



People love talking about fancy **food-and-wine pairings**, but how often are you really searching for the perfect wine at a **Michelin-starred restaurant**? How frequently do you honestly find yourself looking to pair wine with a stellar meal you made at home? More often, we find ourselves looking to relax with a drink over inexpensive delivery or some basic meal thrown together because we didn't feel like cooking. What about wine pairings for those everyday situations?

I sat down with acclaimed Seattle-based winemaker **Charles Smith**, a man whose attitude about wine has always been that it should be able to be enjoyed by everyone at any time. We talked about his thoughts on some more realistic situations where you might find yourself searching for a perfectly paired wine.

What wine should you pair with the two slices of **pizza** you grabbed, because it's all you have time to eat before running off to your friend's one-woman show?

"It's whatever bottle you have on the counter that you didn't drink the end of the night before," Smith says. "Just open up the bottle, pour it in a glass and slam it down." That probably means a really robust red wine or a highly acidic white wine. Smith says those are the styles that will keep the best over the course of a few days.

What wine should you pair with the mysterious "dinner" you've been invited to attend that you have to take a bottle of wine to because you can't show up to a dinner party without a bottle of wine?

When you don't know what you're going to eat, Smith suggests taking "something you know you want to drink." But if you'd rather be more of a crowd-pleaser than a selfish jerk, Smith suggests a single village Beaujolais. "The wines are fresh and fruity and

fleshy," he says, "and they go with a variety of foods, and you're going to enjoy drinking them. So even if the food is somewhat questionable, the wine will make it a good deal."

What wine should you pair with shitty Chinese, because, damn it, you're feeling really poor tonight, but not poor enough to actually do any cooking?

"I'd drink my own Riesling, the [Kung Fu Girl](#), because I have lots of it lying around," Smith quips. It's not just a shameless plug. His [Riesling](#) actually got its name because of how well he believes it pairs with Asian cuisine. "With Chinese food, you got spicy, you got sour, you got lots of other things going on, and the idea is that Riesling is the most versatile grape; it can absorb all those wild flavors. . . . To me, that's a no-brainer; that's exactly what I'd go with."

What wine do you pair with the [toast](#) you're eating while waiting for the taxi that is going to take you to your morning flight to Vegas?

"If there are two or more of us at my house, we'd pop a bottle of [Champagne](#) to celebrate that we're going on a trip," Smith says. Though later, he reconsiders, suggesting that a sparkling rosé might be even better. "A little fruit to go with my toast," he jokes.



What wine do you pair with that stir-fry you made because you thought it would be healthy and delicious but you kind of screwed up?

"Well, since I'm feeling sorry for myself, I'll open one of the best bottles of wine I've got in the house," he says. "You know, a little yin and yang. The food still sucks, but at least the drink's going to be good." What's considered a top-level wine around the Smith household? "A nice bottle of French red Burgundy," he answers. "And the thing is, pretty soon, you're going to push away the food and the wine's going to become your dinner."

What wine do you pair with binge-eating a package of Oreos?

"Well, if I'm going for it, I'll just go for it. How about a big, bold Cabernet Sauvignon? If I'm going to eat [cookies](#) and drink wine, why not make it completely ridiculous and go off the deep end?"

What wine do you pair with the popcorn you popped to help you get through a marathon Netflix session?

"Aw, man, that's easy: a magnum of Cava," he answers instantly. "It's juicy and savory and not too expensive. . . . And you got a big bottle of wine, because one's not going to be enough, because salty [popcorn](#), you need lots of beverage right?" Plus, who knows how long that marathon might last. "You should get three magnums of Cava," he contemplates. "One for every film."

What wine do you pair with the [chef's salad](#) you made for dinner because you're still feeling guilty about the chicken Parm sandwich you had for lunch?

Smith says "there's no guilt here," referring to himself, but he suggests that a nice rich bottle of Chardonnay would pair well with that salad. "You've got the meat; you've got the cheese; you got everything else. It's a substantial thing, and I think you want some white wine," he says. "You want something kind of rich that can kind of hold it all together."

What wine do you pair with the Trader Joe's frozen [mac 'n' cheese](#) that you're finally getting around to eating because there is literally nothing else to eat in the apartment?

"Maybe just a nice bottle of Pinot Grigio," he answers. "Just something to wash it down with."

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What wine do you pair with the chicken nuggets you are helping your kids eat?

"Well, chicken and Burgundy go hand in hand," he immediately remarks. "Either French white Burgundy or French red Burgundy. And actually, I do that. My little girl, Charlotte, likes to eat Mickey Mouse nuggets. So with the Mickey Mouse nuggets, I've definitely had a beautiful French white Burgundy and picked some for myself." In fact, he says, chicken nuggets can make for perfect wine pairings. "If I was going to do a white-trash wine tasting, I'd have nuggets go with it—with some mustard. [Dijon](#), from Dijon, France. It's in Burgundy."

What wine do you pair with a cup of coffee when "just a cup of coffee" is not going to help you get through the day?

"That's a good one," Smith says as he goes deep into thought. "Coffee and wine don't necessarily go that well together, but I think a nice, rich Syrah—I'd probably drink one of my rich, single-vineyard Syrahs—because even though coffee doesn't pair all that well, at least the wine's going to stand up to it."

What wine do you bring to your friend's birthday party when you're pretty sure all the food she's going to have is a bag of Doritos?

"A six-pack of Tecate," Smith says. "That'd be my wine."

What wine do you pair with Indian takeout that you're already worried about getting heartburn from before you even toss a glass of wine into the mix?

"Once again, I'm going to drink Riesling, because it can handle the spice," Smith says. "So I'll try Riesling—and copious amounts. I mean, German Riesling is going to be about 8 or 9 percent alcohol, so you can suck down a whole bottle and take the fire out of your mouth and probably ease the pain of tomorrow."

What wine do you pair with the final can of chicken noodle soup you have left in your apocalypse bunker—I mean, ideally speaking?

"Chicken noodle soup and wine don't really go well together, so pick something you know that's going to be an occasion," Smith suggests. "I'll probably find the most amazing old bottle of [Sauternes](#) that I have in my cellar. I'll drink like a 1947 Chateau d'Yquem and won't worry about it, because if I'm going to die, it's the way to go."