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Barbecue & wine: What to serve with brisket & such

By Paula Monarez Diaz / El Paso Times
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EL PASO --The idea seemed intriguing enough: Does wine pair well with barbecue?

A group of wine enthusiasts and growers met on a recent sunny afternoon to taste wines and a variety of barbecue-- Vic Poulos, owner of Zin Valle Winery; Ken Stark, owner of La Vina Winery; Ray Stafford, El Paso Times publisher and wine collector; Mark Heins, wine expert and restaurateur; Mostafa Rifai, wine lover and restaurateur; Pablo Villa, El Paso Times presentation editor and wine novice; Riccardo Barraza, owner of Italian Wine Imports; and Tammy Diaz, wine expert.

Sausage, ribs, brisket, chicken and smoked turkey filled the table. Two kinds of sauce were deployed -- one sweet, the other fiery hot.

And one by one, the bottles were open. As expected, red wines seemed to do better with the spicy, sweet barbecue sauces and meats.

Here is what panelists discovered when it came to serving wine and barbecue.

A wine from Italy, Chianti Vecchia Cantina di Montepulciano 2007 (\$12.50-\$14), got a nod for pairing well with brisket, chicken and any tomato-based barbecue sauce that wasn't spicy.

"But no way should it be served with turkey," Poulos said.

Stafford said: "This is excellent with brisket."

Heins added. "It should not be paired with spicy sausage or ribs," he said.

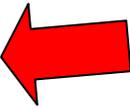
Wilson Winery Sawyer Vineyards Dry Creek Valley Zinfandel 2005 (\$30) was considered one of the best wines for barbecue. It went well with the chicken, turkey, sausage and the brisket.

"It seems to do well against hot, spicy barbecue," Barraza said.

Tasters said Doña Paula Cabernet Sauvignon, Argentina 2007 (\$12) was light and fruity and would be paired with most barbecue and sauces.

"It's subtle and doesn't overpower," Diaz said.

Another South American wine, 2008 Terra Andina Carmenere from Chile (\$9.99), wowed the crowd. Its blend of black currant, blackberry, grilled red pepper and black pepper went well with everything served.



"This had the best value of the bunch," Poulos said.

A California wine, Unti Vineyard Dry Creek Valley Sangiovese 2006 (\$19.99), won for best wine for barbecue. Sangiovese is a dark, full-bodied wine with classic chocolate, cherry and licorice flavors.

"Perfect!" Heins said. "Say no more."

"Works well with turkey, chicken, ribs," Stafford said. "Excellent."

La Vina's Rojo Loco (\$11) is a blend of ruby cabernet and zinfandel similar to sangria. It's sweet and goes well with spicy sauce, tasters found.

"The higher the sugar content, the higher the rating with barbecue sauce," Poulos said. "This proves it."

The last wine to work well with barbecue was also from the area -- Zin Valley Sweet White: 2007 Gewurztraminer (\$11).

"This works nice with the sweet barbecue sauce and chicken or turkey," Heins said.

Several wines served at the tasting did not pair with barbecue. French wines -- ÉDomain Camplaizens 2006, made from Grenache and Syrah grapes; a Louis Jadot Beaujolais-Villages Red 2007; and a Perrin & Fils 2007 Cotes Du Rhone Rouge Reserve -- in particular did not work with the smoked meats and the sweet and spicy sauces.

"The French must not eat barbecue," Poulos said. "It's a good wine, but these really can't be paired with barbecue."

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