

PAIR UP

with Maria Terry



May 2015 – Italian Brunch

Sunday brunch is a fun alternative to a dinner party and gives us a reason to pop open a bottle of sparkling wine before noon. Whether it is served straight out of the bottle or mixed with your favorite fruit juices, sparkling wine is the quintessential brunch beverage. Italian sparkling wine is called Spumante or Frizzante. Spumante is fully sparkling, and Frizzante has slightly fewer bubbles. Here are find three different Italian sparkling wines to pair with Italian-inspired brunch recipes to create a memorable Sunday brunch.

Start the party off with a tray of Smoked Salmon Crostini with Dilled Cream Cheese. These toasted bread appetizers are topped with creamy cheese, smoky salmon, and tiny sour capers. Pair with Prosecco a Spumante from Italy's Veneto region. It is made from eponymous Prosecco grapes and is usually off-dry. The slight sweetness in the wine will counter balance the tart flavors of the capers, and bubbles will cut the richness of the salmon and the cheese.

Your main course is a savory Crab Cake Benedetti. This Italian spin on eggs Benedict substitutes doughy, salty focaccia bread for the classic English muffin and lemon-basil cream sauce for the hollandaise. Crab cakes are the star of the dish and a crunchy alternative to ham. Plan to prepare the components before your guests arrive, and assemble the Benedetti at the last minute. Partner with Italy's most elegant sparkling wine, Franciacorta. It is made using the méthode-champenoise technique, where the bubbles are formed inside the bottle rather than in a tank. Like classic French Champagne, the grapes in Franciacorta are Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, although other Pinot varieties can be included. Franciacorta is dry, and its subtle flavors won't

overpower the delicate flavor of the crab. Furthermore, the fine bubbles will cleanse the palate after the egg and the cream. Since Franciacorta is produced in small quantities, a Brut Sparkling wine will substitute nicely if you can't find one.

A sweet ending calls for Moscato d'Asti. Slightly less fizzy than Prosecco, Moscato d'Asti is called Frizzante instead of Spumante. This lower pressure means that it is closed with a standard cork instead of a wired down, like most sparkling or Spumante wines. Moscato d'Asti is also lower in alcohol because the fermentation is stopped sooner so the wine can retain its traditional sweetness. Stuffed Mascarpone French Toast Soldiers with Warm Blackberry Syrup is a decadent pairing with Moscato d'Asti. The filling between the bread is Italy's Mascarpone cheese, which is generally less tangy than American cream cheese. To me, it tastes like super-thick, unsweetened whipped cream.

So, go on. Pair Up!

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Smoked Salmon Crostini with Dilled Cream Cheese

INGREDIENTS

1 French baguette, sliced into long ovals (about 16)
Olive oil and kosher salt
4 ounces smoked salmon
2 tsp. non-pareil capers

For the cream cheese:

4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

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Zest and juice of 1 lemon
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

In a small bowl, combine the cream cheese, fresh dill, lemon zest, and lemon juice. Season the mixture with salt and pepper.

Drizzle olive oil on bread slices and sprinkle with salt. Bake at 275° for 15 minutes. Cool.

Top each crostini with cream cheese mixture, a thin slice of salmon and 3-4 capers.

Yield: 4 servings, 4 crostini per person

Crab Cake Benedetti

INGREDIENTS

For the crab cake:

1/4 cup mayonnaise
1 tsp. Old Bay seasoning,
1 tsp. lemon juice, divided
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
1 1/2 cups buttery cracker crumbs, divided
1 lb. fresh crabmeat

For the lemon basil cream sauce:

2 tablespoons salted butter
8 fluid ounces heavy whipping cream
1 lemon, juice of
1 chicken bouillon cube
4 -6 fresh basil leaves, finely chopped
1 garlic clove, pressed

4 eggs, poached
8"X4" focaccia bread, cut in half and then horizontally making (4) flat squares, toasted

DIRECTIONS

To make the crab cakes:

Preheat oven to 425°. Line baking sheet with aluminum foil, then spray with nonstick cooking spray; set aside.

Combine remaining 1/4 cup mayonnaise, 1 teaspoon seafood seasoning, 1 teaspoon lemon juice, egg, Worcestershire sauce and 1 cup cracker crumbs in large bowl. Gently stir in crabmeat; shape into 4 patties.

Evenly coat patties with remaining 1/2 cup cracker crumbs. Arrange on prepared baking sheet. Bake, turning once, 16 minutes or until golden brown and thoroughly cooked.

To make the lemon basil butter sauce:

In a saucepan, heat butter over medium temperature until melted. Gently add heavy whipping cream while stirring with a whisk and bring to a low boil while constantly stirring. Slowly add lemon juice while stirring consistently until blended. Add chicken bouillon, basil, and pressed garlic and continue to stir until chicken bouillon is dissolved.

To assemble:

Place a slab of focaccia on each plate and top with crab cake and then poached egg. Drizzle with sauce.

Yield: 4 benedicts

Mascarpone French Toast Soldiers with Warm Blackberry Syrup

INGREDIENTS

1 large egg

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1/2 cup milk
1/4 cup sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
1 1/2 cups cold mascarpone cheese
2 tablespoons blackberry liqueur
8 thick (1/2 to 3/4 in.) slices of day-old
white bread
1/4 cup maple syrup
2 1/2 cups blackberries
2 tablespoons butter

DIRECTIONS

Whisk egg, milk, sugar, cinnamon, and 1/2 tsp. vanilla together in a large bowl.

Stir mascarpone, remaining 1 tsp. vanilla, and the liqueur together in another bowl. Spread mascarpone mixture over 4 bread slices; top with remaining slices. Remove crusts and cut in thirds making long rectangles (soldiers).

Cook maple syrup and berries in a small covered saucepan until berries start to break down, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat.

Heat a large heavy frying pan or 2 smaller ones; swirl butter in pan(s). Dip soldiers in egg mixture, then cook, turning once, until crisp and browned, 4 to 8 minutes total. Serve French toast soldiers with ramekins of syrup to drizzle or dip.

Yield: 4 servings, three soldiers each
(on website)