

SWIZZLE

MATCHMAKERS

BY BRENDA MAITLAND

Local sommeliers pair wine and food.



Cary Palmer recommends wines to go with the selection of small plates at Bouligny Tavern.
 PHOTO BY CHERYL GERBER

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As small plates and global influences have become more common in local restaurants, wine lists have diversified.

Jenni Lynch, formerly Bayona's dining room manager, moved to Mondo as general manager when Susan Spicer opened the Lakefront eatery.

At Bayona, the fine dining atmosphere required more specialized sommelier services, Lynch says, but "at Mondo, the world really is your oyster."

"We are guest-driven," she says. "A guest might not have the same palate I do. I ask them what they drink at home. I try to determine what the guest is looking for. I'll ask for input from everyone at the table."

Guests often start with a glass of sparkling wine. "Sparkling and rose are wines that go with everything, and we keep them on the list throughout the year, adding more as the season warms," she says.

Mondo's deviled egg trio is a popular starter, and Lynch often recommends a glass of sparkling wine or the Domaine d'Arton Cotes de Gascogne white blend. Guests also like White Rose Pinot Noir

from Willamette Valley with the picnic item.

With chicken liver pate with house-made pickles and crostini, she recommends Spanish Ameztoi Rubentis Getariako Txakolina Rose or the Henri Bourgeois Les Baronnes Rose from Sancerre, France.

"Our servers go to the tables to talk with guests about wine and ask if they want to stay within their comfort zone or be adventuresome, like with South Africa's Badenhorst Family Wine Secateurs red blend which is a great accompaniment to the slow-roasted pork shoulder with black beans and plantains as well as a pizza," Lynch says.

A Napa Valley 2001 Amethyst Vinalia Nebbiolo-Sangiovese blend goes with the Gulf fish, mussels and chorizo as well as lighter meat dishes, she says.

Lynch also recommends the uncaked 2009 Sonoma Lioco Chardonnay with the Gulf fish dish or mussels and chorizo. "The wine is sustainably farmed and very vintage-sensitive," she says. The wine is well-made, with nice citrus, and so much of the earth."

A Croatian wine, Bastianich "Adriatico"

Malvasia Bianca pairs well with shrimp and curried cauliflower or Chinese braised duck leg with bok choy, scallion cakes and shitake stir-fry. Another match for braised duck is Portugal's Quinta do Crasto tempranillo.

Lynch suggests the Scarbolo Ramato Pinot Grigio from Italy's Friuli region with the smoked chicken with thyme, Brussels sprouts and bacon. The complex wine goes with the Gulf fish and its three sauces: lemon-caper butter, parsley pistou and Muddy Waters. She recommends Oregon's WillaKenzie Estate Pinot Gris from Willamette with shrimp and curry, shrimp and pork meatballs, pho, meat pies and Indian dishes.

Lynch finds Chateau de Lascaux Coteaux du Languedoc a good pairing for broiled lamb sirloin with Romesco sauce.

For the vegetarian dish of wood-oven roasted goat cheese polenta with mushrooms, roasted fennel and tomato

ragout, she opts for spicy and complex County Line Anderson Valley Pinot Noir or earthy and rustic Cuvee del Maule from Chile.

With its diverse menu, Mondo sells a lot of wine by the glass, allowing diners to explore different dishes and pairings.

Cary Palmer holds court at the upscale Bouligny Tavern, which offers eclectic comfort-to-gourmet-style small plates.

Chef/owner John Harris "knew what he was doing in designing the menu," Palmer says. "The dishes are imbued with a great deal of creativity, so guests have a large range of items and styles from which to order." The wine list features 90 labels.

Bouligny offers a deviled egg trio, currently including duck liver mousse with duck confit, Comte cheese, and one with creme fraiche, bowfin caviar and cornichons.

"A natural pairing for hors d'oeuvres is sparkling wine or Champagne," Palmer says, "and I usually recommend the Durangin."

"I enjoy having roses on the list, especially during the season. Guests want the red wine flavor, plus the acidity and crisp-

ness that make roses more satisfying during the summer than even a white wine."

During summer, white wine drinkers order lighter style wines like proseccos, a good sparkling wine for quaffing, and St. Peyre Picpoul de Pinet from Languedoc.

Many white wine drinkers want crisp minerality, more neutral, refreshing wines, like sauvignon blanc, he says. Palmer likes the lush style of New World sauvignon blanc like The Supernatural from New Zealand with its floral, honeysuckle and passion fruit character.

"It's a nice aperitif wine and pairs well with the rich meat of the Australian langoustine with garlic butter," he says. He also pours the wine with fried squash with pesto and lemon or the fritto misto with shrimp, calamari, octopus, anchovy and oyster.

"A French sauvignon blanc such as the Domaine Neveu Sancerre is actually more of a food wine because of the acidity," he says. "(It) matches well with the gougeres (airy cheese puffs) made with Comte cheese. You need some fat to counteract and balance the acid."

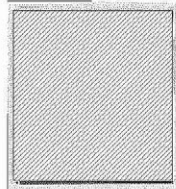
Both fried squash and tempura green beans are welcome companions to the Vina Godeval Godello from Spain's Rias Baixas, a greener, more neutral white wine that shows mineral and vegetal qualities. A bowfin caviar dish with potato crisps and accoutrements calls for Champagne, or Mont Marcel Cava.

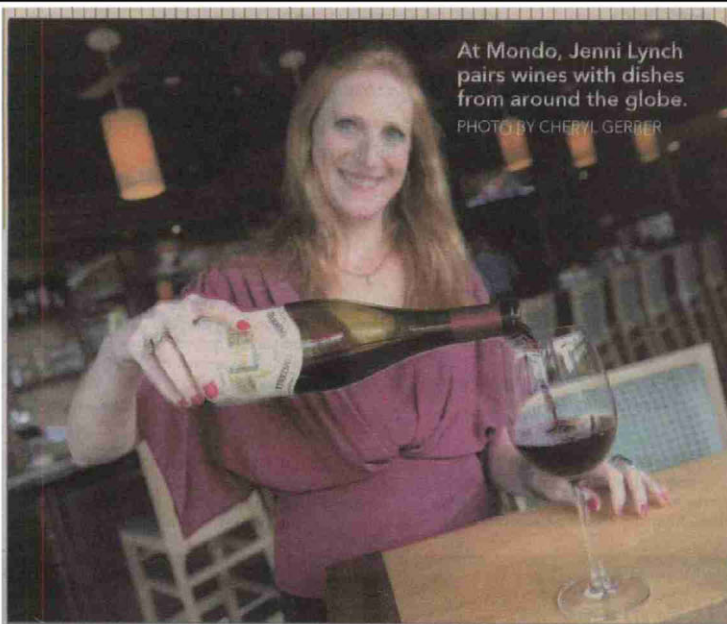
"I also recommend the Lanson Black Label Champagne which is more austere and has a saline sharpness I like with the caviar," Palmer says. He also points to the lighter Domaine Huet Vouvray Petillant Brut sparkling from the Loire Valley.

Sliced meats and cheeses from St. James Cheese Company are terrific with a southern French or Spanish wine, like Embrux de Vall Llach, a grenache blend from Priorat, he says.

Palmer chooses Fabre Montmayou Malbec to go with seared beef short ribs. He also likes Vietti Barbera d'Asti from Piedmont, "an earthy, rustic wine with black cherry fruit that marries well with its acidity and cuts through the fat," he says.

To drink with the duck confit dish, Palmer says, "I like a good Pinot Noir with great acidity and good fruit such as Bel Echo from Marlborough. It's French in style but has that extra ripeness you get from New Zealand fruit. The acidity is





At Mondo, Jenni Lynch pairs wines with dishes from around the globe.

PHOTO BY CHERYL GERBER

very much like what you would expect from Bourgogne."

Another option is Domaine du Joncier Lirac Le Classique, a grenache/syrah blend from Cotes du Rhone.

With the marrow and garlic crostini, Palmer says he can go in either direction: "A rich, decadent red wine like the Mas Igneus grenache, carignan, cabernet sauvignon, syrah blend from Priorat, or the Mas Igneus' decadent white wine — Garnacha Blanca — a ripe, unctuous, beautiful bottling," he says.

At Atchafalaya, sommelier Franklin Buist draws from a list of more than 100 wines to pair with chef Baruch Rabasa's internationally inspired cuisine.

Pinot Noir, along with other lighter-style reds, is the most popular varietal with diners, but Buist recommends wines of all styles. He sells many drier, crisper white wines from France's Loire Valley as well as pinot gris from Oregon's Willamette Valley. Diners want vibrant white wine choices such as Anne Amie Pinot Blanc and Grower Champagnes, Buist says.

He suggests Domaine Sigalas, a Greek white wine, with an heirloom radish, arugula, shaved fennel, red onion and satsuma vinaigrette salad.

"The refreshing wine's structure and clean, racy flavors complement the bright, fresh flavors in the dish," he says.

Crab ravioli with shiitake mushrooms, spinach, mascarpone and citrus beurre blanc nearly jumps off the plate when matched with Domaine Jean Collet et Fils Chablis, produced with neutral oak, he says.

For something as familiar as chicken and andouille gumbo, Buist offers

either Spanish Raul Perez El Castro de Valtuille Mencia from Bierzo for red wine fans or the Alsatian Weinbach Riesling Reserve Personnelle for white wine drinkers.

When waitstaff serve Rabasa's sesame-seared tuna with asparagus, tabbouleh and lemon vinaigrette, Buist reaches for Anne Gros Miner-vois, a syrah, grenache and carignan blend, or a 2003 Tofanelli from Napa Valley, an astringent wine that cuts the dish's richness.

For the vegetarian Yukon gold potato gnocchi with asparagus, oyster mushrooms, roasted red pepper and tomato jus, Buist suggests Pinot Noirs Au Bon Climat of Santa Barbara or Prince Florent de Merode Ladoix from Burgundy.

Buist recommends Joseph Melot Sancerre Rose for pork belly with butter beans, littleneck clams and harissa. The Loire Valley wine is a Pinot Noir rose with cherry fruit flavors that complement the smoky and sweet Tunisian condiment.

Another option to pair with the pork belly is a gamay like the Jean-Paul Brun medium-dry Beaujolais. For the grilled pork chop with mustard greens and black-eyed pea ragout, Buist prefers the French Domaine la Milliere Cotes du Rhone or Italian Bussola ca' del Laito Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso, both available by the glass.

Buist shares his knowledge of wines with Atchafalaya staff.

"I often stage 'palate-check Mondays' for the staff," he says. "We blind-taste a number of wines on the list. The staff ... find it both a learning and challenging experience." 