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~ WINEMAKING AT A HIGHER LEVEL ~

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THE GRAPE AND THE GRILL

California's Long Barbeque Season Offers Endless Wine Choices from Local Wineries

Placerville, CA — There's no doubt about it: Californians and grills are a hot combination — particularly with our long, languorous days of summer and fall. Prime grilling events start on the Fourth of July and stretch well beyond Labor Day. Those will be the times we'll particularly savor the “up in smoke” flavors of a juicy steak and crave those sharp grill marks on our vegetables. But sometimes we wonder which types of wine to choose for our outdoor menu.

There are abundant choices, say wine experts — and a great many of them are made right here in the Golden State. Winemakers in El Dorado County, a diverse grape growing region nestled in the Sierra foothills, offer the following tips for your next BBQ bash:

Beef

“If you're going to grill “big statement” meats, such as steaks, ribs or burgers — it makes sense to go with big statement wines,” says **Paul Bush of Madroña Vineyards** in El Dorado County. “A wine that, paradoxically, goes with strong winter dishes is also sublime for hot months: Syrah would stand up beautifully to a savory beef rib or a highly seasoned steak. Other choices would be California's historical Zinfandel, or Bordeaux varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc or a nice Merlot.”

Fish

When Bush prepares his favorite recipe for *Grilled Shrimp with Basil and Lemon*,* he pulls out a Dry Riesling or Chardonnay. “The richness of the shrimp balances the Riesling's acidity,” he says. “A fruity Chardonnay shines brightly while balancing the myriad flavors of garlic and basil in a dish like this.”

While whites are an easy choice for seafood, show a dash of boldness and don't be afraid of sampling some of the lighter reds, says **Mari Well of David Girard Vineyards**, also located in El Dorado. “Rhone-style wines are lively and refreshing, lending themselves to many seafood choices,” she says.

(more)

“A chilled, crisp rose wine made of classic Rhone varietals like Grenache and Mourvedre is a fresh choice with BBQ salmon.” She’ll add grill polenta slices and a *Strawberry and Feta Summer Salad** for a simple, satisfying meal.

Another Rhone winemaker in El Dorado, **Josh Bendick of Holly’s Hill**, pairs the citrus aromas and refreshing flavors of a Roussanne with the delicacy of lightly marinated, *Grilled Abalone** with garlic and cilantro.

Pork

“I would choose a Barbera, Tempranillo, Petite Sirah or Zin” says El Dorado County winemaker **Justin Boeger of Boeger Winery**. “You want to have muscle and heft to your wine after you bite into a spicy sausage or a bold, *Stuffed Pork Tenderloin**. The beauty of higher elevation reds is that they can balance the highly seasoned food in a way that more timid, delicate wines can’t. If you are daring over the coals, you certainly can’t stop when it comes to your choice of wines.”

Poultry to Pizza

For grilled chicken or turkey, try a rose blend or Chardonnay — or, if you are going for more intensity, pour a Merlot or even a Sangiovese. “Just keep wine choices on the same level of assertiveness with your grill flavors — and it’s almost impossible to make a mistake,” says organic winemaker **Brian Fitzpatrick**. At **Fitzpatrick’s Winery**, he serves a *Wood-Fired Oven Pizza** featuring roasted salmon, caramelized onions and cheeses on top of a garlic cream sauce. He favors Sauvignon Blanc, Grenache or Pinot Noir with this variation on the pizza theme.

Vegetables and Salads

Grilled, savory vegetables call for something different. “I encourage people to try Grenache, a Rhone varietal that’s gaining popularity with El Dorado winemakers as well as consumers,” says **Teena Hildebrand of Narrow Gate Vineyards**. If the veggies are accompanying roasted poultry or fish, she suggests Syrah. For a recent dinner, she delighted guests with *Grilled Panko Crusted Goat Cheese on Organic Greens with Grilled Olive Bread.** Her winemaker husband, Frank, offered two pairings: a Viognier-Roussanne blend and a fruit-forward Chardonnay.

Backyard BBQs at El Dorado’s Wineries

In the mood to let someone else do the grilling and wine pairing? Then venture to the El Dorado wine country. This summer, many of the local wineries are hosting a series of Backyard BBQs. Beginning in mid-June, El Dorado’s winemakers are wheeling out their grills and adding new twists to the BBQ theme — and at times that fit just about anyone’s busy summer schedule.

A complete listing of events can be found at www.EldoradoWines.org, where El Dorado’s vintners also share their favorite BBQ recipes.

Editor’s Note: Recipes noted with the * are available at www.EldoradoWines.org.