

Matching Wine and Food

The Making of an Italian Treat !



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“Adult Pizza” with Barbera d’Alba

Introduction

Our idea of a “match made in heaven” is the combination of a “light” version of an Italian pizza, with a Barbera based wine from our favourite areas of Northern Italy.

The Dish

Our chosen dish is called “Adult Pizza”. The name refers to the preparation of the base – a multi-layered phyllo pastry rather than the usual monolithic pizza dough. This layering along with the delicate arrangement of toppings gives the pizza a very distinctive light character compared with the typical North American presentation.

The pizza base is created by layering seven sheets of phyllo pastry. Each layer is brushed lightly with melted butter and sprinkled with a tablespoon of freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano. On this delicate base goes a light scattering of grated Mozzarella cheese and a few paper-thin slices of sweet red onion. Over this we neatly arrange rows of sliced tomatoes, our preference being the Roma variety, which keep their form when thinly sliced.

The next ingredient in our creation is an artful arrangement of anchovy fillets – certainly optional for those non-anchovy lovers. A few sliced olives could be another option. Over all this we sprinkle fresh herbs; thyme, oregano and rosemary, for a truly Italian end result!

Baking is straightforward – twenty-five minutes in the oven on a cooking tray, melding together the best of Italian flavours. The overall result is a light dish, with predominantly crisp non-cloying textures.

No wines or spirits are used in the creation of this dish.

So what are the resulting critical parameters of this dish when it comes to choosing a wine match? The phyllo pastry in itself is neutral, but the addition of the rich butter and nutty, earthy Parmigiano Reggiano add distinctive elements. Most significantly, however, the tomatoes deliver a clear acidity that must be addressed. Although the salty anchovies meld into the overall tastes they are still present, and the three herbs certainly remain as factors.

The Wine

Given these parameters what should be our choice of wine?

Weight should be a prime consideration. This pizza is a very light dish, and is often served in small slices as an appetizer. This would indicate a wine of complimentary lightness.

The Parmigiano Reggiano and tomato are the significant influences, in particular the acidity of the tomatoes. This suggests a low tannin wine in order not to clash with the cheese, while having the necessary acidity to match the tomatoes. The saltiness of the anchovies would further support the choice of a low tannin wine. The presence of fresh thyme and rosemary, and our own preference for an esthetic colour match, dictate a red, and hence the choice of wine is further limited.

From our experience we believe strongly in regional matches. Evolution has ensured the right wines are developed to match the local cuisine. This is essentially a northern Italian dish, and so it is to there that we looked to select our wine. Our choice is a Barbera, specifically the 1999 Prunotto Barbera d'Alba

From the Piedmont region, from the vineyards around the towns of Barbaresco, Treiso, Alba and Serralunga, this wine has the necessary acidity and low tannins to perfectly compliment this dish.

To quote from the Barbera producers' description; *“Barbera d'Alba is red/mauve in color with lively acidity and medium body. On the nose are cherries, plums and spice, plus some oak from barrel aging. The wine's bold fruit flavors of plum, cranberry and black cherry are nicely balanced by its acidity and soft tannins. The finish is surprisingly long and full.”*

There are other Barberas that could be considered such as the Barbera d'Asti. Perhaps the ultimate choice would be a younger, fresher, more acidic Barbera such as would regrettably only be sold to the locals in the cafes of Piedmont. Other potential Italians include Bardolino or Lambrusco, while from further afield the ever-dependable Beaujolais certainly wouldn't offend.

In making this choice, there was no reason to violate any of the traditional guidelines – we were well able to select a perfect match following convention. Once again we validated our personal preference for ranking a regional match at the top of the list to accompany one of our favourite dishes!

Adult Pizza

7 sheets phyllo pastry
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, melted
7T. freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups grated mozzarella cheese
1 small red onion, thinly sliced
5-6 roma tomatoes
1 t. oregano
salt & pepper to taste
Fresh herb sprigs - thyme, oregano, rosemary

Preheat the oven to 375F

To thaw and prepare phyllo, follow package instructions. Place first sheet of phyllo on baking sheet, brush with butter and sprinkle on one T. parmigiano cheese. Repeat until all 7 sheets are used. Press firmly so layers will stick together. Sprinkle top sheet with mozzarella and onions. Arrange tomato slices on top. Season with oregano, salt and pepper. Bake for 20-25 minutes, until edges are golden. Decorate with herbs and cut into squares.

Note: olives, anchovies, peppers can be used - but don't overload as this is a delicate crust.

- Janet Duggan & Girvan Patterson