

Mary Cressler, a Certified Sommelier and owner, with husband Sean Cressler, of Ember & Vine in Portland, OR.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMBER & VINE

Where There's Smoke

COOLER WEATHER CALLS FOR WINES FOR SMOKED FOODS

by Meg Houston Maker

The grill is king of July, but the smoker reigns in November. Interest in smoked foods rises in October, peaking around Thanksgiving. Smoked turkey, anyone?

It's not all ribs and brisket. Fish, poultry, game and vegetables also hit the heat, and diners will be seeking wines to pair with their savory creations. Chefs will tap the zeitgeist, too. What to pour?

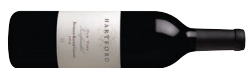
"People think big and bold when they think of smoked foods, because they automatically think of traditional smoked barbecue," says Mary Cressler, a Certified Sommelier and owner, with husband Sean Cressler, of Ember & Vine in Portland, OR. "But if you think of smoke as just one of many ingredients in the main dish, you open your wine options immensely."

Light-bodied wines like Gamay or Merlot are smoothing with smoke. Ditto full-bodied and demi-sec whites. Rosé wines are great for chicken and fish, as are sparkling wines.

Peppery reds like Zweigelt, Grenache and Syrah pick up spice, while wines with earthy minerality draw a dark line under the smoke. Pinot Noir, Malbec and Rhône blends work well. Avoid tannic wines—the net effect is too woody—but a shade of barrel toast harmonizes with smoke-tinged food.

Zinfandel, that barbecue classic, works on the same principles with smoked meats. It's robust, fruity, spicy and peppery, and it can handle a sharp sauce to boot.

"Smoke should be a condiment, not the defining flavor of the meal," says Cressler. "The meat or vegetable should still be the star."



Hartford 2014 Old Vine

Zinfandel, Russian River Valley (\$40) Velvety and concentrated, with spiced blueberries and woody black plum topped by a whiff of smoked applewood. Best for pork and beef.



Château Biac 2012 Côtes de Bordeaux

Cadillac, France (\$30) A plummy Merlot-based wine with suggestions of juniper and cedar. Structured but zesty, too. Works with both poultry and meat.

MS WALKER



Fonseca NV Bin 27 Finest

Reserve Port, Portugal (\$18) Fresh herbs, dried herbs, jammy red berries, and Port's hallmark sweetness and oxidative notes will balance the most flavorful, salty, smoky foods.

KOBRAND



Rotari 2013 Brut Rosé, Trentodoc,

Italy (\$20) Its fine, clean mousse has suggestions of strawberries, melon and Meyer lemon. Leesy savoriness gives it heft. Great for salmon and chicken.

PRESTIGE WINE IMPORTS



Birichino 2015 Vin Gris, California

(\$16) A blend of Grenache, Syrah, Vermentino and Cinsault; softly floral but with a flare of tart strawberry refreshment. Pair with fish and poultry.



Qupé 2013 A Modern Red, Central Coast

(\$17) A Rhône Ranger California blend, mostly Syrah, with hints of black licorice, cranberry and a smoked tea top note. Best for pork and beef. TERROIR SELECTIONS



Poliziano 2014 Lohsa, Morellino di

Scansano DOCG, Italy (\$15) Saturated with cherries and cherry bark, tobacco and tea. Terrific acidity makes this definitively a food wine. DALLA TERRA



Adelsheim 2014 Breaking Ground

Pinot Noir, Chehalem Mountains (\$45) Oregon Pinot is great for poultry and fish. This one casts a tracery of spice around its zippy cranberry fruit.



Dierberg 2013 Estate Pinot Noir, Santa

Maria Valley (\$44) Wildly floral, effusively perfumed with beach roses and spiced flowers, but with refreshing red currant clarity. Stellar with smoked salmon.



Daniel Cohn 2014 Bellacosa Cabernet

Sauvignon, North Coast (\$25) Opulent but balanced, offering blueberries and cherries. A dash of barrel toast and spice proves a perfect tie-in. ■■