

Bacchus meets Venus

A LOVER'S GUIDE TO WINE

by Edward Ragg and Fongyee Walker

If music be the food of love, then wine is at the very heart of romance, so here are a few vinous tips on how to express yourself with a romantic bottle ... or two.

Whether it's a first date or a poignant anniversary for amorous old-timers, go for bubbles first. Pink bubbles are usually a hit if you can manage the price tag. Rosé Champagne will impress, but make sure your date can munch on a breadstick or other nibbles. The very high acidity in most sparkling wines can cause queasiness, which doesn't go well with adrenalin, nerves and empty stomachs.

Try to be attentive to what your partner likes. Romantic encounters are not usually occasions for really serious wines, what those passionate Italians call *vini di meditazione*, wines to meditate over. Don't buy rare Fino sherries, Sercial Madeiras, Barolos or undrinkable young red Bordeauxs. Go for fun, fruity flavors like lighter-bodied Australian Shiraz or Chilean Merlot for reds, Alsace Gewurztraminer or New World Viogniers for whites. But watch out for high alcohol, unless you both want to be blabbering before you can vaguely say, "I love you."

There's also the matter of food. Try to find wines that suit what you're both eating. You might enjoy a gutsy Italian red with your beef carpaccio, but it won't be kind to your partner's raw oysters. This kind of problem can be avoided by going to Chinese restaurants or other cuisines where sharing is essential, or just cook at home. If you must dine out, scope out a proper venue – preferably with a "Valentine's menu" that can appeal to a wider range of wine selections.

Famed culinary aphrodisiacs like oysters pair well with light, crisp whites such as Chablis, Sancerre, and lighter styles of Aus-

tralian Riesling. But wine is not particularly friendly with chocolates, so be careful. If you must, try a Pedro Ximenez sherry or red port. These rich fortified sweet wines marry well with the tannic side of cocoa-rich chocolates.

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Sweet wines are themselves a must. If you really want to impress, go for a Canadian ice wine made from Riesling or Vidal (the latter is less acidic), which can be a fireside,

post-dinner *digestif*. New World "dessert wines" like Australia's Noble One can give the perfect ending to your romantic night as well. If you seek marriages made in heaven, try Sauternes with blue cheeses or lightly sweet desserts. Finally, if there's a lull in the evening, there's nothing like a bottle of the gently sparkling, moderately sweet Moscato d'Asti to pick up the spirits.

Edward Ragg and Fongyee Walker run Dragon Phoenix Fine Wine Consulting (www.longfeng-wines.com), Beijing's first independent wine consultancy. They are the authors of the Dragon Phoenix Wine Blog.

SELECT SIPS

One to quaff
NV Reggiano Lambrusco Secco, Emilia-Romagna, Italy (RMB 88)

Lambrusco doesn't have the best reputation, largely because this "cheap and cheerful" sparkling red used to be less than drinkable. This is a good example, however, and fun to drink. Medium purple-red with a generous mousse; expect red and black cherry fruit with a refreshing dry palate and, importantly, very little tannin. (Available from Piazza Italia, 2/F China Central Place, 89 Jianguo Lu, 5200 8080)

One to drink
2007 Argento Reserva Torrontes, Mendoza, Argentina (RMB 148)

Torrontes is indigenous to Argentina and a very aromatic grape. Medium green-gold in color; the nose is

packed with peach, apricot, orange blossom and even rose-petal aromas. A rich, fat palate – bone-dry but full of aromatic fruit, medium acidity and a slightly salty tang. (Available from Mercuris Fine Wines, jack.chen@mercuris.com.cn)

One to savor
2007 Moscato d'Asti, I Vignaioli di S. Stefano, Piemonte, Italy (RMB 330)

Moscato d'Asti, especially when it's this well-made, is ideal for a romantic encounter. Medium gold-green with a light sparkle; the nose is full of grapey orange-blossom fruit and the palate is gentle at only five percent alcohol with generous sweetness and some lifting acidity. Great with strawberries and most cream desserts! (Available from Aussino, www.aussino.net, 6508 9008)

