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Top 10 Food & Wine Pairings From Pinot Paradise

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What's better than a roomful of great Pinot Noir? Why, a roomful of good food to match! Here are my top 10 food and wine pairings found at Pinot Paradise. The 9th annual Pinot Paradise, held at Villa Ragusa in lovely downtown Campbell, presented a plethora of delicious Pinots, just begging for the perfect food pairing.

My co-contributor, Lindsey Roffey, and I, set out to find our faves. While Lindsey focused on the food, I conducted a detective-like hunt for the perfect wine for each dish, or vice versa. That's the fun of wine and food events like this: you get to make your own rules. Because many of the wines were from the cool, challenging 2010 and 2011 vintages, they were acid queens: romping with naturally tangy red-fruited juiciness, eager to find foods with bright flavors and textures. The older vintage wines are less "edgy" making them a bit easier to pair.



In general, Pinot Noirs from the Corralitos side of the Santa Cruz Mountains where they have a strong coastal influence and long, moderate growing season, tend to be flirty, red fruity and filled with spice and floral notes. They love anything served with berries, including lighter game, poultry and venison, as well as delicate mushroom dishes and goat cheese. Pinots from the Summit area off Highway 17 down into Los Gatos tend to be richer, fatter and have darker fruit flavors. They demand rich lamb, venison, bison burgers, or even a hearty beef bourgignon. Their favorite cheeses are parm, cheddar, blue, gorgonzola and smoked gouda.

Some of the most ethereal Pinots come from Woodside: they tend to shape-shift from sip to sip, eluding description, beckoning you to follow where they lead. Those are sometimes best enjoyed with some crusty bread and triple crème brie or aged, hard cheeses, especially those infused with truffles.

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2010 Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, Branciforte Creek, 14%, \$39

Notes: Huge peppery nose, lots of earth, soy and Asian 5-spice. Phenomenal texture and gorgeous acidity. Built to last, but with only 5 barrels, it will sell out fast!

Match: Oddly enough, Sushi Confidential's salmon sushi rolls with soy and lots of ginger were really fun with this! Would have loved some lamb with this wine, though.

2010 Clos Tita Estate, 14.5%, \$36

Notes: Amazingly bright and spicy aromas carry over to the palate, where a flood of cranberry, pomegranate and beguiling spice set you up for an incredibly powerful, lingering finish. One of Dave Estrada's best ever.

Match: Paradise Beach Grill had two kinds of stuffed mushrooms, one with prosciutto and one without. Packed with peppers, summer squash, scallions and gouda cheese, they were great with this well-built savory-noted wine.

2011 Cinnabar Winery, Saveria Vineyard, 13.5%,

Notes: Stylistically, this wine is near perfection, with its floodwaters of tangy strawberry rhubarb and its powerful raspberry cranberry core. The acidity sings.

Match: This wine will make almost every meal a delight, but it was particularly fetching with Nonno's Italian's fabulous aged parm and a dollop of wildflower honey.