

# Animal

# Style

*Today Show*  
sommelier  
and author  
of *Big Macs &  
Burgundy*  
Vanessa  
Price brings  
her high/low  
pairings to the  
West Coast.



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BY  
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avoring a burger is the definitive American culinary pastime. In popularity, even pizza doesn't come remotely close to burgers in the United States. The burger market sector raked in \$162.8 billion in 2023—three times as much as the Italian-American staple.

Few foodstuffs can beat a beef patty and two buns in the nostalgia department, too. As far as classic Americana is concerned, there's no burger chain quite like In-N-Out, which has captured the beating hearts (and pop culture fanaticism) of its diners to a cult-like degree.

While I am a self-acknowledged Big Mac-loving gal, I must admit to a very real habit of being sidetracked by quests to In-N-Out anytime I'm in California. Yes, it might mean tacking on an extra 45 minutes of L.A. traffic to my journey. Yes, it's worth it.

Once that burger, fries and shake are safely buckled in, I recommend chaste patience on the torturous journey home, the scent of those hot and crispy fries wafting enticingly out of the bag. Why wait, you ask? The only thing that can make this iconic meal better is the right glass of wine.





# Classic Hamburger

Hirsch Vineyards 2023  
Bohan-Dillon Pinot Noir,  
Sonoma Coast

While red Burgundy might be where I lay my Big Mac-loving head at night, the quintessential hamburger at In-N-Out is an entirely different beast. It subsequently requires a totally different expression of Pinot Noir. That's because the patty packs a mighty protein punch, while the bun—made with an old-fashioned, slow-rising sponge dough—can tame tannins. It altogether makes the burger a worthy companion to fresh red-fruited Pinot from California's Sonoma Coast, with medium tannins and bright acid. The wine delivers a lean body that won't overwhelm the burger's onion, lettuce and tomato trio, which might otherwise register blandly as watery crunch, and the acidity necessary to match the tang of the "secret" ketchup and mayo spread.

Winemaker Jasmine Hirsch of Hirsch Vineyards offers a superb cuvée, Bohan-Dillon, seemingly made for this pairing. This blend from three estate vineyards reflects Burgundy's village philosophy, creating a delightful and affordable bottling.



There is no pairing more essential than French fries and bubbly. This is, in fact, a meal in its entirety. Burgers, tenders and shakes be damned—if I have fresh, hand-cut fries prepared in 100% sunflower oil at the ready, a glass of something sparkling is all I need to find karmic bliss.

While Champagne is a standard-bearer for this Frenchie combo, a domestic iteration can be just as satisfying and much more economical (especially in light of recent world events). Schramsberg, an OG of California traditional-method sparkling wine production, needs no introduction. And their Blanc de Blancs? Never has a yeast-laden, fruit-baked, acid-teeming and fine-bubble bottling felt so right alongside the salty, greasy, savory crunch of a French fry. This 100% Chardonnay style's mousse and acidity act as a squeegee on the palate, wiping the whole glutinous affair clean and preparing you for the next bite.

# French Fries

Schramsberg 2021  
Blanc de Blancs  
Chardonnay,  
North Coast, California





# TRIXIE M<sup>♡</sup>TEL

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The In-N-Out cheeseburger pairs well with a New World Bordeaux Blend. With bold flavors and velveteen complexity, this wine perfectly complements the burger in all its meaty, cheesy glory. Its potent but polished tannins enhance the rich cheese without overwhelming the dish. The secret sauce dances on your palate, led by the wine.

I suggest a California wine made without Merlot, as warmer temperatures suit grapes that retain acidity. Napanook, from Dominus Estate in Yountville, is the ideal choice, offering a taste of pricey Dominus from younger vines at a friendlier price. Faced with an increasingly warm and arid California climate, the estate made the salient move of uprooting Merlot to focus on Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. This move is on the edge of a radical choice, as Merlot is a hallmark of California wine-growing and typical in a Bordeaux Blend.

## Cheeseburger

**Dominus 2017 Estate  
Napanook, Bordeaux-  
Style Red Blend,  
Napa Valley**



# “Animal Style” Burger

Vall Llach 2022 Embruix  
Red Blend, Priorat  
*Spain*

Once we go “animal style,” we’ve gotta head to Europe. This popular offering on the chain’s “not-so-secret menu”—a beef patty grilled with mustard and served with pickles, lettuce, grilled onions and extra spread on a toasted bun—turns up the acidic intensity and adds a dollop of onion-driven sweetness. This is where Old World wines shine, delivering acid and earthy richness.

Red wines from Priorat, located in the Catalonia region of north-eastern Spain, are especially renowned for their intense flavors and robust character. Their unique terroir expression comes from the region’s reddish-black slate soils with small deposits of mica quartz called llicorella. Think of it as a Spanish version of a Bordeaux blend—Garnacha for ripeness, Cariñena for tannin, Cabernet Sauvignon for acid and body, Syrah for seasoning and, occasionally, Merlot for fruit.

Even at the entry level, these wines can usually age, even if we don’t have the patience to wait. Embruix, the young-vine wine from Vall Llach, has the density we need for our cheese and patty, brooding fruit for our mixed fresh/cooked veg combo and mouthwatering, mineral-driven acid that carries the entire palate party over the finish line. I may have to do a drive-through dance on this one.



# Neapolitan Shake

Donnafugata  
2023 Ben Ryé  
Zibibbo, Passito  
di Pantelleria,  
Sicily

The first order of business? Wrapping your mouth around the words “Passito di Pantelleria.” Second is forgiving me for making the most expensive wine choice of the mix a sweet wine. But I’d argue that it’s actually too cheap: This wine is made from Zibibbo (Muscat of Alexandria) grapes, which were once favored by Nefertiti. They’re grown on the island of Pantelleria, where strong sun and winds require vines to be planted in holes for protection. (Do you feel back pain just thinking about vine maintenance like I do?) After harvest, the grapes are dried on straw mats, greatly reducing yields, and aged in bottles before release. Calling this wine a delight is an understatement. It’s a just-right foil for In-N-Out’s sugary Neapolitan shake, an indulgent combo of the chain’s chocolate, vanilla and strawberry milkshake flavors. Pro-tip: Wait eight seconds between sips of shake and wine to reduce numbness and prevent acid-induced curdling.