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## *What is the Best Wine for Venison*

Tuesday, 25th February 2014

Wine expert Peter Lunzer offers some advice on pairing wine with Venison.



Ever since teaching a course at Le Cordon Bleu cookery school back in the mid 1990's, I have been fascinated by food and wine pairings but more than for any other reason, because I know that one persons 'clash' is another's heaven. There are potentially some magic moments of harmony where flavours of food and drink create a truly exquisite balance, however, this is an art not a science and therefore by definition, it is entirely subjective.

At a humble level, I was recently in raptures over German Sausage, a fresh Pretzel and an Augustiner (Bavarian) Lager. The 3 ingredients are quite simply, "made for each other". At another end of the market, the sommelier of a sophisticated establishment will try to steer guests towards Nirvana through his knowledge of the wines on his list and the Chef's talents. But how often do 4 dining individuals order the same course and has a wine ever been produced which will work with 4 different dishes ?



So when asked what wine to serve with Venison my first premise is that there is no single way of 'getting it right'.

There are however a few simple rules which tend to help in selecting wines, amongst which the most important for me is the attempt at matching power.

A light wine with a powerful dish and you may as well drink water, conversely a mighty Shiraz with a grilled filet of sole and the poor fish does not stand a chance.

My world frequently revolves around choosing wines to match a specific course and when I begin the process of selecting wines, I think about the nature of the dish being served. So if the menu says Venison, what does it really mean ?

There are a number of key factors which for me naturally progress in the following order, starting with the gender and age of the Deer, the skill of the butcher in dealing with the carcass, in particular how long it is hung, the Chef's choice and timing of Marinade and is this meat going to be blasted on a griddle or slow roasted. Last but not least, what is the nature of the sauce ?

Many recipes for venison include sauces with a strong fruity influence whether from ingredients such as red berries or something richly fruity like a Ruby Port. The reason for this fruity approach is logically because Venison can be quite a dry meat compared to Beef or Lamb so the Chef takes responsibility for creating a balance between dry meat and sweet sauce.

A famous chef once described wine as a form of seasoning. I completely agree in that I prefer Venison to be served with natural juices and perhaps a hint of red wine in the sauce, but the goal is to make the wine you serve, create the desired balance.





I may by now have lost anyone reading this, in search of instant wine answers and I haven't mentioned a single wine yet !

I am going to divide the wine word roughly in half straight away because there are almost no whites that I can think of where, if power exists, it tends to incorporate an acidity which I do not believe any Venison would enjoy.

We should of course be looking for something rich and red and fortunately, the world is currently delivering heaps of these wines at all budgets.

I find it equally enjoyable to find inexpensive wines which punch well above their weight as wines from the money no object division where there can be revelations about why people are prepared to spend so much on a single bottle. For Venison, I would include in the latter bracket, a top of the range Cru Classé, Pauillac (Bordeaux) from a relatively recent but ripe vintage, such as 1996 or 2000.

But it is still Winter, albeit a mild one, and I think that my Venison may deserve something warming like a Cannonau di Sardinia or Aglianico from Italy, or a Southern Rhone such as Chateauneuf du Pape and therefore, with as much class but a lot less hype, a Gigondas from the same part of the World.

A lot for me depends on the time of day as well. If I know that the Venison will be served in the evening then why not risk everything on a 15.5% Amarone di Valpolicella or a decent Barolo ? And while on the subject of strength, some Californian's pack a punch as does an Australian Shiraz. The problem with both of those options is that the best wines on offer in those countries do not always make it to the UK.

Enough of sitting on the fence... I have chosen Majestic Wines as a possible source if anyone feels like experimenting, since there are many of them in the UK and although I am in the Wine Trade and advise seven different wine companies, I am frequently impressed by the modest margins Majestic seem to charge.

The problem I find is that it is very hard to find maturity of stock at most Merchants but if you were to buy Barolo, 2009, Natale Verga, (Nebbiolo Grape) on offer at Majestic at £18.00 a bottle, then provided you open and decant it 4 hours in advance, the results will be very rewarding (alternatively, serve it in 6 years time).

As another thought, look up O W Loeb (wines by the case) and ask for some of their Château de Montfaucon, 2007, le Vin de Monsieur le Baron at £58.00 per Magnum (A Southern Rhone and not too extravagant provided there are at least 2 of you!)

And lastly, from one of the companies I represent, (Bel Wines Limited) a Mitolo, Savitar Shiraz 2001 McLaren Vale, Australia. Quite a leap of faith but at £36 per bottle it is not a wine requiring a mortgage.

There is a final and simple reality worth sharing, which is that if the sauce with which the Venison is served is too fruity then it will probably make your carefully selected, warm and comforting red, taste unpleasantly sour. Fear not, use the potato to bring the wine back to earth and remember next time to ask the Chef to put the sauce on the side.



Peter Lunzer has been in the wine trade for over 30 years and frequently hosts food and wine pairing and tasting events for the Corporate Entertaining market (most recently in London, Munich and Hong Kong)

[www.lunzerwineevents.com](http://www.lunzerwineevents.com)

