



SPECIAL OCCASION WINE RECOMMENDATIONS



Selecting the wine for a meal at a restaurant can be nerve-racking for many customers, especially when it's a special occasion or in the company of important guests. So how do the wine professionals approach it?

Bill Netherland, wine director for HMGI Restaurant Group, the Charleston, SC-

based parent company for the Blossom Cafe, Magnolias, and Cypress restaurants, shares what he would recommend for different dining scenarios.

★ **HOLIDAY MEAL WITH FRIENDS.** If I sat down with a small group of friends for a dinner out, the first thing I would do is order some bubbly. No need to go expensive, since it won't last long and it's meant to just welcome everyone and give them something to sip while planning out the ordering. At Cypress, good options for this are the Domaine de Martinolles Brut Rosé Cremant de Limoux (\$52) or Reserve de Lavernette Brut Nature "Granit" Beaujolais (\$50). After the bubbly, one bottle of white and one bottle of red.

★ **DINNER OUT WITH THE BOSS.** Assuming the boss is paying and wine-savvy, and that a guest would like to impress him or her, you will want a wine with the highest quality/price ratio. This can be complicated, but really just means a good deal for the price in any category.

If you think the meal needs white wine, an interesting choice might be the Weiner Gemischter Satz by Weininger (\$71). More traditional might be the Sancerre Domaine Roblin "Cuvee Ammonites" (\$57). A good deal on a red might come from a Bordeaux from an excellent great vintage from a lesser-known commune. Chateau La Vieille Cure Fronsac 2010 (\$69) is great.

★ **AN INTIMATE DINNER WITH A SIGNIFICANT OTHER.** Given the small "guest list," many would be inclined to spend a bit more. I would start with two glasses of Delamotte Champagne to enjoy with oysters. Then I would probably suggest a great pinot noir such as Talley Estate "Rincon Vineyard" Arroyo Grande (\$98) or Brick House "Cuvee du Tonnelier" Ribbon Ridge (\$92).

★ **WORK PARTY.** Value and quantity matter. One has more options to find value because most folks just want something pleasant to sip on and are probably not expect-



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ing a mind-blowing wine experience. The Martin Codax Albarino (\$33) is a fresh and lively white, and the Alto de la Hoya Monastrell (\$36) is a great medium-bodied red.

★ **LARGE FAMILY DINNER.** When it's up to me, I cater to what I know about my family's taste and still look for value. If anyone likes a wine with more fruit (code for a bit sweet), I love the Josef Leitz "Dragonstone" riesling (\$39). A drier white that I love is the Venica "Ronco del Cero" sauvignon blanc (\$50). A nice, crowd-pleasing red is the Ferraton Pere & Fils Crozes-Hermitage (syrah) (\$47).