

I was born in Paris, the city of romance, and grew up in the Loire Valley wine region. This upbringing should in theory give me the perfect mixture of knowledge to pass on to any aspiring Romeos this Valentine's Day. Let the romance begin...

St Valentine's Day is the perfect day to impress your partner. For me, St Valentine's Day is very different from any other; it is all about sharing an experience. Some of you might go away for the weekend or give a personal present but for me it is all about sharing the love over an excellent dinner accompanied by a selection of seductive wines.

Seafood is a well known aphrodisiac, that's why I would recommend lobster for my starter. I love the whole process going into my local fishmonger's and selecting the finest, freshest lobster from the Cumbrian coast. It's this real detail that will impress and show your dedication to your partner. I would use a pink Champagne as an aperitif and as the perfect match for the lobster. The texture of the lobster is meaty and the greater structure of the pink Champagne compared with the white Champagne gives a more elegant taste as a combination, a perfect start for Valentine's Day. After the impact of the lobster I would soften the evening down by choosing a delicate fish like a sole for the fish course. I would use a famous Paris recipe that cannot fail to impress (especially if you are wooing a lady), called Sole Bonne Femme (Good Lady). This recipe combines the sole with a buttery sauce and mushrooms. My choice of wine would be a dry white with a lovely floral bouquet which you can find in the viognier grape from the New World. The complexity of the wine will match the finesse of the fish combined with the complexity of the sauce. The best venison I have had in my life came from Martindale. This is the most powerful dish giving the crescendo for the evening's main course.

I would recommend a stylish, masculine Italian wine like a Barolo from the Piedmont wine region produced from the nebbiolo grape. The wine has a fruity character with a full bodied structure and a soft finish, a perfect match for game. Again I am using the British influence on me when it comes to my choice of dessert. Sharrow Bay's chocolate and ginger pudding is hugely popular on Valentine's Day. This is a challenging dessert to match with a wine but I think I have the perfect answer. An xo (extra old) brandy, especially cognac, which I invite you to put into your freezer for a couple of days before serving. I don't have the explanation of why this works but please try it: you will be simply amazed by the experience.

I really hope this wine column has helped you with the difficult decisions this Valentine's Day. Please do bear in mind that all this advice is coming from a gentleman who is spending Valentine's Day working!

Joyeuse Amoureuse Journée

Nico

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