



# *It's Wine Time*

## CHOOSING THE PERFECT WINE FOR YOUR HOLIDAY TABLE

*By Michelle Nickens*

Visiting a winery is a unique experience. Some are extravagant castles, such as Castillo de Amorosa. Others, like Ledson, rise up like magnificent mansions. Yet others are intimate and small, like Amista, or snuggled into cottages or log homes, like Sequoia. But don't be fooled. Whether large or small, grand or prudent, these wineries offer wines that please the palate. Don't judge a book by its cover.

As art is in the eye of the beholder, so is wine. Even within varietals, you may favor one winery's product over another. Not all chardonnays are created equal. It's about finding what you enjoy and exploring new smells, tastes and experiences. Like any aroma, wine creates memories of celebrations, of love, of adventure. The possibilities are endless.

Just as every winery looks and feels different, every wine is equally different. According to CellarNotes.net, there are more than 600 varieties of grapes, but only a certain few are suited for wine making. Some of the common white varieties include chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, pinot gris and riesling. Red grape varietals include merlot, cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir, malbec, zinfandel and shiraz/syrah. In addition, there is also sparkling wine or champagne as well as dessert wines.

So how do you know which wine to have? The short answer is—whatever you like. But, there are some basic steps to take when tasting wines. When you pour a glass of wine, first look at its color. Is it a light sun tone or a deep butter? Is it burgundy, eggplant or dark plum?

Next, swirl the wine. This oxygenates the wine and opens the bouquet. A little trick is to smell the wine before you swirl and then after. The difference in the power and depth of the bouquet is incredible.

Now, smell the wine. This step is as important as tasting the wine. Put your nose just inside the glass and breathe in the aroma. What do you smell? There's no right or wrong answer—apple, citrus, butter, oak, plum, blueberry, nut or smoke. These are just a few of the aromas you might find when sampling different wines.

And now taste the wine. What flavors pop in your mouth? Pear, oak, chocolate? Trying wines at a tasting is a great way to discover which wines you like and which ones you don't like. And if you go to a wine tasting and don't like something, don't feel obligated to finish it.

Tallahassee has a number of locations that offer wine tastings. The Wine Loft in Midtown has free wine tastings on Wednesdays from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. The wines at the tastings change weekly. The Wine Loft's owner, Jamie Christoff, encourages customers to sample wines to learn about their likes and dislikes. Everyone's palate is different, she says, so one person may find a wine appealing but the next person may prefer something completely different. If it's a good wine to you, then that's what matters.

Another great place for wine tasting in Tallahassee is Café Cabernet's The Wine Cellar, which hosts tastings every Thursday starting at 5:00 p.m. Jay Burleson at Café Cabernet suggests that when you find a wine you like, snap a photo of the label with your phone camera. Then it will be easy to find it again or tell a wine shop what you are looking for.

You've got your wine. Now what to eat? A sauvignon blanc balances nicely with sushi and seafood. Chardonnays go well with barbeque chicken. Try a merlot with tuna or salmon. The website [foodandwinepairing.org](http://foodandwinepairing.org) provides a list of different wines and offers suggestions on pairings. Also, if a recipe calls for wine, use the wine that you are planning to drink with the meal. The flavors come together brilliantly.

The bottom line is that wine was meant to be enjoyed, so drink what you like. Try new things and don't worry about rules. Sitting down with a good book (or iPad), a glass of cabernet and a roaring fireplace sounds like a great way to spend an evening.

*Cheers.*

Did you know that you can serve wine throughout all courses of your holiday dinner, including dessert? The website [TheNibble.com](http://TheNibble.com) provides a number of suggestions to complement your favorite desserts with an appropriate wine. Chocolate desserts are always a hit at holiday gatherings—surprise your guests with delicious chocolate cupcakes from **Lucy and Leo's Cupcakery** and serve them with Vintage Port or Late Harvest Zinfandel. Serving a dessert with apples as the main ingredient? Then try Anjou wines—Quarts de Chaume or a Bonnezaux. Simple desserts such as petit fours or cookies work well with lightish Commandaria from Cyprus or Vin Santo. Delicious desserts can be selected from a number of local bakeries including **Au Peche Mignon, The Cake Shop, and Tasty Pastry.**

