

## The Salad and Wine Challenge

Frank Stitt pairs a French wine and his latest creation—pheasant salad by Jan Walsh



Photo: Beau G. Laflamme

**once** pairing wine with dinner simply meant matching fish with white, meat with red, and regional foods with local wine. Although these are still appropriate pairings, today's fusion of ethnic and regional cuisines and the array of ever evolving wines lead to more confusion than perfect matches. So learn about pairings from the professionals—Birmingham's chefs and sommeliers. Each month this new column, "Pairings" will match food and wine in local restaurants.

Through the months and pages of this column, we will pair everything from cheese to crème brûlée—and a vari-

ety of sauces, spices, fruits, vegetables, and main dishes in between. Like many meals, the column starts with a salad—sounds simple. Yet due to their acidity, salads have a history of not being the marrying kind. And more than just a tossing of greens and tomatoes, many of today's salads are now entrée items, which include varieties of fruits, veggies and meats. But even a complex salad will settle down with a wine if its flavors match those in the salad's ingredients and dressing.

Debuting the column, Frank Stitt shares his newest recipe from Highland's Bar & Grill for Pheasant Salad with Apples, Frisée lettuce and Stilton and pairs it with 2003 Domaine de L'Hortus Grande Cuvée Blanc. "The salad is comprised of a seared breast of pheasant, seasoned with salt and pepper, young lettuces, diced Fuji apples, toasted pecans and Stilton crumbled over. The vinaigrette is made from a pecan or walnut oil and red wine vinegar, honey and shallots," Stitt describes.

Stitt's wine is a special blend of Chardonnay, Viognier, Roussanne and Marsanne from the Languedoc-Roussillon region of France and complements the intensity of the salad's flavors and textures. "The different qualities in this cuvée—the richness of the Chardonnay and the honeyed sweetness of the Roussanne and Marsanne are a lovely match for the same in the salad—the richness of the pheasant, the sweet apples and the sharpness of the blue cheese," he explains. The wine offers aromas of roasted apple and peach, a rich mouthful on the palate, and enough minerality to finish dry and clean.

Although homemade salad may not be as sophisticated as Stitt's, consideration of ingredients and dressing will lead to a wine for pairing.

Try whites such as Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Gris for traditional tossed and Caesar salads. Save the reds for salads with steak atop. Pinot Noir is a famous match for most anything with a mushroom flavor. Pair Riesling or Gewürztraminers with sweeter salads. Also toss around the idea of reducing your salad's acidity by substituting another tart ingredient rather than (full strength) vinegar in the dressing. Add fruit to bring forth the fruitiness of the wine. Incorporate shredded or sliced cheese for a creaminess that tames the acid. Or try them all, and enjoy exploring. And like Stitt, you may soon find that salads aren't such a wine challenge after all. **W**