



Picking the Perfect WINE

An Interview With Elise Loehr Solima of F. Scott's Restaurant and Jazz Bar

BY JENNIFER CHANDLER/FOOD STYLIST PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY SWEENEY

When asked how to pick the perfect wine to go with a particular dish, Elise Loehr Solima, co-owner and wine director of F. Scott's Restaurant and Jazz Bar, gives the following advice: "Many people ask me about the perfect pairing of wine and food. That's really a very personal decision, and it's not as crucial as it used to be to create the perfect pairing. Ultimately, it's really about having a great experience. Eat what you want to eat. Drink what you want to drink."



Solima's philosophy is a boon for wine lovers. It gives freedom to experiment and obliterates many of the old-school rules such as pairing whites with fish and reds with meat.

Luckily for us, Solima is willing to share some basic guidelines to help make choosing a good wine a less daunting experience.

One of the foremost authorities of wine in Nashville, Solima is the only advanced sommelier to be recognized by the Court of Master Sommeliers in the city, and in 2007, will sit for the test to actually become one of only 176 master sommeliers in the world.

Sollima is passionate about wine. She knows so much about the wines that she serves at her restaurant that she doesn't simply give a recommendation, she will tell you a brief history of the wine, including stories about how the winery came into existence or even how a particular vineyard struggled to produce a particularly difficult wine. Solima makes the wine-making industry even more interesting and really adds a lot to the dining experience at F. Scott's.

"You have to think about all the aspects of the dish when choosing your wine," advises Solima. "Many fish dishes, grilled tuna or salmon for example, go well with red wines. Look at the sauces and garnishes. Some preparations of chicken are better with red and other with white."

Another rule of thumb Solima offers is that the best values are often in the wine categories looked at secondarily. For a \$100, you can get a great Sonoma Valley chardonnay, but for \$50 you could find an amazing bottle of New Zealand chardonnay. "There are so many great wine-producing regions around the world in addition to California and France, branch out and try wines from Spain, South America and New Zealand," recommends Solima.

Using several of F. Scott's popular menu items, Solima offers some examples of looking at the whole dish and experimenting with some new wine regions.

"Our Trio of Pork— Grilled Tenderloin, Dry Rubbed Ribs and Braised Shoulder With Jalapeno Silver Queen Corn Fritters and Brandied Peaches— screams for a wine with lots of intense spicy flavors and a hint of sweetness to counter the savory, spicy and sweet flavors of all the components," says Solima. She also adds that she considers pork to be "the other white meat," and as such, recommends



avoiding a heavy tannic wine which could overwhelm the tenderloin as well as unpleasantly spike any heat in the spicier parts of the dish. Solima recommends a pinot-style 2003 Papapietro Perry Zinfandel from the Russian River Valley to pair with this complex dish.

“Zins are usually great values, when compared to other varietals from the same region, and they can be terrific with a wide variety of cuisines,” adds Solima.

For F. Scott’s Pan Seared Sablefish With Tomato, Basil, Mint, Shaved Red Onion, Fried Okr and Grilled Squash & Zucchini Drizzled With a Balsamic Vanilla Glaze, Solima chooses a 2005 Don Alegario Albariño, Rias Baixas, Spain. “I pair a lot of fish dishes with red wines these days, but the delicate, buttery-smooth texture and sweet flavor of sablefish calls for a white wine, even with the zingy intense flavors on this plate,” she explains.

Solima goes on to describe the Albariño as “quite aromatic, yet crisp and vibrant with aromas of citrus, white peach and a floral intensity that almost leads you to believe the wine will taste sweet, and yet is dry, with lemony freshness and a clean finish.”

When asked what to pair with their salad of Pine Nut Dusted Fried Goat Cheese, Heirloom Tomatoes, 10-year-old Balsamic, Strawberries, Mâche and Basil, Solima answers, “Here we have some tricky elements combined in one dish: tomatoes and vinegar. However, homegrown heirloom tomatoes are less acidic, and the 10-year-aged balsamic adds a richer and sweeter touch to the plate. Normally I pair goat cheese with sauvignon blanc, as their pungent and herbaceous flavors mirror each other so perfectly. But with the pine nut, strawberry and basil flavors combined with the tomatoes and balsamic, I am dreaming of rosés, with their mouthwatering spicy fruit flavors.”

Her top picks for a dry rosé are either a 2005 Domaine Tempier Bandol Rosé from the traditional region of Provence, France, or a 2005 Wieninger Rosé de Pinot for the not-so-traditional Vienna, Austria.

Next on the list was F. Scott’s Pecan and Shitake Stuffed Quail With Lightly Smoked Polenta, Benton’s Farm Bacon and a Fresh Herb Apricot Sauce. “I love this dish. With its smoky accents from the polenta and bacon, the nutty earthy flavors of the stuffing and the sweet apricot sauce,” says Elise, “I recommend a pinot noir, such as the 2004 Belle Glos “Clark & Telephone Vineyard” from Santa Maria Valley, California, or a 2002 Fougeray de Beauclair Fixin ‘Clos Marion’ from Burgundy, France.”

Solima advises, “Never buy pinot noir on a budget. Go for pinot noir when you are willing to treat yourself and spend a bit more.”

If choosing the best wine to go with your dish is still intimidating, know that at F. Scott’s, Solima will be there to help guide you to the perfect choice. ☺

Elise Loehr Solima often hosts educational wine tastings and dinners at F. Scott’s. Call the restaurant at 615.269.5861 for more information.