

## Is it ham or lamb for Easter dinner?

With the snow shovels nicely put away in the garage for the next winter season, the daffodils, crocuses and tulips starting to pop out of the ground we are all ready to welcome the start of spring.

The first holiday to jump start this season is Easter. With a few days off to spend with family and friends, we will share in many traditions. Depending on your religious background of affiliation, many of us will be gathering around an Easter feast. Whether it's Easter egg hunts for the young or young of heart, Sunday mass with your new Easter hat or diving into that chocolate Easter bunny that has been winking at you for the last couple of weeks, we all have our favourite Easter memories.

An important part of this holiday is Easter dinner. With the onset of spring, we see fresh asparagus, delicate greens and tender meats arriving in market. Many of us will be drinking fine wines with our meal. For those of you looking for nice food and wine pairings, here are a few recommendations to help you complement your Easter feast.

Being of Acadian heritage, my Easter holidays were centred on a big juicy ham with plenty of mashed potatoes, buttery roasted root vegetables and tender new greens. Ham will be very common on our dinner table this year but the perfect wine will depend on the way the ham is prepared. If your ham is to be glazed with maple syrup, brown sugar or with sweet pineapple, a nice white chardonnay will pair nicely. The oakiness of barrel-aged chardonnay, along with a well-balanced acidity, will tone down the sweetness of the glaze. Hob Nob Chardonnay (750 ml \$14.49) from France is a nice full-bodied, oaky and rich white wine. Just enough of oak, notes of hazelnut and pineapple and a pleasant buttery weight to the wine make this a product to look out for.

Cupcake Chardonnay (750 ml \$14.99) from the California Central Coast is also a good option. Here you will find fruitier pear and ripe apple flavours, a little oak and crisp acidity.

If you are looking for higher-end products, Taz Chardonnay (750 ml \$34.29) from Santa Barbara County and Joseph Drouhin Pouilly Fuisse (750 ml \$35.99) from Burgundy have just enough oak, well-balanced acidity and buttery finishes to complement all the side dishes and the subtle notes from the maple flavours or the fruity pineapple notes.

If red wine is more to your liking, try fruity, lighter wines like Beaujolais: Duboeuf Beaujolais (750 ml \$14.99), Beaujolais Village; Duboeuf Beaujolais-Villages (750 ml \$15.79) or Cru Beaujolais; Georges Duboeuf Brouilly (750 ml \$17.99). You could also try a fruity Pinot Noir from California; Mirassou (750 ml \$14.99) is the first to come to mind. Ripe red cherry flavours balanced with raspberry undertones and bright acidity make this wine a nice alternative. If you want to expand your horizon, go for a Dolcetto d'Alba; Batasiolo Dolcetto d'Alba (750 ml \$12.99) or Pio Cesare Dolcetto d'Alba (750 ml \$28.99) are fine examples. Ripe red fruit flavours paired with crisp and light acidity are the hallmarks quality of both these wines.

If you are preparing your ham with mustard crust or sauce, then a more assertive white wine can complement the meat. Look for a dry, crisp Riesling with mineral notes and just a hint of residual sugar. Willm Reserve (750 ml \$18.79) from Alsace, Dr Loosen (750 ml \$15.99) from Germany and Spy Valley (750 ml \$19.99) from New Zealand would be good choices. The earthiness of the mustard will be complemented by the minerality of the wine and the residual sugar, along with the nice acidity which will tone down the spiciness and bring out the fruitiness of the cured meat.

Again, if red wine is more to your taste, a nice Cotes du Rhone with hints of spice and pepper will fit the bill. Guigal Cotes du Rhone (750 ml \$20.79) or Heritage des Caves des Papes (750 ml \$18.99) are good options. A nice red from Spain can also be a fine match. Borsao Joven (750 ml \$13.29) shows a nice clove and cinnamon nose along with a fruity and smoky finish. Campo Viejo Reserva (750 ml \$20.49) from the Rioja region is a little heavier due the Tempranillo grape. The longer barrel aging makes for a silkier wine with a rounder finish and softer tannins.

If your Easter holiday meal is more centered on spring lamb than a whole new choice of wines are in order. Again, the preparation method along with the side sauce will influence your options. If the lamb is prepared as a stew or is braised in the oven with a cooking liquid (wine, beer or stock), a medium-bodied wine would be your choice. A big earthy Pinot Noir from France like Louis Jadot Couvent des Jacobins (750 ml \$22.49) is a great choice with its dark fruit flavours. The nice acidity will cut through the fattiness of the lamb and the richness of the sauce or braising liquid.

A third Pinot Noir such as Prahova Valley Reserve (750 ml \$14.49) from Romania can also be tried. A bit on the heavy side, the predominant choke cherry flavour along with notes of herb and mushroom make this wine a pleasant option. Being a relative new product on our shelves, it might not be available in every store. For a more fuller-bodied red, go to a Chateaneuf du Pape such as Clos de l'Oratoire (750 ml \$43.49), Vacqueyras; Perrin Vacqueyras Les Christins (750 ml \$26.99), or a heavier grenache-based wine like Sella & Mosca Cannoneau di Sardegna Riserva (750 ml \$18.99). Being all wines with predominant grenache flavours, notes of spices like clove, nutmeg, cinnamon and peppercorn come through. Bright fruit and well-balanced acidity complete the wine.

Lamb that is to be grilled or oven roasted needs a more heavier-bodied wine. If rosemary and garlic are on the list of ingredients paired in the cooking of the lamb, then a big cabernet sauvignon, syrah, bordeaux blend or Nero d'Avala are perfect pairing options. Errazuriz Max Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon (750 ml \$18.99), Errazuriz Max Reserva Shiraz (750 ml \$18.99), Marques de Casa Concha Syrah (750 ml \$24.99), Liberty School Syrah (750 ml \$22.99), Chateau Hourtin Ducasse (750 ml \$25.99) and Donnafugata Sedara Nero d'Avala from Sicili would be my top picks.

All these wines show nice structure with well-balanced tannins, a lot of blackcurrant flavours and hints of herbal notes. These wines need a bit of time to open so do decant them at least one hour and up to four hours before your meal. The tannins will be softer and all the potential of the wine will show through.

If mint jelly is served with lamb, than choose a big cabernet sauvignon from California. The following wines have plenty of dark red fruit flavours along with a long minty or eucalyptus finish: Liberty School Cabernet Sauvignon (750 ml \$22.99), Sterling Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (750 ml \$29.99) and Souverain Winemakers Reserve (750 ml \$41.78). They would make an ideal match with the mint sauce or jelly.

The products listed above are available in most NB Liquor outlets across the province. You can locate the store by using the Product Search function at [www.anbl.com](http://www.anbl.com).

Whichever meal or wine you will be choosing, the most important part will be the company that you'll be sharing with. Spending time with family and friends, eating a good meal and drinking a nice bottle of wine are all that is needed to make fond memories.

Written by Marcel Richard, a product advisor at NB Liquor's Dieppe store.