Wine Spectator

SOMMELIER ROUNDTABLE

48 Wines for Brunch, Picked by the Pros

15 top sommeliers share their favorite bottles to pair with bagels, eggs Benedict and more

By Julia Larson

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We're declaring it: It's officially brunch season. Eggs Benedict dripping with silky hollandaise, fluffy pancakes, omelets stuffed to the brim with veggies ... all that's missing from the table is a great glass of wine. No, we're not just talking about mimosas (though we certainly wouldn't say no to one). So many great wines pair well with breakfast foods and are perfect for sitting back, connecting with friends and letting the Sunday scaries roll past.

To get some tips, *Wine Spectator* asked 15 leading sommeliers across the country what bottles they'd bring to brunch and what they'd pair with them. They suggested everything from Sauvignon Blanc with bagels and lox to white Burgundy with breakfast sandwiches to Champagne with beef hash. These picks help make the morning brighter!

John Crabtree, owner of Grand Award winner Crabtree's Kittle House Restaurant and Inn, Chappaqua, N.Y.

Brunch might be my favorite meal of all time, with all the luscious flavors coming together in comfort and elegance. So the first wine that pops into my head is a chilled, sparkling, light, fruity, balanced wine like Moscato d' Asti: La Spinetta 2020. This wine has never let me down over the past 40 years; it's a perfect match to cleanse the palate with a hollandaise-laden eggs Benedict.

If you're going with an entrée that is a little meatier, with corned beef hash or smoked ham, I'd lean toward a spicy, fruity, earthy, not too heavy grape like Gamay (Jean Foillard Beajoulais Villages 2021, or for a little more depth, Foillard's Morgon Côte de Py 2020), or a Pinot Noir from Oregon like the silky, fruity, slightly smoky WillaKenzie Willamette Valley 2018.

If you're talking smoked salmon with cream cheese and bagels, I'd grab a nice Sauvignon Blanc with good acidity to balance the richness and wash it all down. Elena Walch Castel Ringberg 2020 [from Italy's Alto Adige region] will do it with aplomb, or a crisp, fresh New Zealander like Dogpoint Vineyard 2022.

Erik Lombardo, general manager at Lupetto, New York City

Everyone is going to show up with Prosecco but bringing Cava or Franciacorta is a way of getting *méthode Champenoise* wine for less than $30 a bottle ... and your feelings won't be hurt if someone pours OJ into it.

Forough Vikali's Le Bon Nosh serves sustainable produce for breakfast, lunch and dinner. (Courtesy of Le Bon Nosh)

Forough Vakili, chef, owner and wine director of Award of Excellence winner Le Bon Nosh, Atlanta

Domaine Migot Brut Rosé is 100 percent Gamay and lends a great body and acidity to pair with hearty brunch menu items such as our Le Bon Nosh burger with fries! It's also super cool to see that this wine is from Lorraine, France, where I studied one semester while at Georgia Tech's French campus.

Olivier Leflaive's Bourgogne Blanc Les Sétilles is 100 percent Chardonnay and can add a little prestige to any meal—and even more to brunch! The roundness of it shouldn't be confused with a hot-weather California Chardonnay, due to its balanced acidity. It pairs great with our breakfast sandwich. The eggs within the sandwich really bring out this Chardonnay's stone fruit foreground, and the mineral background helps cut through the cheddar and bacon.

Jeffrey Perisho, wine director of Grand Award winner the Plumed Horse Restaurant, Saratoga, Calif.

Brunch is one of those meals in which the wine-and-food pairing idea goes out the window for me. It's generally a time to unwind from a long week, catch up with family or friends, or just tell a Sunday that "you don't matter." That being said, I like to order, pop and pour wines that are bright, refreshing and spritely.

Riesling would be the obvious "go-to" for me. Kabinett is off-dry enough to welcome you to a Sunday morning but still has enough acid to get you through the "I forgot to brush my teeth when I woke up 15 minutes ago and have to meet friends" moment.

Champagne is an obvious pick, but more for the sake of formality: It's borderline expected before eggs Benedict. My local brunch spot is New Orleans–based cuisine, so chicken-fried chicken with gravy and a bottle of ripe Loire Sauvignon Blanc go hand in hand. Something with muscle from Dagueneau is cool—especially with a dash of Louisiana hot sauce.

If we are drinking red—and again, a punt—cool-climate Pinot Noir from West Sonoma Coast, Otago or Burgundy tends to do the trick. Something red fruit–driven with spice and acid. Senses' Bodega Thieriot [from Sonoma] and Burn Cottage Bannockburn are two that I have had in the past few weeks that were rockin' with bacon and sausage Benedict. In fact, that Senses was the belle of the ball when I served it to a few friends last month—a cool bottle in a cool moment of time!

Katy Kindred, partner and sommelier of Kindred, Davidson, N.C.

Ameztoi Rubentis [a sparkling txakoli from Basque County] is just a perfect wine. Full stop. My first glass every spring is the official start of the season. Classic. I am also convinced that the Cruse Valdiguié Sparkling wine goes with everything. It's the little black dress of wines. Valdigue is the new black, but you probably hear that every day. The Nomadica Sparkling White [from California] is such a sophisticated wine in a very chic little can. Perfect for a beach cooler or picnic. It pairs perfectly with a great book or cheese, olives and good conversation.

Sarah Clarke, wine director of Best of Award of Excellence winner République, Los Angeles

I always love Champagne—especially at brunch. Eggs, hollandaise, bacon and several other rich brunch foods benefit from a wine with a little effervescence. During the day, I love blanc de blancs Champagnes like Agrapart & Fils'. However, a yummy buttery croissant pairs very well with a richer Champagne; Bérêche & Fils and Egly-Ouriet are favorites of mine.

I also love to bring a screw-top German or Austrian wine. Grüner Veltliner and dry Rieslings are great options, and they pair well with many different foods. Easy and quick to open and a bottle shape that chills quickly. [There are] so many good options in this category; Bründlmayer and Dönnhoff are wines I recommend.

I like to have a non-alcoholic beverage to offer as well. Copenhagen Sparkling Tea Company teas are made by a couple of sommeliers in Copenhagen. Always looking for options for a non-alcoholic pairing, they crafted an organic sparkling tea. I love the Lyserød, which is a rosé sparkling made from silver needle, oolong and hibiscus teas. Easy to open and a great option for anyone who doesn't want alcohol, but still would like a special beverage.

Mark Sayre, wine director of Goodnight Hospitality including Best of Award of Excellence winner March and Award of Excellence winner Rosie Cannonball, Houston

Wine for brunch immediately conjures thoughts of juice-tinged Prosecco and rosé—as it should! So, to try and *not* overthink it, what if I suggested … Chardonnay? But hold on what if I brought, not just three Chardonnays to brunch, but three *vastly* different styles to the table to make sure everyone was happy? This is Chardonnay's superpower—the ability to make essential, delicious wines in various styles that all demand attention.

Can't miss bubbles at brunch, so Blanc des Blancs from the Côte des Blancs in Champagne checks that box, [like the] Legras & Haas Grand Cru Blanc des Blancs Chouilly NV. The thirst for bright, refreshing, mineral-driven wines can be quenched with Chablis! Yes, it's Chardonnay! [Try the] William Fèvre Chablis Premier Cru Vaillons 2020. Don't forget those who want a bigger, luscious style—just bring a great one with amazing balance! [Grab the] Arista Chardonnay Russian River 2020.

Caroline Styne, restaurateur and wine director of Lucques Group, including Award of Excellence winner Caldo Verde, Los Angeles

Although this choice may seem obvious, the first thing that comes to mind to bring to brunch is something sparkling, like Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc de Nit Brut Rosé, a sparkling wine from the Conca del Riu Anoia region of Penedès in Spain. The wine is made by Pepe Raventós, a maverick winemaker from the region who focuses on native varieties, biodynamic farming and minimal intervention. This wine is super bright, crisp and minerally, and the perfect daytime bubbly to drink alongside salads, cheeses and savory breakfast foods.

Rosé is another great option. I happen to love the RAEN Vineyards Monarch Challenge by Carlo and Dante Mondavi. Not only is this a delicious wine laden with stone fruit notes, hints of citrus and bright acidity and a perfect afternoon sipper, but the wine is made with the environment in mind. The Mondavis, who are very focused on ecology, donate the proceeds from this wine to two organizations dedicated to protecting the planet, the Xerces Society and Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue. So you can have your boozy brunch and also save the earth.

I always think it's best to stick to bright, light-bodied wines when day drinking, so when I'm not in the mood for sparking or rosé, I opt for a bright mineral-driven white, like Chenin Blanc. My new favorite in this category, Café Society Chenin Blanc, is from the Happy Canyon AVA of Santa Barbara and captures everything I love about the variety. It is salty and crispy and also has a slightly oily, languid texture that adds so much complexity and counters the energy of the wine's beautiful acidity. It is the perfect wine to consume with friends over a lively lunch or boozy brunch.

Jordi Paronella, wine director of multiple Restaurant Award winners in the José Andrés Group

Artadi's Izar-Leku 2019 [is a] traditional sparkling txakolina, mostly Hondarrabi Zuri with a touch of Hondarrabi Beltza. A third of the base wine is aged in barrel for a year and matured for 36 months before it is disgorged. Artadi's vision of new sparkling in the Basque Country [has a] bright, crisp and saline character to it. Creamy texture but with freshness—ideal for brunch dishes.

[Also try the Beykush] Telti-Kuruk 2022; an indigenous variety from Ukraine—[the grape name means] fox tail—it is grown close to the Black Sea region and aged five months on fine lees. [It has] citrus peel, herbal and mineral notes and is round with satisfying acidity.

Eamon Pereyra, sommelier at Award of Excellence winner the Peacock Mediterranean Grill, Austin

Prosecco [like the Bosco del Merlo Millesimato Brut] is a sparkling wine from Italy that is light, refreshing and slightly sweet. It pairs well with a variety of brunch dishes, such as eggs Benedict, quiche or fresh fruit. Its effervescence and fruity flavors add a festive touch to the brunch experience.

Sauvignon Blanc is known for its vibrant acidity and herbaceous flavors. [The Venica & Venica Ronco del Cerò from Collio, Italy,] pairs well with dishes like omelets, green salads and goat cheese–based appetizers. The bright citrus notes and refreshing nature of Sauvignon Blanc make it a great option for brunch, especially if you prefer a dry white wine.

Rosé is versatile and can complement a wide range of brunch foods. They are typically dry, with flavors of fresh berries and a crisp acidity (like the Mersel Phoenix Field Blend from the Qannoubine Valley in Northern Lebanon). Rosé pairs well with dishes like smoked salmon, salads or even brunch sandwiches. Its light and refreshing character makes it a popular choice for daytime gatherings.

Gabriel Corbett, sommelier at Best Award of Excellence winner Jônt, Washington, D.C.

Brunch is taken very seriously in D.C. While most places entice guests with cheap mimosa or beverage deals, there are some stellar wines that should be in rotation at any brunch table but especially in the spring and summer.

Champagne is always the answer. The bottle I keep reaching for is J. Lassalle's Préférence. Woman-owned for three generations and handmade from start to finish, it's an absolute steal—plus it can go with just about anything. Eggs? Absolutely. A braised meat hash? Definitely.

Grüner Veltliners, like those from Schloss Gobelsburg, I find to be particularly refreshing due to the green nature and bright acidity. I especially like to pair them with lighter brunch fare like a bagel and lox or something simple like a French omelet.

Daniella Lauricella, director of hospitality at Llama San and Llama Inn, New York City

Bubbles, bubbles, bubbles! My first go-to is always bubbles for a brunch, from an Austrian sekt to South African *pétillant naturel* and everything in between. Try something along the lines of Szigeti Sparkling Grüner Veltliner [from Burgenland] for something light and refreshing to start off the day. A bit more pizzazz? Try Testalonga's I Wish I Was a Ninja pét-nat [made with Colombard from South Africa]. Outside of bubbles, bright, mineral-driven wines are a great option. Jim Barry's Assyrtiko from South Australia is refreshing and sharp—certainly, a great way to wake up the senses. For something on a more serious note, and for those steak and egg lovers, try a darker style of rosé. Maxime Magnon's Métisse out of Languedoc-Roussillon in France or Tenuta de Sterlich's Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo from Italy are my go-to's for the richer dishes or a side of bacon. In the end, no matter exactly what I end up bringing to brunch, I am always searching for something refreshing and lighter in style—no need to feel weighed down and heavy for the rest of the day!

Brad Dixon, wine director of Grand Award winner Bern's Steakhouse, Tampa, Fla.

At the risk of sounding old school, I have to say Champagne, and specifically blanc de blancs! Working in the Steakhouse, I often say "The classics are a classic for a reason!" Brunch can include such a wide range of fare, from sweet to savory, and I feel Champagne complements this diversity seamlessly. Rosé is also a great option, or to make it a three-bottle brunch, my third pick would be something fruity such as *cru* Beaujolais, because of the versatility.

Jordan Smelt, co-owner and wine director of Best of Award of Excellence winner Lucian Books & Wine, Atlanta

My wife, Katie, and I consider ourselves experts in "breakfast wine." For brunch with friends, stick to bottles that are fresh, food-friendly and fun. Don't overthink it: Start with a good Champagne to wake up the palette, then shift to a rosé or a Riesling for your second bottle. Here are three wines that I guarantee will elevate your next daytime social event.

Champagne: Michel Gonet's Zero Dosage Blanc de Blancs NV. Bright, crisp and a perfect late-morning fizz. Whatever you do, don't add orange juice. Rosé: Lady of the Sunshine 2023. Gina Giugni blends Sauvignon Blanc with Pinot Noir for her Edna Valley rosé. The result is maybe the best pink wine from California I've ever tasted. Riesling: Peter Lauer No. 8 Kupp Kabinett 2022. Don't be afraid of wine with some sweetness at brunch, especially when it's damn near perfect kabinett from the Saar.

Mary Kennedy, sommelier at Award of Excellence winner Mara Restaurant and Bar, Minneapolis

Brunch and oysters are always a must for me! Vermentino is always a great option, with its ocean breeze finish and tart citrus notes that are sunshine in a glass, like adding a squeeze of fresh lemon.