FOOD & DRINK

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Shortbread and Champagne? That's the way the wine-cookie pairing crumbles

By: Michelle Locke, The Associated Press  
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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 savoury 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."

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 flavours of the bubbles cut through the firm, crumbly buttery goodness of the cookie," says Heiligenthal.

Another traditional favourite, lace cookies, can be paired with late-harvest riesling, with the wine's delicate flavours complementing the delicate crispness of the butter cookies.

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

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Online:

England and Kuo’s website: http://cookiesandcorks.com/
Heiligenthal’s website: http://enobytes.com

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