



## **SenseofWine 2010: Q & A with Francine Segan**

Written by [TheGothamPalate](#) on Feb-8-10 1:11 am

Francine Segan, acclaimed food historian, James Beard nominated cookbook author and US Spokesperson for Dolce Italia, Italy's Confectioners Association on her favorite Valentine's Day dessert pairings.



### **1) What is your favorite Valentine's Day wine pairing? We're interested in both savory and sweet.**

*Asti-Spumante* is my one-and-only-true-love Valentine's Day wine. It's sparkling, so you get that nice festive "pop" when you open the bottle. It pairs wonderfully with one of the most famous aphrodisiacs—oysters. Asti-Spumante's crisp sweetness matches beautifully with the oyster's salty sweetness.

Asti-Spumante is also great with appetizers, especially pâté, salami or cheeses. As a dessert wine, it serves a double duty purpose taking you from the start of the meal to the end. Plus, considering it's a DOCG wine (guaranteed controlled origin denomination—Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita) it's very, very affordable and sold at a great value in the States.

Asti-Spumante is an ideal Valentine's Day wine, because of its relatively low alcohol level, so you can sip it through the night and not get logy. Can't have my hubby too pooped to pop on Valentine's Day

### **2) What wines would you pair with chocolate?**

My favorite wines that I like to pair with chocolate are the following:

*Brachetto*, a sparkling red wine from Italy that is fruity, but not too sweet. Brachetto goes nicely with milk chocolate. The bubbles literally clean your palate in between bites.

*Barolo Chinato*, a very smooth, aromatic wine that pairs beautifully with dark chocolate. It's made with Barolo wine that, depending on the maker, has been steeped with different spices such as cinnamon, coriander, mint and vanilla. Some say it was invented to pair with chocolate, created by a wine maker in Piedmont as a gift to his chocolate-loving wife.

*Grappa*, pairs with fine dark chocolate beautifully. Grappa and dark chocolate are like a perfect couple—each supports the other, making them both better, stronger and a natural match! The rich cocoa butter in chocolate cuts the alcohol bite of the grappa, while the grappa's aromatics underscore the nuanced tastes in chocolate. Grappa also cleans the palate between bites, making you notice the full range of chocolate wonderfulness.

### **3) Is wine an aphrodisiac? Is sparkling wine particularly so?**

Yes, and yes! Physicians, like Hippocrates who wrote the Hippocratic Oath that doctors still swear by today, prescribed sparkling wine for patients instead of the modern little blue pill. Of course, one tip to patients was never to over do the dose! "A little makes your sword stiff, a lot and it will not leave its scabbard".

The ancient Romans highly associated wine with virility and live-giving energy. They celebrated Bacchanal festivals each year—wild drinking & sex parties to honor Bacchus, the god of wine—kicking off the growing season. Casanova, the famous Italian 1700s lover, wrote in his tell-all memoir that sparkling wines added to passion in his hundreds of lovers.

#### **4) How do you go about finding a good wine pairing for desserts?**

Sip nibble sip! Buy three different dessert wines or after-dinner liqueurs and taste them with the three main dessert categories: a chocolate dessert, a fruit dessert and a cheesy dessert. See which wine you like best with each type of sweet.

An easy way to find a good wine pairing for desserts is to make friends with a good wine or liqueur storeowner. Discuss what dessert you'll be serving and ask for pairing suggestions.

#### **5) Can you recommend any inexpensive dessert wines or sparkling wines for Valentine's Day? We're particularly interested in wines under \$10 and something that is amazing that is worth the splurge.**

As I mentioned before, Asti-Spumante, a good DOCG Asti, is my go-to inexpensive wine when I want bubbles or something to pair with dessert. It is one of those retro things that may have gotten a bad reputation and is not that popular in the states. It should definitely be brought back.

For my big splurge I invest in a good red wine from Piedmont like Barolo. Passito di Pantelleria— one of the best Italy's most acclaimed dessert wines is my dessert wine splurge. It's a pretty important wine, even in Italy, which has hundreds of important wines. In 1971 it became only the 3rd Italian wine to receive DOC status. It has a lovely bouquet and velvety, sweet yet crisp flavor which pairs well with anything.

#### **Baci Molten Lava Cake**

By Francine Segan

Serves 2

A romantic oozy drippy decadent dessert for two. The cake batter can even be made the day before so you can just pop them into the oven right before dinner so you'll be able to spend less time in the kitchen and more time relaxing with your guests.

2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder  
1/4 cup sugar  
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces  
2 large egg yolks  
1 large egg  
2 teaspoons all purpose flour  
2 Perugina Baci chocolate candies  
Raspberries or sliced strawberries, as garnish, optional

Butter two 3/4-cup ramekins or custard cups. With an electric hand mixer, beat the cocoa, sugar and butter in medium bowl until smooth and creamy. Beat in the egg yolks, then the whole egg and flour. Divide the batter between the two prepared ramekins. Press one Baci, nut side down, in the center of each ramekin. (If you like, at this point, you can refrigerate them for up to 24 hours before baking). Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake the cakes uncovered until edges are firm, about 18 minutes. Cut around the cakes with a butter knife to loosen them, then turn out onto plates.

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