices can vary widely. But as always, remember my mantra – ***IF YOU LIKE IT, DRINK IT.***

Let's start with the simplest version – ***Pizza Margherita***, consisting of cheese (usually buffalo mozzarella), San Marzano tomatoes, and some simple herbs (usually basil). Its basic ingredients call out for a light, slightly fruity wine. For a red, a Montepulciano d'Abruzzo would be delightful. There are several in the \$10-\$20 range available from Italian wineries such as Barba. There are also some softer reds from the island of Sardegna (Sardinia) – look for the name Dolia for delicious wines in the \$10-\$15 range. Rosés from the southern portion of Tuscany, especially towns like Bolgheri and Maremma, about 10 miles WSW of Florence, would also be a perfect accompaniment. These can range from around \$15 to as high as \$60.

Other traditional pizzas include those with meats like ***pepperoni or sausage with red sauce***. Now is the time to reach for the Chianti or wines that feature Sangiovese grapes. Personally, I wouldn't spend the money on something like a Riserva or a Nobile unless those are your preference. Less expensive classicos will do quite well. For something slightly different, check into a Nero d'Avola from Sicily – lots of flavor for \$10 and less.

Stepping away from the "red" pizzas, you might want a ***white pizza*** – something like chicken with a white cream sauce. For pizzas with a little more body, reach for a fuller-bodied Pinot Grigio or a Chardonnay. You will need something with a little substance to stand up to the richer white cream sauce.

Again, check out some softer reds from Sardegna or even a rosé like those mentioned above. These wines would also pair nicely with a ***vegetarian pizza*** or even one of the newest fads in pizza, a ***salad pizza***.

Moving further away from traditional, you might be a fan of ***Hawaiian pizza***. Try a sparkling wine such as a Val de Brun Brut Rosé or a Prosecco. There are also some

light and jammy wines made with the Primitivo grape from the Puglia region as well as some lighter wines (mentioned in a previous wine column): Lambrusco, from the Emilia-Romagna region. Dry and sparkling styles also exist. Sei Amici Lambrusco comes in both red and white versions available locally for only about \$7 a bottle; Frascati, from the Frascati area south of Rome, made mainly with Trebbiano grapes; Gavi, a dry, medium-bodied wine made from Cortese grapes in the Gavi area of Piedmont; Orvieto, a generally medium-bodied wine made mainly from Grechetto grapes around Orvieto, in the Umbria region; and Soave, from the Soave zone in the Veneto region, made from Garganega grapes, with subdued flavors of pear, apple, or peach.

See you at the Pizza Party!

Cent' anni,

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