Cookie-wine pairings add zip to afternoon tea

By MICHELLE LOCKE
For The Associated Press

(AP) - Cookies and tea are nice, but cookies and wine can be fine.

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.

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 cabernet franc or even a zinfandel, it really is a great pairing.

Another traditional favorite, lace cookies, can be paired with late-harvest riesling, with the wine's buttery goodness of the cookie," says Heiligenthal.

Sherry is another stand-by for sweet pairings.

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 complementory 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 entetain, 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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