

Wine and cheese, cheese and wine . . .

by SAM AARON

NO gourmet I've ever encountered fails to subscribe to the opinion that of all of the foods known to civilization, cheese brings out the best in wine.

The professional wine buyer, traveling from vineyard to vineyard, tasting from barrel to barrel, is always wary about accepting hospitable slabs of cheese from the vintner. He knows that cheese will prejudice his palate favorably. But the ordinary mortal, whose only interest in wine is the pleasure it may give him, can discard such professional precautions. He is free to take full advantage of the delightful fact that cheese has a way of making wine taste better.

At a dinner which I recently attended of the *Confrérie des Chevaliers du Tastevin*, after an elaborate description of the main course the menu stated, with poetic simplicity, "*Fromage pour Finir le Vin.*" The host did not want his delicious Chambertin, still lingering in the glass after the entrée was finished, to vanish without accompaniment. So he served a beautiful Brie, at the peak of perfection. We ate it as an obbligo to the last few drops of the red Burgundy. It did more for the illustrious wine than the rack of lamb that had preceded it.

When friends drop in of an evening to talk about politics, life or the theater, I staunchly advocate that red wine and cheese be served instead of the customary whisky-soda or coffee and cake. The harmonious duo influences the mind, the spirit, the senses. In general, the conversation is quieter, mellower, than any whisky-soda conversation. That post-theater discussion which might have been limited, earthily, to the physical qualifications of the blond ingénue will soar into such realms as the playwright's hidden purpose. Even if such cerebral effects do not take place, good red wine and good cheese are their own best reasons for being; they make a pleasant change from the usual fare of the evening gathering.

I don't mean to imply that white wine should never be served with cheese, I merely hold the opinion that it can never quite reach the depth of harmonious flavor of a red wine. The wine need not be a collector's item; it can come from any honest vineyard, whether it be in Burgundy, California, Bordeaux, the Rhône Valley, Italy or Spain. A modest Beaujolais which makes hardly a dent in the family budget can taste twice as good when served with cheese.

I respect and share the fondness of the British for good Port, particularly of vintage character, with their cheese. The popular American custom of serving beer with cheese is not quite so subtly satisfying an ex-

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perience, but it is, beyond dispute, a wonderful happy combination.

Wine and cheese have their origins deep in the history of civilization. Both are referred to frequently in the Old Testament. Each stands alone, each is a thing of singular beauty to the palate. But joined together, they do more to justify God's ways to man than malt alone, or even Milton, can.

On page 94 of this issue, James Beard pens a prose poem of his own in praise of what Webster calls, quite unpoetically, "the consolidated curd of milk." This department, in the interests of editorial unity, has asked Mr. Beard to give us his notions of what cheeses go best with which wines.

His suggestions follow:

1. **Roquefort**, an earthy cheese aged in great caves in central France, calls for a rich, heady wine—something from Burgundy or the Rhône Valley. I enjoy particularly a great Hermitage, 1950 or 1953 vintage. This hearty red from the Rhône has a fine bouquet and flavor. It can hold its own and makes an excellent contrast with the tang of cheese.

2. **Teleme** is a delicate cheese from the rich dairy country of northern California. With it try a fine varietal wine from the same area, such as Almadén's Pinot Noir. Add crisp French bread and sweet butter and you have the perfect ending to a good dinner. If you prefer a French wine, I suggest a Fleurie, 1955 vintage. This wine has a delicate charm, a nice complement to Teleme.

3. **André Simon**, the great international food authority, suggests a bitter ale with the harder cheeses from England—**Cheshire, cheddar or Wensleydale**. This is a delicious combination, but to my taste these cheeses call for a good solid red wine, such as a fine St. Emilion. Try the recent discovery from that region, Chateau la Gaffeliere Naudes 1953. It is one of the most interesting Bordeaux of that year.

4. **With Italian cheeses**, such as **Tellagio or Provolone**, I like a delicate red wine made near Verona called Bardolino. Frank Schoonmaker imports a 1952 vintage from Count Campostrini. You will find it delightfully fruity and soft.

5. **A rich Brie** calls for a powerful wine, but not one that will overwhelm this creamy cheese. If you are serving Brie as a course at an outstanding dinner, try a Beaune Clos des Mouches, a little known but elegant wine from the Côte de Beaune. Or try a fine claret such as a Chateau Lascombes 1943. ◆