

The heart of Sonoma style entertaining lies in its regional diversity, rich winemaking and agricultural history, which has propelled this unique northern California region on to the cutting edge of culinary trends.

The wide range and consistent quality of Sonoma's wines inspires local chefs like Bruce Riezenman to create a unique style of wine country cuisine, which is symbiotic with its hallmark wines

Bruce's Sonoma style is defined by his innovative approach by balancing flavours to infuse and pair wine and food perfectly for fellow wine and food lovers to enjoy in a simple and approachable way. All that's required are a curious set of taste buds and the desire to bring friends and family together to share a simply delicious meal and glass of wine.

### **Bruce's Wine and Food Pairing Tips**

Sonoma is renowned for its casual sophistication in its approach to food and wine. Bruce believes that you really don't need to be a wine expert to enjoy it. But if you'd like to learn more, the best way to begin exploring is to try out a range. Red, white, sweet, dry - the more you taste, the more you'll discover a variety of aromas and flavors.

#### **"No Hard-and-Fast Rules" Pairing Policy**

In Sonoma, the "white wines with fish and red wines with meat" adage was abandoned years ago for a more adventurous and relaxed approach. The growing influence of ethnic foods and regional cuisines has created an open mind to infinite pairing possibilities. Bruce's most important rule for wine and food pairing is to follow your own taste preferences. If you like it, the pairing works.

#### **Choose Wines to Complement or Contrast**

Wine and food should complement or offer a pleasant contrast with one another. When choosing a wine, consider the style and ingredients of the dish.

When choosing wines that *contrast*, consider pairing opposites. Very hot or spicy foods often work best with sweeter wines. Opposing flavors can play off each other, creating new flavours and cleansing the palate. For heavily seasoned ethnic dishes choose wines that can stand up to assertive flavors. Try lively Viognier or Pinot Gris.

To choose wines that *complement*, try matching the weight of the wine and food. For lighter foods such as grilled fish or chicken choose more delicate whites, such as a light Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc. Lighter reds - a slightly earthy Pinot Noir, for example - can bring out the rich flavors of grilled fish like salmon or tuna. Heavy roasted meats, such as a leg of lamb, are complemented by a spicy Zinfandel or smoky Merlot.

### **The Elements of Taste: Balancing Sweet, Salt, Bitter, Sour and Umami**

Beware of pairing a wine with food that is sweeter than the wine. Sweetness in a dish will increase the awareness of bitterness and astringency in wine, making it appear drier, stronger and less fruity.

High amounts of acidity in food will decrease awareness of sourness in wine and making it taste richer and mellower — sweet wine will taste sweeter.

Bitter flavors in food increase the perception of bitter, tannic elements in wine. Sourness and salt in food suppress bitter taste in wine. Salt in food can tone down the bitterness and astringency of wine and may make sweet wines taste sweeter.

## **Nine Steps to a Sonoma-Inspired Thanksgiving**

## Getting Started:

**1. Buy Local, Buy Heirloom:** Heritage (or Heirloom) Turkeys are enjoying gaining much consumer interest this season, and for good reason. We have all experienced Heirloom Tomatoes and tasted the quality of those. Consider these items and other Heirloom food items as you plan your menu to celebrate the quality and history of these foods. Shopping at the local Farmers' market is a great way to go and is more popular every day. It means you are taking home and serving the freshest food to your family and guests.

**2. Enjoy More by Cooking Ahead:** Bruce makes a turkey stock and the base turkey sauce the day before. He starts with a good chicken broth and then adds, roasted turkey necks and wings (purchased at the butcher). He simmers for 2 to 3 hours and uses this for making his gravy. When the turkey is finished cooking on Thanksgiving Day, he deglazes the pan with a little wine and adds the base sauce. Then, he's ready to finish the gravy and suggests that you adopt a "chef's choice" approach to adding whatever selection of spices and herbs you want to achieve a fuller and richer flavour.

Other recipes that Bruce routinely makes ahead include Pinot Noir Cranberry Sauce and Walnut, Fig and Zinfandel Relish. Plan your meal so that you have a limited number of things to do last-minute and invite your guests to pitch in. At Bruce's family meals, guests help plate and serve. Often it is a plated first course and a family style (and occasionally buffet) main course.

**3. Serve Foods Creatively:** Soup served in espresso cups or hollowed out mini pumpkins can create great impact and add a whimsical note to the table. Small shot glasses or Martini glasses can be used to serve a small dessert or sorbet. Consider a wine sorbet as a fun "intermezzo" at the table. Think about the serving pieces you have on-hand and consider alternative uses for them as you plan your menu.

**4. Wine and Beverage Planning is Key:** In Sonoma County, any gathering with good food is equally all about wine. As Bruce says, "In wine country we have wine with burgers and anything else you can think of. Plan a progression of wines throughout the meal starting with sparkling wine when the guests first arrive and then moving on to other varietals with each course. Sonoma County is about having fun with wines and trying new combinations that work. It makes drinking wine even more enjoyable."

Try a different shaped glass for each course. Using the proper shaped glass enhances your appreciation of the wine and is also more satisfying from an aesthetic perspective. Larger glasses also look great at the table!

### Setting the stage... And the Table

**5. Bring Nature In:** Use leaves, pumpkins, gourds, moss and branches in creating your centerpiece and décor. Beautiful fallen leaves can be washed and pressed to use on the table, as well. Incorporate nuts (in shell) or acorns in hurricane style candleholders around the base of pillar candles. Filling glass hurricane or other glass cylinders with pinecones is a great addition to the holiday table to add height and texture. Grapevine napkin rings and some harvest linens in fall colors give guests the feeling that a bountiful dinner is ahead.

**6. Mix and Match:** Sonoma style is casual and sophisticated both at the same time. Mixing colors and patterns at the table is a great way to create this effect. Use assorted candleholders with a single candle colour to tie the arrangement together. Mismatched napkins or napkin rings can be stylish if the colours are in the same colour family or style.

**7. Think about Height and Texture:** Bruce's years of catering and creating beautiful food displays serve him well when it's time to set a table or serving area. Use candles of differing heights, small risers under linens, linens with distinctive texture, and other 'tricks of the trade' to build interest in the food and make it even more appealing. Scatter your decorations around the kitchen and dining areas to tie the areas together. Dimming the lights and lighting candles also adds more textural interest.

### And Finally, The Most Important Ingredients: Family and Friends

**8. Stories around the table:** Sonoma wine country style is also about hospitality. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, everyone around Bruce's table shares something they are thankful for. It allows everyone a moment to appreciate why they have come together and makes for a more intimate gathering, whether the guests are well-known family or newly made friends.

**9. Dessert Buffet:** Guests will often bring a dessert as contribution to a Thanksgiving feast. So, why not create a special area to celebrate the group effort of the final course. Invite guests to retire to another area for dessert and coffee or tea. Provide the requisite dishes, flatware and serving utensils so your guests can serve each other while describing their various contributions. A buffet-style dessert course is more casual and relaxed for everyone, and is a nice way to enjoy more time with your guests. Consider adding dessert wine(s) to your menu and plan to offer small dessert or port glasses for serving.