

## Pairing food and wine in Sonoma

Matt Villano

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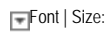
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Like Laurel and Hardy or Posh and Becks, great wine and the right food can go together famously. It's no surprise, then, that a growing number of Sonoma County wineries are offering food pairings with some of their vintages.

### Images



Seghesio Winery

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The pairings - offered at **Seghesio** and Mayo family wineries, to name two - cost from \$25 to \$40. The sessions are designed to educate people about how food and wine can work together to improve the gustatory experience.

They're also a ton of fun.

The best and most intimate is the hourlong tasting at **Seghesio** in Healdsburg. On Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, visitors can sample five appetizer-size portions with five library and limited-release wines for \$25.

If you're lucky, Rachel Ann **Seghesio**, the family matriarch, might even swing by to say hello.

During a recent visit, my host, Andy Tester, greeted me in the main tasting room and led me to a private, eight-person room upstairs. After giving me a little **Seghesio** family history (they've made wine since the late 1890s), Tester poured four reds: the 2004 Auradou Zinfandel, 2004 Marian's Reserve, 2003 Venom and 2004

## Omaggio.

Next, Tester introduced chef Jon Helquist, who arrived with plates filled with small servings of food: a dollop of al dente spaghetti with tomato gravy; a pile of marinated Gypsy peppers; one zucchini ripieno; and one ravioli with Swiss chard, leeks and prosciutto.

Helquist explained that all of these dishes were his own interpretations of old **Seghesio** family recipes. Tester added that, rather than pairing specific wines with specific dishes, the Seghesios prefer to let guests match their own.

"We have our own preferences, but every palate is different," he said. "Rather than tell people what to drink with what, we like to let them be in charge."

With this freedom, I tried each wine with each food. My favorite combos: the Venom with the peppers and the Omaggio with the spaghetti. I loved the last course as well: a dish of chocolate-covered almonds served with fortified 2004 Dionigia Port.

The food-pairing experience is more structured at Mayo Family Winery in Kenwood. For \$35, visitors are ushered into the secluded Reserve Room, where wine educator Leigh Page and Chef Billy Oliver walk them through an hourlong session, matching seven food courses with seven reserve wines.

Oliver's menu changes every month or so, but the dishes always incorporate fresh, local ingredients.

The "Harvest 2008" menu, for instance, which lasts through the end of this month, pairs a 2007 Emma's Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc with a chilled gazpacho and grape-leaf pesto. Oliver makes the pesto from leaves off the Emma's

Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc vines.

Other intriguing duos on the current menu include the 2006 Laurel Hill Vineyard Chardonnay with mustard seed-crusted trout and butternut squash dolma; the 2006 Page-Nord Vineyard Syrah with root vegetable and pork tenderloin stew; and the 2005 Random Ridge Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon with Kobe beef meat loaf.

Also worth noting is dessert: the 2006 Ricci Vineyard Zinfandel with a chocolate-almond lollipop and a port reduction.

"These are small tastes of dishes on par with those you'd find in gourmet restaurants," Page says. "The idea is to replicate that restaurant experience, but do it in a way that enables you to sample a bunch of things and see how each of them works with some of our best wines."

Like the **Seghesio** tasting, the Mayo experience is not meant to be a big meal; either tasting works perfectly as a light lunch.

Another light option can be found at Stonestreet Winery in the Alexander Valley, which recently began a pairing called the Mountain Experience. It matches four wines with four cheeses in hourlong pairings available daily for \$40.

Reservations suggested.

**Seghesio Family Vineyards**, 14730 Grove St., Healdsburg. (866) 734-4374, [www.seghesio.com](http://www.seghesio.com). Food tastings Fri.-Sun. \$25.

**Mayo Family Winery**, 9200 Sonoma Highway, Kenwood. (707) 833-5504, [www.mayofamilywinery.com](http://www.mayofamilywinery.com). Tastings

daily. \$35.

**Stonestreet Winery**, 7111 Highway 128, Healdsburg. (800) 355-8008, [www. stonestreetwines.com](http://www.stonestreetwines.com). Tastings daily.

\$40.

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