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By Michelle Locke, For The Associated Press

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Cookies and tea are nice, but cookies and wine can be fine.



Matthew Mead, AP

and tea are nice, but cookies and wine can be fine. Shown here are lemon almond cookies and late-harvest Riesling.

That's something Leah Kuo and Laura Englander, co-owners of Cookies & Corks found out a few years ago.

The pair already had turned their culinary and marketing smarts into a business selling gourmet cookies direct-to-consumers and through local merchants. Then, Englander got a new idea after delivering cookies to a Falls Church, Va., wine shop that was carrying their goodies.

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A wine tasting was going on and she was struck by a thought — How about pairing cookies with wine?

So, she and Kuo sat down and wrote out a business plan, got busy with recipes and enlisted the expertise of wine columnist Amy Reiley. The result is a line of gourmet and savory cookies intended specifically to pair with wine.

"It was fun to come up with these formulas from a cookie standpoint," says Kuo.

For instance, bakers usually use table salt which dissolves well and doesn't leave a distinct taste behind. But for wine pairings a salty finish can be an asset, so Kuo started using kosher salt, with its larger grains and

bigger taste wallop. "Then when you pair with wine, a buttery chardonnay, say, or cabernet franc or even a zinfandel, it really is a great pairing."

Looking for some holiday inspired pairings of your own?

Pamela Heiligenthal, co-founder and editor of Enobytes.com, suggests matching gingerbread with riesling or gewurztraminer, two aromatic white wines. "The spiciness of the cookie brings out the honey and peach notes of a riesling," she says. "Try it with a gewurztraminer to accentuate the spiciness of the cookie."

The holidays also are a good time to pull out the bubbly, and shortbread is a good match for a sparkling wine or blanc de blanc Champagne (sparkling wine from France's Champagne region made from chardonnay grapes). "The light and dry flavors of the bubbles cut through the firm, crumbly buttery goodness of the cookie," says Heiligenthal.

Another traditional favorite, lace cookies, can be paired with late-harvest riesling, with the wine's delicate flavors complementing the delicate crispness of the buttery cookies.

Sherry is another stand-by for sweet pairings.

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Liz Mendez, co-owner of Vera Chicago, a wine bar featuring Spanish cuisine in Chicago, suggests going with an amontillado-style sherry when serving cookies. This kind of sherry is in between dry and sweet, so it makes a nice contrast with desserts without overpowering them. Amontillado sherry also typically has a nutty flavor which goes well with rich treats.

Some suggested pairings from Kuo and Englander include their espresso chocolate peanut butter cookie and a zesty lemon cookie with prosecco.

The zesty lemon, lightly tart and sweet, is a versatile player, says Englander. "The fun part is when I put this cookie in front of people. They're always surprised to take the zesty lemon cookie and pair it with a merlot or a light pinot noir. Acidic red wines like those red wines are very complementary with this acidic lemon cookie."

Kuo also likes the idea of using cookie-and-wine pairings as a way to get people thinking about mixing and matching flavors. "It was so interesting to think of this as more than just a fun way to entertain, which it is, but also a way to educate people in an accessible manner on how to do food and wine pairings."

Cookies and wine — not the most conventional pairing, but it just may turn out to be your cup of tea.

Online:

Englander and Kuo's website: <http://cookiesandcorks.com/>

Heiligenthal's website: <http://enobytes.com>

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