

The Restaurant at Meadowood

Imagine what it's like to be the wine director and sommelier at a three-star Michelin restaurant, one of only two such restaurants in the entire state of California. When most people think "Michelin" they think of a stuffy, formal place with needlessly fancy food and rigid wine service. Yet you won't catch wine director, Michael Ireland strutting through the dining room, demanding a moment of silence as he tastes one of the restaurant's prized 1,200 bottles on a silver tasteevin.

"We pride ourselves on our competent, knowledgeable, and friendly sommeliers and service," he explains, echoing the theme of this relaxed country club-style restaurant, set in the greenery of the Napa Valley and the crown jewel of the elegant Relais & Châteaux Meadowood Resort. "We have wines from around the world to suit all tastes and budgets, daily wine discussions and frequent blind tastings so our sommeliers are prepared to help guests pair wine with Christopher's cuisine."

"Christopher" refers to Christopher Kostow, a two-star Michelin chef before he was 30, who had worked in some of the finest Michelin-rated restaurants in France before coming to America and taking over the prestigious dining room at Meadowood, a favourite spot among the world's movers and shakers.

"One thing that has always been impressed upon me about Chef Kostow's food is his use of texture," Ireland says. "He deepens the complexity of his dishes with multiple layers of texture. I have adopted that into my wine selection process as it's not enough to find the right wine or beverage for a given dish – we need to push further and touch on its textural nuance."

As examples, Ireland mentions the Guinea Hen Baked in Salt, Katahdin Potato, Chanterelle à la Grecque with Mélisse (a green vegetable), paired with Palmina Barbara, Santa Barbara County 2009. "Palmina is a winery set



Outdoor wine tasting at Meadowood

up by Steve and Chrystal Clifton to highlight Italian varietals in a traditional style. For me, a great Pinot Noir would run over some of the more nuanced aspects of this dish. We needed something light and bright with a defined acidity to keep up with the lemon on the chanterelles. This wine has it, along with a pronounced, almost gamey, earthiness that creates a wonderful bridge to the Guinea hen itself."

As a higher priced example, Ireland recommends pairing the Roederer Estate, L'Ermitage Anderson Valley 2002 with Baked Potato Cream, Borage, Oyster and Caviar. "Here a still wine would have difficulty working," he explains. "The creaminess of the dish almost demands bubbles/. I went with this cuvée because its green apple brightness paired well with the oyster and caviar, while the toasty, brioche notes tended to the 'baked' aspect of the potato."

Since Ireland strives to feature local wines and this is one of the world's most important growing regions, you can rest assured that you're in for a singular experience. ♦

— MARISA D'VARI

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ON THE WINE LIST

Number of wines: 1,250
 Wines by the glass: 60
 Most expensive wine: \$5000
 Least expensive wine: \$35
 Dinner for two without wine: \$225