

RECIPES

Which Wines Pair Well With ... Sushi

You don't have to stick with sake or beer. Here are 10 suggestions for white, red and sparkling wines—and why these matches work



To handle the diversity of sushi served over the course of a meal, a crisp Champagne serves as an excellent stand-in for more typical beverage pairings. (Jonny Valiant)



By Owen Dugan

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“What grows together goes together” is often invoked as a maxim of [wine-and-food matching](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/abcs-of-food-and-wine-pairing) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/abcs-of-food-and-wine-pairing] . A classic Lyonnaise dish like [coq au vin](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/dining-tip-julia-and-emerils-coq-au-vin-50807) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/dining-tip-julia-and-emerils-coq-au-vin-50807] , for example, will work well with a [red Burgundy](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Burgundy&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=nu) [https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Burgundy&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=nu] from the surrounding region. But this generally useful rule should not preclude exploration. If we treated that maxim as a straitjacket, we wouldn't have the Reese's [Peanut Butter Cup](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/a-classic-remade-48358) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/a-classic-remade-48358] , among many other beautiful and surprising combinations.

Likewise, if we followed that rule to Japan, which has precious little wine production, we would end up drinking [sake](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/cracking-the-sake-code-48249) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/cracking-the-sake-code-48249]

, which is a fine solution, or beer every time we go out for sushi. (I asked a friend who lived in Japan for over a decade, and he said that beer is the preferred beverage pairing with sushi, at an estimated 80 percent.) But this is *Wine Spectator*, and we like to play around with matching.

Is White or Red Wine Best with Sushi?

Asking “What wine goes with sushi?” is a little like asking what [wine goes with poultry](https://www.winespectator.com/recipes/search?wine_type=&food_type=Poultry&keyword=&submitted=Y) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/recipes/search?wine_type=&food_type=Poultry&keyword=&submitted=Y\]](https://www.winespectator.com/recipes/search?wine_type=&food_type=Poultry&keyword=&submitted=Y) . A meal of sushi will typically deliver

a parade of fish and a range of richness, texture and flavor that can suit different wines. Depending on where and how you eat, you might also get boldly vinegary rice, full-flavored soy sauce and mustardy wasabi in most bites.



Seasoning and accompaniments such as wasabi and palate-cleansing pickled ginger can dramatically change how a wine shows with different bites of sushi. (Jonny Valiant)

The relative simplicity of [sushi](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/the-abcs-of-sushi-48256) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/the-abcs-of-sushi-48256\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/the-abcs-of-sushi-48256) —rice, raw or lightly treated fish, and possibly a few other straightforward ingredients—is what makes it so fascinating. Differences among fish and preparation are thrown into stark relief. Fish that seem similar—at least when they are cut into filets, cooked and sauced—seem wildly different in their bare state as sushi. So I try to choose wines that stand back, whether they are white or red.

Sushi Pairing Tip #1: Choose Dry, Crisp Bubbles

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a lot of Asahi Dry gets drunk by Japanese nationals at sushi bars in the U.S. Translated to wine, that means Champagne, [blanc de blancs](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=blanc+de+blancs) [\[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=blanc+de+blancs\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=blanc+de+blancs) , please. A traditionally made, all-Chardonnay sparkling wine will cover a lot of sushi, and is even okay with wasabi and soy sauce, which for the record are seen as overused and unnecessary by many sushi aficionados.

Recommended Blanc de Blancs Champagnes for Sushi

ALFRED GRATIEN Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne 2015
[\https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1303074/name/alfred-gratien-

brut-blanc-de-blancs-champagne-2015] (93 points, \$90): This mouthwatering Champagne plays a refined mouthfeel against a crisp spine of bright acidity, framing flavors of pineapple, black cherry, blanched almond, lime blossoms and graphite. Minerally, lingering finish.—*Alison Napjus*

LOUIS ROEDERER Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne 2016

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1302869/name/louis-roederer-brut-blanc-de-blancs-champagne-2016>] (92, \$115): Racy acidity backs flavors of grapefruit sorbet, white raspberry, poached apricot, toast and pickled ginger. The citrusy profile carries through on the mouthwatering finish.—*A.N.*

PIERRE GIMONNET & FILS Brut Blanc de Blancs Champagne Cuvée Gastronome 2018

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1303716/name/pierre-gimonnet-%26-fils-brut-blanc-de-blancs-champagne-cuv%C3%A9e-gastronome-2018>] (91, \$74): A fresh, focused Champagne, with smoke and oyster shell notes serving as a minerally overtone for the flavors of nectarine, salted almond, white blossoms and Meyer lemon peel. —*A.N.*



A delicate fish such as raw fluke calls for a lighter style of dry white wine. (Jonny Valiant)

Sushi Pairing Tip #2: Think About the Fat in the Fish

Typically, the sushi chef will welcome you with lighter dishes, and you will want to stay with light wines. If not Champagne, maybe something crisp from the [Loire Valley](#)

[[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Loire&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=null_ca)

submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Loire&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=null_ca
. I generally avoid oaky **[[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=oaky)**

page=1&submitted=Y&word=oaky] and overly fruity whites with sushi. If you see a wine described as having been fermented in [stainless steel](#)

[<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/is-sweetness-influenced-by-fermenting-a-wine-in-oak-vs-stainless-steel-52541>] or having "mineral

[<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/what-does-mineral-refer-to-in-wine-tasting-notes>] "

notes, give it a whirl. As the meal progresses, you might get heftier fish like toro that like more substantial wines. I've had good luck with [Vermentino](#)

[<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/vermentino-57633>] , which can be refreshing and a little saline or marine. This is also the point where you can bring in a crisper style of still

Chardonnay [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/chardonnay-57804>] , one that doesn't taste like toothpicks and Juicy Fruit.

Recommended Loire Whites for Sushi

HENRI BOURGEOIS Sancerre d'Antan Terroir de Silex 2022

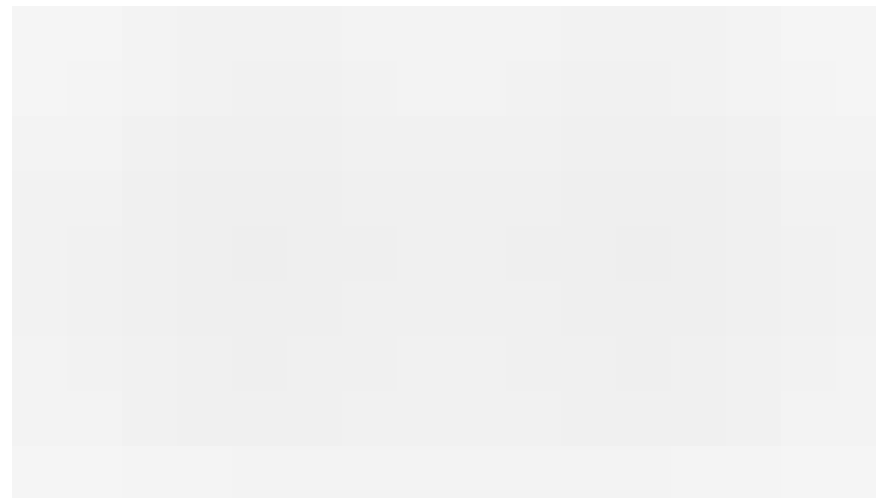
[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1312660/name/henri-bourgeois-sancerre-d%27antan-terroir-de-silex-2022>] (92, \$60): This white's bright, lemony freshness is filled out with round, ripe notes of orchard fruit, jicama and ginger. There's good tension thanks to bracing acidity and finely crushed mineral details.—*Kristen Bieler*

DOMAINE DES BAUMARD Savennières 2020

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1310232/name/domaine-des-baumard-savenni%C3%A8res-2020>] (90, \$45): This savory, mineral-driven white is defined by lemon and crisp apple notes layered with elements of smoke, gunflint and crushed stone. Offers steely acidity and real structure, with an upright spine and grip guiding the firm finish, which lingers, with hints of dried green herbs.—*K.B.*

PATIENT COTTAT Sancerre Anciennes Vignes 2022

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1312788/name/patient-cottat-sancerre-anciennes-vignes-2022>] (89, \$36): More savory than fruit-driven, this leads with gunflint, smoke and dried thyme notes. Quince and fleshy melon accents merge with oyster shell brininess, while tangy acidity powers the finish.—*K.B.*



Fattier fish like salmon can hold up to a richer white wine or a light, elegant red such as Pinot Noir or Gamay. (Jonny Valiant)

Sushi Pairing Tip #3: Reach for Red Wine with Richer Fish

At the heavier end of the meal, when the fish are fattier and often more flavorful, I typically use a little more wasabi and soy sauce, which I often will skip altogether at the beginning. Soy sauce is an umami bomb so I think first of [red Burgundy](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Burgundy&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=nu) [https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Burgundy&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=nu] (or other Pinot Noir [<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/pinot-noir-57812>]), with its affinity to earthy mushroom dishes. If you're shy of Burgundy because it's on the pricey side,

you could try a more affordable red wine, *cru* Beaujolais

[[https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?](https://www.winespectator.com/wine/search?submitted=Y&page=1&winery=Beaujolais&text_search_flag=everything&search_by=all&scorelow=85&scorehigh=-1&pricelow=-1&pricehigh=-1&case_prod=n)

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; though sometimes very fruity, these wines, made from Gamay

[<https://www.winespectator.com/articles/what-kind-of-wine-grape-is-gamay-57107>] , can

handle soy sauce and the attack of wasabi.

Recommended Red Burgundies and Cru Beaujolais for Sushi

BOUCHARD PÈRE & FILS Nuits-St.-Georges 2019

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1307794/name/bouchard-p%C3%A8re-%26-fils-nuits-st-georges-2019>] (91, \$65): A pretty red, featuring bright, pure cherry, raspberry, rose and spice flavors. This well-structured version is more elegant than powerful, with fine earth- and mineral-tinged length.—*Bruce Sanderson*

JOSEPH DROUHIN Santenay 2021

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1307349/name/joseph-drouhin-santenay-2021>] (90, \$60): An airy red highlighted by bright cherry, raspberry, floral and earth aromas. Immediately appealing and harmonious, thanks to its elegant profile.—*B.S.*

JONATHAN PEY Morgon Bellevue 2022

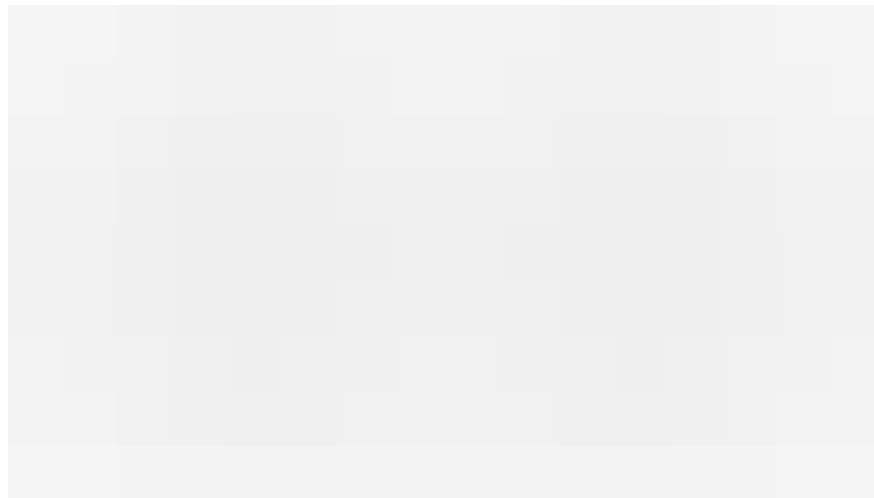
[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1307831/name/jonathan-pey-morgon-bellevue-2022>] (91, \$35): A bright, vibrant, delicious style, with fragrant dried rose petal, violet and dusty earth overlaying sweet notes of wild raspberry and dried strawberry. Anise, smoke and dried herb hints arrive on the medium-length, snappy close.—*K.B.*

CHÂTEAU DU MOULIN-À-VENT Moulin-à-Vent 2021

[<https://www.winespectator.com/wine/wine-detail/id/1310227/name/ch%C3%A2teau-du-moulin-%C3%A0-vent-moulin-%C3%A0-vent-2021>] (90, \$45): Gentle-edged and lean, with licorice and cassis notes spilling out on a supple palate. This showS mineral intrigue, with hints of warm spices and grilled herbs. Finishes bright, with a kiss of orange peel acidity and a smoked pepper detail.—*K.B.*

Sushi Pairing Tip #4: Stay in the Shallow End of the Wine Pool

Keep your pairing picks on the light side, flavor- and body-wise. (Here are [handy lists of wines](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/abcs-of-food-and-wine-pairing#weightlists) [https://www.winespectator.com/articles/abcs-of-food-and-wine-pairing#weightlists] roughly in order of "weight.") I stay out of scraps over how you "must" drink this with that. But in the case of sushi, you're not doing the wine or the food any favors by serving a Napa Cab that is swinging for the fences with big flavors and alcohol above 15 percent. The magic of sushi is its subtlety. When you're that keyed into noticing narrow differences between courses, you don't want a big loud wine ruining the party.



A flight of tuna, using three different cuts and three different preparations, provides ample opportunity to experiment with how small changes can influence a wine pairing. (Andrew and Carrie Purcell)

Pairing Wine and Sushi at Home

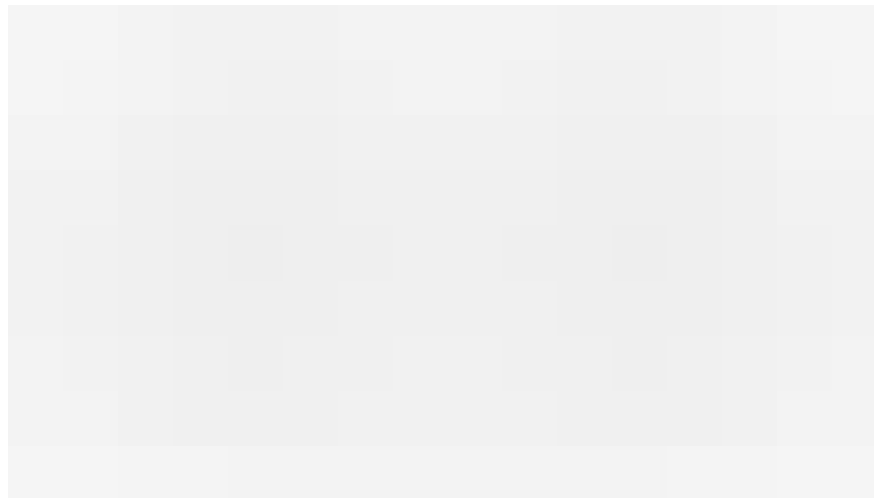
If you want to play around to see how different wines fare with different types of sushi, a fun way to do that is with a sushi- and wine-tasting party at home. Some years ago, I worked with chef Marco Moreira, of 15 East @ Tocqueville in New York City, on [a sushi menu for the magazine \[https://www.winespectator.com/articles/tuna-sushi-flight-51909\]](https://www.winespectator.com/articles/tuna-sushi-flight-51909). Chefs often prepare three different cuts from the same animal, each cooked differently to show off their particular qualities, on one plate. Moreira applied this idea to sushi by preparing tuna three ways. His recipes here, a selection of three as a flight, showcase the distinctions among the cuts.

The differences in the three dishes—based on both cut and preparation technique—are subtle, but clear. The otoro is the fattiest, and very luscious. It's seasoned only with soy, and has direct flavor. The akami is the leanest, and is flash-blanching, then marinated in cold dashi. Though you might not really identify the dashi if you didn't know it was there, it does season the fish. The bluefin cheek, which is scored and then torched for a few seconds, has the most flavor and is more savory than the others. "Sushi is not always raw," noted Moreira. "It's often cooked, cured, torched or poached."

You could use his flight as an opportunity to experiment and see which wines you enjoy most with each cut, such as trying a blanc de blancs; a cuvée with the typical blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier; and a [blanc de noirs \[https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=blanc+de+noirs\]](https://www.winespectator.com/glossary?page=1&submitted=Y&word=blanc+de+noirs) or a rosé Champagne with the fattiest. Or set up a flight with a crisp, dry, light still white wine, a medium-bodied white and a light red.

Recipe: Tuna Sushi Flight

Moreira's preferred proportions for these are about 1/2 ounce of fish to 1/3 ounce of rice per piece. Temperature is crucial; just as you don't eat cold brie, you want the fish tempered. While most aficionados say room temperature is best, anecdotal evidence shows that many people favor cool.



After thinly slicing the tuna, mold a small amount of rice by hand and drape the fish on top. (Andrew and Carrie Purcell)

Ingredients

- 4 ounces bluefin cheek
- 4 ounces otoro (bluefin underbelly)
- 4 ounces akami (the vivid red bluefin cut from along the spine)
- 8 ounces sushi rice (recipe below)
- Dashi bonito broth (recipe below)

Preparation

1. Portion the bluefin cheek, then score shallowly in a cross-hatch pattern. Season lightly with cracked peppercorn and sea salt. Use a butane torch to sear for just a few seconds, then sprinkle with a little lemon juice. Place on rice (recipe below) molded in your hands, and serve.
2. Portion the otoro, then brush one side lightly with soy sauce. Place soy-side down on rice molded in your hands, and serve.
3. Blanch the akami fillet for one second, then shock in ice water to stop the cooking. Marinate in dashi-bonito broth for 2 to 6 hours. Portion and place on rice molded in your hands, and serve. *Serves 8 as an appetizer.*

To Make the Sushi Rice

Ingredients

- 3 cups sushi rice
- 1/3 cup rice vinegar
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt

Preparation

1. Put the rice in a large bowl and wash with cold water until the water runs almost clear. Drain rice in a colander and set aside for about 30 minutes.
2. Soak the rice in 3 1/2 cups water in a rice cooker for 30 minutes. Start the cooker. When rice is done, let it steam for 15 minutes.
3. Mix rice vinegar, sugar and salt in a saucepan set over low heat until the sugar dissolves. Let cool.
4. Spread the hot steamed rice over a large plate and sprinkle the vinegar mixture over the rice while folding it together quickly. Use immediately.

To Make the Dashi Bonito Broth

Ingredients

- 5 6-inch squares dried kombu (edible kelp)
- 1 cup bonito flakes, tightly packed

Preparation

1. Gently wipe some of the powder from the kombu. Combine in a large pot with 2 quarts of water over medium heat. Bring almost to a boil, then remove the kombu.
2. Add the bonito, bring to a full boil, then turn off the heat and let stand for 2 minutes. Strain the broth through a fine sieve and chill.

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