

MERRY & BRIGHT:

Holiday Cheese and Wine Pairings

If there's one thing we can always count on during the holiday season no matter what, it's that it's made for indulging. Wine and cheese might be vices during the year, but come year end it's best to celebrate, and nothing goes together better than these two treats. When pairing them together, however, make sure you know what you're doing. Nothing is worse than when one flavor overshadows the other and you end up missing out on something delicious.

Charles Duque, the managing director of the Americas for CNIEL, or French Dairy Board, and overseer of the French Cheese Board in New York, offers us one of his tricks of the trade to ensure pairing success:

"When it comes to pairing libations with cheese, I am a big fan of using wines from the same region the cheese is from – as long as it complements and enhances the cheese. For example, you wouldn't want to pair a delicate triple creme with a heavy red wine. Instead something sparkling is the perfect choice because the bubbles in the wine with the creaminess of the cheese."



Try some of our favorites:

Cowgirl Creamery Mt Tam (\$20/8 oz.): This famous California triple cream is the most popular seller from Cowgirl Creamery for good reason. Organic, with a bloomy rind and luxuriously creamy center, this easily spreadable cheese is a standout on any food board.

Pair it with: Taittinger Brut Réserve (\$35.99): Notes of fruit and honey subtly balance this effervescent bubbly. Comprised of a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, this lightly aged champagne is the ideal companion for this creamy brie-like cheese. Its sharp acidity will help to cut the fat and creaminess of the cheese.

Sartori Reserve Cheese Espresso Bellavitano (\$79.34/5 lb.): Wisconsin-based cheese brand Sartori has an impressive line of affordable cow's milk cheese in their BellaVitano line, including this one with an espresso rind. It's slightly creamier than a cheddar, with both nutty and fruity flavors.

Pair it with: Sonoma Cutrer Russian River Valley Woodford Reserve Barrel Finish Pinot Noir (\$50): This rich Pinot, aged for four months in Woodford Reserve Bourbon barrels, makes for a great sip whether on its own, or paired with something like Sartori. Its soft tannins, light acidity and notes of black cherry balance out the nuttiness of the cheese and bring out the espresso flavors.

Murray's Cheese Ewephoria Sheep Gouda (\$25/lb.): Brought to you by the popular New York City-based Murray's Cheese, this smooth gouda has a sweet caramel flavor, along with some added nuttiness. It lingers on the palate.

Pair it with: Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc (\$31.99): The mineral acidity of this New Zealand sauvignon has zesty, tropical notes with a long finish, making it a great partner for Murray's sweeter cheese. The flavor profiles of both of these balance perfectly.

Cypress Grove Midnight Moon (\$27/lb.): This aged goat milk cheese gets a slight crunch to it as it ages, formed by protein crystals. These add to its brown butter and nutty flavor, where it is produced in California.

Pair it with: Peju Cabernet Franc (\$75): This approachable, earthy wine compliments this cheese without overwhelming it. Notes of cherry and peppercorn blend together with vanilla, giving it an easy drinkability.

Maytag Farm Reserve Black Label (\$15.95/4 oz.): This bold blue cheese revs it up a notch or two with a more audacious, creamy flavor and an edible bloomy rind.

Pair it with: Château Guiraud Sauternes (\$38.99): When you have a saltier cheese, try pairing it with something sweet, like this fruit forward wine from Bordeaux. Dried fruit flavors are balanced out with a tangy acidity and plenty of minerality, creating an interesting pairing with Maytag.