

# FEATURES

## Beer vs Wine

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## Beer vs. Wine

### What's The Perfect Pair?

For as long as I can remember, when it comes to pairing cuisine with a drink that will either constructively complement or creatively contrast the plate at hand, only one glass comes to mind — that which contains a well-thought out wine. With fish and chicken we go to a white wine, perhaps a Pinot Grigio, and when it comes to red meat, we follow suit and look to red wines — a nice Cab usually does the trick.

But the days of the “same old, same old” are quickly fading in our rearview. Not only are the varieties of wines around the world smarter, sexier and more adventurous than ever, but another sun has risen on the culinary horizon — beer.

Before we dive into the main course of this article, let's get something clear: there's beer and then there's real beer. Do you know the difference? There's a Big Mac and then there's a Bone-in Filet. Get it? When dealing with “real beer,” your palate has roughly 700 flavor profiles to encounter. Wine brings about half that to the table. “That's why they spit it out at tastings,” quips Brewmaster Dan Rogers.

Still, the debate is heated ... sizzling on flambé, if you will.

While many over the age of 40 are still trying to get used to the idea of seeing beer on the dining room table (as opposed to the railing on the deck next to your barbeque), the suggestion of the beer paired dinner becomes ever more popular with each passing year. That being said, many still scoff at the mix of beer and fine cuisine.

Big Rock Chophouse in Birmingham is the perfect testing ground to get to the bottom of this dispute, as this enlightening eatery is home to both an award-winning brewery, headed by Brewmaster Dan Rogers, as well as housing one of the most impressive wine lists in the state, thanks to the vivacious Vera Dayrizer, General Manager. Executive Chef Jeff Rose, a culinary talent with a palate to be reckoned with, has crafted a stunning menu, one perfect for paired dinners. And while Big Rock hosts eight to ten wine paired dinners a year, they also offer a handful of spectacular suppers with meticulously matched brews, the next being held on April 24.

With Dan and Vera sitting across from each other, and Chef Jeff playing referee, Real Detroit made a trip to investigate this phenomenon and instigate a true debate utilizing Big Rock's magnificent menu.

Beer or wine? Let's let the experts duke it out!

First Course: Oriental Seared Tuna Appetizer is served rare and accompanied by a ponzu, vinaigrette & wasabi.  
Flavor notes: citrus.

Wine: Sauvignon Blanc

“I'd go with a Sauv Blanc, especially one from New Zealand,” says Vera. “Craggy Range might be the best bet. A Blanc will pick up on the citrus really well, especially with their grapefruit undertones.”

Beer: Belgian Whit



“The Belgian Whit will also pick up on the citrus notes really well, especially because it’s brewed with orange peel,” says Dan. “It’s a lighter beer and won’t overpower the delicate flavors on the plate.”

Winner: Wine

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Second Course: Spinach Salad Seved with pecans, bleu cheese, red onion and a bacon or balsamic vinaigrette.  
Flavor notes: smokiness, caramel.

Wine: Rietralleis Janita Cabernet-based Roset

“I would definitely go with a good Cab or Shiraz-based roset and this South African selection is a perfect fit. The flavors are vibrant and beautiful, this is certainly not a White Zin,” Vera says. “They will balance with the pecans, shallots and cheese really well.”

Beer: Belgian Double

“The smokey, caramel undertones, especially with the bacon vinaigrette, will match wonderfully,” notes Dan. “There’s also some dark fruit undertones, like plum and the carbonation will cut through the cheese, leaving your palate clean.”

Winner: Beer

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Third Course: Grilled Lamb Three Australian pieces served with a Zinfandel and red pepper reduction and a barley and braised lamb risotto.

Flavor notes: rich but not overpowering. The Australian lamb is much less sweet than domestic cuts.

Wine: Rosenblum Kick Ranch Syrah

You might think that because there’s a Zinfandel reduction, that would be the way to go, but on the contrary, something a bit less overwhelming is what you want. “A Pinot Noir or Syrah is the way to go here,” Vera enthuses. “Rosenblum Kick Ranch is my choice, it’ll stand up to the lamb, but won’t beat it over the head. A Zin would go better with barbeque ribs, something stronger and richer.”

Beer: I.P.A. (Indian Pale Ale)

Dan says that the bitters in the I.P.A. will match perfectly with the lamb and the strong carbonation will cut through the thick sauce really well, making the meal a bit lighter perhaps. “I think the wine might very well get lost in the richness of the risotto,” Chef Jeff spouts.

Winner: It’s a Tie ... But, to be honest, the wine almost edges out the win, as Brewmaster Dan laments, “I might actually just get the wine to get something different. When I’m going out to dinner I get beer, but when I’m going out to dine I like wine.” This writer, if my vote counts, actually prefers the I.P.A because I’m guaranteed a beautiful explosion of tastes from the dish and the beer and, “it does leave your palate quite refreshed for your next bite,” as Chef Jeff says. I’ll call this one a split.

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Fourth Course: New York-style Strawberry Cheesecake

Wine: Without hesitation, Vera announces, “Michele Chiarlo Moscato d’Asti!” Why? “Because it’s a brilliant white with a light and sweet sparkle, perfect for cheese — a great way to end a meal.”

Beer: Saison Belgian

While beautiful Russian Stout always makes for a great dessert beverage, the Saison is what you want here ... unless there was chocolate on the cheesecake, and then it’d be a tough decision. “The Saison is the most vinous beer I make, meaning it’s similar in some ways to a wine,” says Dan. The acidity cuts through the fat, making it a revitalizing choice.

“Like the wine, this is a great cheese platter beer and is simply perfect.”

Winner: Beer

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Overall winner: BEER!

That’s correct, no typos here, beer is just far more complex than wine and thus makes for easier and better matches when it comes to what you’re washing dinner down with. Also, keep in mind that beer is harder to make, there’s more of a science involved and, as any Brewmaster will tell you, recreating the same beer 25 times or more in a year is a much harder task than bottling one variety of wine just once.

Try it at home: “The best way to experience the complexities of beer pairings is with Asian food,” says Chef Jeff. You can go hoppy or malty or light, but you’ll definitely see how different flavors come out with each one. “The Peking House in Royal Oak has a really great wine list, but if you go there you’ll see everyone who knows what’s up enjoying a bottle of beer — there’s a reason for that.” | **RDW**

*Spring Beer Dinner w/ Brewmaster Dan Rogers 4/24 • Big Rock Chophouse*  
*More info: [bigrockchophouse.com](http://bigrockchophouse.com)*