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Cru World Order

Local sommeliers recommend Old and New World wines
BY [BRENDA MAITLAND](#)

When choosing wines, New Orleans diners both rely on old favorites and explore newer wines from around the globe. Local sommeliers recommend everything from familiar California and French labels to lesser known bottlings from Spain, Argentina and other regions. And there are many good values to be found from new regions.

At the Windsor Court, Grill Room manager and sommelier Sara Kavanaugh says she is surprised at the amount of red Burgundy she's selling.

"I'm selling more French wines, particularly red Burgundies — Pinot Noirs — than I ever have before," she says. "People are just coming in and asking for it and I can tell they know what they're talking about.

"A 2004 Liger-Belair Vosne Romanee that sells for \$117 is attracting attention," she says. "Pinot Noirs are so food friendly and the acid balance is perfect for pairing with all kinds of dishes." Kavanaugh also mentions a Morey St. Denis wine and Louis Jadot's Gevrey-Chambertin premier Cru Clos Saint-Jacques as popular bottles. She recommends 2003 and 2005 red Burgundy vintages to accompany the menu's beef duo or veal chop. "Those vintages are more full-bodied and bigger from the hot growing seasons in those years and match up better to the boldness of the dishes," she says.

"For the 2001 or 2002, vintages which weren't as ripe or robust, I like to pair the salmon, pork or chicken," she says.

For dishes like the seafood stew or halibut, she encourages diners to drink white Burgundy. Kavanaugh also finds Rhone wines are very attractive to guests. "I love Rhones. You put your nose in the glass and you just want to pass out," she says.

At Stella!, sommelier Josh Prados sees two particularly popular categories.

"Argentine Malbecs are definitely in vogue, especially with guests just getting into wine," he says. "When someone's choosing the wine for the table, they will often select a value-priced, velvety-textured Malbec with less alcohol and softer tannins than you generally see in California Cabernets."

Prados also sees a big demand for Pinot Noirs, particularly from Oregon.

"Our guests are interested in French Pinot Noir — red Burgundy — but we sell more Oregon and California Pinot," he says. "Customers are more interested in areas like California's Sonoma Coast, where Flowers Pinot Noirs are produced," he says. Stella! also offers Pinots from the Santa Barbara area and by Arcadian in Santa Maria Valley.

Prados particularly likes Anne Amie from Oregon's Willamette Valley. "This wine is fuller bodied and elegant with Burgundian notes like earth and spice on the nose. It's from a small estate and is very reasonable, yet it represents great quality with both softness and complexity." He recommends it with chef Scott Boswell's venison. "It also goes well with an incredible Tasmanian salmon that the chef is currently serving," he says. "It's a rich, fat salmon with tandoori rub, Indian shrimp fried rice and a vegetable spring roll. The Anne Amie's good acidity matches up with the fish and those Burgundian notes with its mushroom character harmonizes with all the other elements of the dish."

South American wines are getting extra attention from value hunters, he says. "People are looking for a good wine and they see South America as a place where they can find quality at a reasonable price." He cites 2003 Ernesto Catena Tahan Syrah as an example.

Argentinian Malbecs and Malbec blends are getting better, says Prados. Clos de los Siete from Mendoza, a blend of Malbec, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and a small amount of Syrah, is a sort of Bordeaux-style blend and a good value at \$60. Prados recommends drinking it with the mix of hot spice and savory flavors collected on Boswell's Duck Five Ways dish.

"The dish has a lot of things going on, savory tastes, a slight gaminess from the duck, some sweetness and Asian spices. The Malbec blend with its soft, velvety texture brings all these varying elements together," Prados says.

With the weather warming up, guests also are looking for refreshing, lighter style wines, he says. "I find that people are educating themselves and open to more interesting white wines." Prados recommends Domaine Rene Barth Pinot Gris from Alsace. He pairs it with roasted kabocha squash puree, a soup sprinkled with Valrhona chocolate, cardamon, chili flakes and paprika.

At Commander's Palace, sommelier Dan Davis says California Cabernets and Chardonnays remain the biggest sellers, but more and more customers are open to new and diverse varietals and regions.

"In addition to craving new wine experiences, the trend is towards finding great values in New World wines," he says. "People are realizing that many of these wines are value priced and even people who can afford more upscale wines are really working the list for hidden gems."

With 1,300 wines on his list, Davis says he's placed price-performing wines in every category with lots of options. He also



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has quadrupled the number of half bottles and offers 22 by the glass to give diners more choices.

Davis sees customers moving toward Spanish whites. "Albarinos are going over very well, along with Spanish cava and Italian Verdelho."

White Burgundies also are strong sellers. "We pour Domaine Joseph Matrot les Chevaliers — a single vineyard Meursault by the glass which really resonates with our signature oyster and absinthe dome appetizer," he says. "It's a rock star pairing.

"Meursault is a great place to take someone who has only experienced a typical California Chardonnay," he adds. "It has terrific minerality and livelier acidity."

Davis also likes some California Chardonnays by Sonoma Cutrer and Stony Hill. He recommended pairing Monchoff Riesling Spatlese Urziger Wurtzgarten with the shrimp and tasso Henican with a five-pepper gastrique.

His customers like Pinot Noirs including Siduri from Sonoma Coast, Eola Hills from the Willamette Valley and French Nicolas Potel Bourgogne Cuvee Gerard Potel. Davis recommends any of the Pinots with Commander's duck or duck confit salad.

He also likes the Bourgogne Pinot with the veal chop, but prefers Robert Foley Charbono from Napa. "It's a fun, quirky grape, more like a Bordeaux or Italian."

He recommends the Rhone white Ferraton Condrieu "Les Mandouls" with Commander's soft shell crab,

"In Bordeaux, the trend is towards super seconds — the second labels of famous chateaux — for value," he says. Also popular are Spanish Priorat and Rioja wines, and bottlings from Languedoc and Provence in southern France.

General Manager Shannon Fristoe and Assistant Manager Jessica Moore share sommelier duties at Bayona.

Although many customers are interested in California Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma and Napa Carneros Pinot Noirs are really hot items, Fristoe says.

"The largest part of our list are red and white Burgundies," says Moore, a certified sommelier. "Domestic Pinot Noirs are definitely in but many customers are expanding their choices to French Pinot Noir.

"I often recommend the Maison Champy Savigny-les-Beaune," she says, "The Savigny pairs well with the duck breast, braised cabbage and wild rice." She also recommends Adelsheim Pinot Noir from the Willamette Valley and California's Arcadian and Napa Valley's Robert Sinskey.

"I find Oregon Pinots have more earthiness and the California Pinots offer more bright berry fruit," she says.

She often recommends Rhone wines like Domaine du Pesquier Gigondas to go with lamb. Fristoe notes interest in Spanish red wines made from Tempranillo, Monastrell and Garnacha grapes. With the lamb loin accented by crushed peppers, herbed goat cheese, chopped prosciutto and Zinfandel reduction, Fristoe recommends a Rioja, Palacios Remondo Propriedad Tempranillo blended with Mazuelo and Graciano grapes.

Fristoe recommends another Spanish favorite, Venus de Universal "Dido" Montsant from the province of Tarragona, with the goat cheese starter with mushrooms and Madeira cream.

For white wine, Fristoe likes Albarinos and Spanish Verdejos. "We've poured Verdejo by the glass for 20-plus years, and I recommend it to Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc drinkers. It has the weight of a Chard and the clean crispness of a Sauvignon Blanc." Fristoe often suggests the Verdejo from the 500-year-old Bodegas Martinsancho in Rueda to pair with seafood dishes such as crawfish crusted redfish.

Moore is a fan of Bordeaux's Chateau Carbonnieux for white wine. Primarily made from Sauvignon Blanc, it has a touch of Semillon. "The Semillon gives it a fuller body. I like to pair it with the scallop appetizer," she says. For 100 percent Sauvignon Blanc, she recommends Bordeaux's Chateau Peyruchet.

"The best part of my job is to introduce new wines and suggest different pairings to guests," Moore says. "They always love them and that gives me validation."

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