



Perfect Pairings

Rustic Canyon's Josh Loeb Couples Wine with Dishes

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Rustic Canyon in Santa Monica is a city-chic restaurant with a neighborhood vibe. I've seen police and city workers nosh alongside ladies who lunch and industry types. Even the owner's family drops by to dine almost daily.

Rustic Canyon's proprietor Josh Loeb started the concept of his woodsy Santa Monica wine bar and restaurant from special dinners he would give at his family's home in nearby Santa Monica Canyon. I was lucky enough to attend one of those dinners, served outside under candlelight near a stone pool with views of the ocean. The menus always had a Mediterranean influence, whether from Spain or Italy, Morocco or Lebanon. And the wines that they served were always spot-on, because Loeb is serious about wine. He managed the wine selection at Broadway Deli, then had a stint at Capo.

I met with Loeb, and he helped pair some of Rustic Canyon's seasonal plates made by Executive Chef Samir Mohajer with his wine selections. Some of the following wines are the restaurateur's favorites, and just might provide a little insight to the art of making a match.

JOSH LOEB'S WINE WISDOM

Small Plates and Appetizers

Mixed Moroccan Salad Plate with 2005 Leon Bayer Riesling — Alsace, France (white) or 2005 Frederic Esmonin, Hautes Côtes des Nuit, France (red)

"All five homemade Moroccan-inspired salads come with hummus and roasted eggplant spread, baby beet and mint salad, marinated mushrooms with olive herbs served with spicy harissa and grilled flatbread. We recommend a white or red option that's crisp with good acidity to go with the creaminess of the hummus and the harissa's spice. What I like about the Leon Bayer Riesling is that it's got enough acidity yet [is] light enough to cut through the hummus. The Riesling is dry, so it takes well to sweetness and accompanies the sugar in the beet. For a red option, I'd say the Frederic Esmonin, Hautes Côtes des Nuit. As a Burgundy, it does have good ripe fruit in it but it's a fairly restrained pinot with a little bit of spice that pairs well with the harissa."

Sliced Filet Mignon over Horseradish Creamed Spinach and 2004 Flowers "Andreen Gale," Sonoma, Calif.

"This is a sliced Niman Ranch all-natural, antibiotic-free, really beautiful tasting filet. I'd do some of the bigger California and Oregon pinots with steak, like a 2004 Flowers "Andreen Gale," Sonoma. Flowers has got a good strong medium to dark berry fruit and it holds up well."

Main Courses

Niman Ranch Pork Osso Buco with 2002 Nicolaysen Brianna's Vineyard Syrah, San Luis Obispo, Calif.

"With any braised meats [that are] so rich and concentrated, I love to do a syrah with natural jamminess and a little bit of spice. This osso buco is Niman Ranch pork just beautifully done over confit potatoes that absorb all the juices. The 2002 Nicolaysen Brianna's Vineyard Syrah is chewy, jammy — really delicious."

Root Vegetable Pot Pie and 2006 Domaine de la Chapelle Macon, France

"The pot pie has carrots, parsnips, turnips, cipolline, onions, fennel and spinach with béchamel and cream cheese. We always have one vegetarian option, and the pie is very rich, even though it's vegetarian. You can drink red, but I would drink white. The 2006 Domaine de la Chapelle Macon is from the outer region of Burgundy. It's also a great value. The wine has the natural weight of chardonnay and good amount of acidity to cut the creaminess of the béchamel, and it also has a bit of nuttiness, which works well with the cream and the veggies."

Wild Chilean Sea Bass and 2006 Domaine Gilbert Menetou-Salon Rouge, France

"This pan-seared Chilean sea bass [not endangered] is served with roasted banana fingerling potatoes. Since it is prepared Veracruz-style with olives, tomatoes and rapini, you can go with red or white. I'm going to pick an obscure red wine for this: 2006 Domaine Gilbert Menetou-Salon Rouge. This wine is a pinot noir from outside of Sancerre (France), which is famous for white wine but makes lighter pinot. I like Domaine Gilbert Menetou with this dish because of the tomatoes and olives. And this red doesn't overpower the fish."

Desserts

Lemon Pistachio Cake with 2000 Karl Steiner Trockenbeerenauslese Riesling, Austria

"Karl Steiner is a sweet wine but balanced, which is really important because the cake is so sweet on its own. There are so many distinct exotic flavors with the lemon and pistachio that I like the perfumed honey of the dessert wine. That's why they pay me the big bucks."

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