



QOH Wines (and Salad)

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



QOH (pronounced Q-O-H) is the industry abbreviation for "Quantity On Hand". For me, QOH wines are the wines I keep on hand at home for everyday drinking with dinner. They are the versatile wines that fit the niche for any number of everyday meals and situations. None of these are "special occasion" wines or even "weekend" wines. Rather these are wines to drink with a salad and an omelet, steak and salad, pasta and a salad, grilled salmon and a salad, etc.

These QOH wines are the basics that should be inexpensive, easy drinking, reliably good, and – at least at my house – workable with salad. Did I mention we sometimes have pizza and salad for dinner?

A double hand-full of the right selections can handle most foods. (And the right salad dressing can make that salad wine friendly – but more on that in a bit.) My QOH wine categories are Brut Sparkling, Riesling, Pinot Gris, and Sauvignon Blanc, Beaujolais, Rhone-style blends and Syrahs, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Red Bordeaux. Did I leave anything out? I don't think so. What about Chardonnay? We don't drink much basic (low-end) Chardonnay at home.

Basic Brut Sparkling has to be good enough to drink on its own as an aperitif or with pre-dinner nibbles but cheap enough that I won't be upset if it gets turned in to a Mimosa, a Kir Royal, or a Kir Violette. Cheap enough should also cover the problem that often only half of the bottle will immediately get drunk and the other half may wait in the 'fridge for a few days (which is fine with me as I like my fizz a little less than fully bubbly and if it gets too flat, I'll just cook with it. My Basic Brut Sparkling picks are:

VARICHON & CLERC Blanc de Blancs, France, NV (\$11.39)

GRUET Blanc de Noirs, New Mexico, NV (\$13.59)

RIESLING, for me, is most likely German Riesling from the Mosel, the Rheingau, or the Pfalz. It is crisp, fresh, refreshing, and fruity. It has enough sweetness to handle spice but not so much that anyone would think it is a dessert wine. It works as an aperitif but segues nicely into a first course accompaniment. It complements shrimp and can work with oysters. I like Riesling with ceviche. It can handle spicy pork and chicken dishes and is at home in the BYOB bag that makes its way to La Vista, Vietnam, or Lucio's on a semi-regular basis. It also goes well with fish tacos.

NICOLAS HERMEN Riesling, Pfalz, 2008 (\$7.99)

POLKA DOT Riesling, Pfalz, 2008 (\$7.99)

SELBACH Riesling, Mosel, 2009 (\$13.59 per one liter bottle)

SCHLOSS VOLLRADS Riesling QbA, Rheingau, 2009 (\$10.39)

LEITZ Dragonstone Riesling QbA, Rheingau, 2009 (\$14.81)

PINOT GRIS is not Pinot Grigio. Well, actually it is but it's not really. The same – that is. They – Pinot Gris and Pinot Grigio – are the same grape but the wines bearing the two names are generally different. Mere Pinot Grigio (as made in Italy and often in California) is lighter and crisper and maybe drier. It has simpler citrusy fruit and at its best is fresh and clean. If tainted with oak barrels, it can be muddy and is to be avoided. The preferred Pinot Gris (as made in Alsace and Oregon) is richer and fruitier (pear and lime) with good tension, some mineral notes, and often a bit of sweetness. The "sweetness" in question may be a strong impression of fruit or actual residual sugar, or both. In any case, ideal Pinot Gris sports no discernible oak; I prefer all stainless but will allow some limited use of older (inert) wood. Pinot Gris handles whatever seafood Riesling doesn't, mostly fin-fish (salmon, trout, redbfish, even sword fish and sea bass) and especially scallops. QOH - Pinot Gris also works with lots of pork and veal dishes and can be a fill-in for those who must have Chardonnay. Those that have a bit of residual sugar can also handle some spice up to and including mild curry.

PONZI Pinot Gris, Willamete Valley (Oregon), 2009 (\$14.87)

A-to-Z Pinot Gris, Oregon, 2009 (\$12.34)

KING ESTATES Pinot Gris, Oregon, 2009 (\$11.99)

SWALLOW Pinot Gris, California, 2009 (\$8.99)

SPARR Pinot Gris Selection Carte d'Or, Alsace (France), 2008 (\$16.79)

SAUVIGNON BLANC is not among my favorite grape varieties; however, it can be very useful at the table. In addition to whatever other charms it possesses, Sauvignon Blanc is often the ideal accompaniment to catfish and especially to oysters. The catfish may be fried, grilled, or blackened and put into enchiladas (as is done especially well by Joyce's Steaks and Seafood). The oysters may be fried, grilled, Rockefeller-ed, or raw. In any case, a fresh, un-oaked or at most very lightly-oaked Sauvignon Blanc fits the bill. While I am fond of many things Kiwi, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc often shows a bit of green asparagus so I tend to stick with Basic White Bordeaux or the lower tier of California Sauvignon for my QOH – SB

Ch. du CROS, Bordeaux Blanc, 2009 (\$8.59)

Ch. BONNET, Entre Deux Mers, 2009 (\$9.49)

CA' MOMI, Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley, 2009 (\$11.84)

DRY CREEK Vineyards Fume Blanc, Sonoma, 2009 (\$9.99)

BEAUJOLAIS was not on the QOH list last year and may not be two years from now but as long as the excellent 2009 vintage is in the market, I will be drinking a lot of Beaujolais. While I am enjoying everything from Basic Beaujolais through Beaujolais-Villages and into the top Crus (Moulin au Vent, Fleurie, Brouilly, etc.), it is the lower-end stuff that makes my QOH list. I like 'em as burger wines, wines to go with salad with just about whatever on top (grilled chicken Caesar, that sort of thing), wines to go with the ubiquitous take-home roast chicken (I prefer Spec's take-home roast duck), even Mexican food (great with carnitas). The are light, fruity, red fruit packed, serve-it-cool, delicious red wines.

LOUIS JADOT Beaujolais Villages 2009 (\$9.09)

HENRI FESSY Beaujolais Villages 2009 (\$9.79)

Domaine des TROIS VALET (Durdilly)

Beaujolais 2009 (\$10.79)



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RHONE-STYLE reds are a seasonal thing in my house. We'll drink a bit during the summer with a mixed grill or just when the taste hits but they become a go-to in the cooler months to drink with anything braised. These often Grenache-based, usually blended reds also boast some Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan, Cinsault, Counoise, and a host of other possible co-conspirators including even Zinfandel. SYRAH can also be the dominant grape here or even the sole varietal. Whether it is braised short ribs, osso-buco, lamb-shanks, stew (daube or Boeuf Bourguignon), Coq-au-Vin, Bolognese, or just pot roast, long-simmered (braised) meats NEED this sort of wine.

- St. COSME Little James Basket Press NV (2010) (\$9.49)**
- PEGOVINO Vin De Pays D'oc 2006 (\$9.99)**
- PLUME BLEUE Vdp D'oc 2005 (\$11.99)**
- Domaine CABASE "Deux Anges" Cotes Du Rhone Villages 2008 (\$10.99)**
- St. COSME Cotes Du Rhone Rouge 2009 (\$12.29)**
- St. COSME Cotes Du Rhone "Deux Albions" 2008 (\$16.99)**
- CLINE Cashmere, California, 2008 (\$12.79)**
- VINA ROBLES Red 4 Huero Huero (Paso Robles) 2007 (\$12.99)**
- BECKMEN Cuvee Le Bec 2008 (\$16.90)**

PINOT NOIR fills the opposite roll of Grenache and Syrah. While we drink some QOH Pinot Noir in the winter, it comes into its own during the summer. In the summer is great with grilled salmon and with grilled birds of just about all types. In the winter, we drink Pinot Noir with roast duck and roast goose, roast beef, and especially with roast turkey. I've even served it with paella. Whether bright with cherry fruit from Burgundy or a mix of red and black fruits from California, QOH Pinot Noir fits a niche nothing else fills. It also fits into my BYOB wine bag more often than any other red.

- FRANÇOIS LABET Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2009 (\$11.98)**
- SWALLOW Pinot Noir, California, 2008 (\$11.99)**
- HAHN Pinot Noir, Monterey, 2008 (\$11.89)**
- MEIOMI by Belle Glos Pinot Noir, California, 2008 (\$16.59)**
- BOUCHAÏNE Pinot Noir Carneros 2007 (\$19.94)**
- ROUTESTOCK Pinot Noir 2007 (\$19.83)**
- MICHEL MAGNIEN Pinot Noir Bourgogne Grand Ordinaire, 2007 (\$19.18)**
- PIERRE LABET Bourgogne Pinot Noir Vieilles Vignes, 2007 (\$19.99)**

ZINFANDEL, especially with a bit of Petite Sirah blended in, is Pizza-wine and Lasagna-wine. Zinfandel goes with American-Italian food (as opposed to Italian-Italian food) such as spaghetti-and-meat sauce, church-supper-spaghetti-and-meat-balls, and red-and-white-checkered-table-cloth with Chianti-bottle-candle-holder Italian restaurant Eggplant Parmigian. QOH Zinfandel is the comfort wine to go with all these comfort foods. Truth to tell, I am just as likely to serve Zinfandel with my Bolognese and it can also handle a nice mixed grill.

- ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEARDS "Redemption" Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley, 2007 (\$17.24)**
- CLINE Ancient Vines Zinfandel 2008 (\$11.55)**
- DRY CREEK VINEYARDS Zinfandel Heritage Clone 2008 (\$15.89)**
- JRE Zinfandel Sonoma County 2007 (\$14.82)**
- PEZZI KING Zinfandel 2007 (\$16.99)**
- RANCHO ZABACO Sonoma Heritage Zinfandel 2008 (\$10.79)**
- RAVENSWOOD Zinfandel Sonoma 2006/2007 (\$14.17)**
- ROSENBLUM Vintners Cuvee Zinfandel 2008 (\$8.49)**
- SEGHESSIO Zinfandel Sonoma 2008 (\$19.36)**
- SHANNON RIDGE Zinfandel 2007 (\$12.99)**

CABERNET SAUVIGNON is steak wine. And this is Texas where we grill year round. We simply have to have some good basic Cabernet around. There is nothing too complex about this. If I am buying fancy steaks (say prime strips), I'll drink fancier Cabernets but when I am having top sirloin (which is at least a couple of times a month), I need my QOH Cabs.

- ALEXANDER VALLEY Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon, Alex. Valley, 2008 (\$13.49)**
- LOUIS MARTINI Cabernet Sauvignon Sonoma Valley 2008 (\$12.49)**
- COPPOLA Claret, California, 2008 (\$14.89)**
- PEZZI KING Cabernet Sauvignon, Dry Creek Valley, 2008 (\$17.99)**
- TRIG POINT "Diamond Dust" Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley, 2007 (\$12.39)**

RED BORDEAUX, especially the Cabernet Sauvignon-based left bank red, is for grilled quail and grilled or roast lamb. I love both and eat them as often as I can. Sometimes these are fancier occasions but sometimes its just me and Miss Carol at home with a leg chop or a couple of lamb t-bones (loin chops) served next to a salad. (OK, she'll have a chicken breast instead of the lamb but I don't hold it against her.) On those lower-key occasions, I like a nice red Bordeaux from the Medoc or Haut Medoc. It goes with her chicken breast as well.

- Ch. CARONNE Ste. GEMME, Haut Medoc, 2006 (\$17.49)**
- Ch. Clos du JAUGUEYRON, Haut Medoc, 2006 (\$19.99)**
- Ch. HAUT BELLEVUE, Haut Medoc, 2006 (\$16.99)**
- Ch. La LAUZETTE DECLERQ, Haut Medoc, 2007 (\$14.99)**
- Ch. MALMAISON, Haut Medoc, 2004 (\$17.69)**
- Ch. PATACHE d'AUZ, Medoc, 2006 (\$16.99)**
- Ch. PONTAC PHENIX, Haut Medoc, 2007 (\$19.94)**
- Ch. PONTOISE CABURRUS, Haut Medoc, 2006 (\$17.49)**
- Ch. TOUTERAN, Haut Medoc, 2007 (\$15.72)**

While all of these Bordeaux wines and a couple of the Cabernets would benefit from a bit more age, none of these QOH wines require long keeping. All are ready to drink now. I don't buy any of them by the case. I buy 'em as I need 'em to replenish the QOH at home. And I ALWAYS have a QOH at home. For me, keeping wines like these around the house is like keeping eggs in the 'fridge, flour and sugar in the canisters, and the fixin's for salad dressing on hand.

Now, About That Salad ...

We eat a lot of different salads. Salad has a reputation for being wine unfriendly. It doesn't have to be. Most commercial Bleu Cheese dressings are at least OK with red wine. I wanted something a bit lighter so I worked up a personal favorite that goes well with wine for dinners (with salad) at home with Miss Carol. *

Bear's Carol's Salad Dressing

- 1.5 tablespoons Walnut Oil
- .5 teaspoon Truffle Oil
- .25 teaspoon Balsamic Vinegar
- .25 teaspoon Worcestershire Sauce
- 30-40 grinds of black pepper
- 15-20 grinds of salt
- Toasted Pine Nuts (for topping – to taste)

Thoroughly combine all ingredients (except the pine nuts) in the bottom of a large (preferably wooden) salad bowl. Add spring mix and toss thoroughly. Serve onto plates and scatter the toasted pine nuts over the top.

If you like, the spring mix can be enhanced with additional arugula, cress, and/or frisse. The pine nuts should be freshly toasted in a pan with a little olive oil. They should still be warm when they go onto the salad.

This salad and dressing is so wine friendly, I sometimes serve it with a cheese course at a fancier dinner to go with what is often the best red of the evening.