

# The Vineyard at Painted Moon

## Book Club Discussion Guide

### SUSAN MALLERY'S WINE PAIRINGS

Let me start by saying there is no right or wrong way to drink wine. Drink what you like with whatever foods you like, but maybe be open to trying something different. The lone exception being please don't put ice in your wine, I beg you! 😊 It dilutes the flavor and the impurities in the water totally change the balance of the wine. If you don't like your wine getting warm, then use a thermal glass.

Okay—basic wine pairings. The rule of thumb is to balance the flavors and intensity. So a lighter wine is paired with lighter tasting foods. A heavy wine will crush the flavors of a light tasting food and a heavy, spicy dish will make a light wine tasteless. Also, know that food can completely change the flavor of wine and vice versa. Don't believe me? Taste a dessert wine like an ice wine. Too sweet? Too thick? Try it with a tart lemon bar. Suddenly the dessert wine makes sense. The tartness balances the sweetness.

There are dozens of types of wines, so I'm going to go with a few basics that are easy to find pretty much anywhere in the country. My suggestions are simply that—my suggestions. They will give you a starting point. If you enjoy wine, then playing with food and wine can be so much fun.

#### **Sauvignon Blanc**

This is a lighter, fruitier white wine. It's best served chilled and is very drinkable. Try it with goat cheese, either plain or lightly flavored. It pairs well with salads made with a light vinaigrette and summer fruits. Honestly, a glass of Sauvignon Blanc and a ripe nectarine is pretty amazing.

## Chardonnay

Chardonnay has changed over the years. Most winemakers are aging Chardonnay in stainless steel barrels rather than in oak, so the flavor is brighter, without the butteriness. I personally love an oaky, buttery Chardonnay, but they aren't everyone's taste. Either Chardonnay is great with a light flavored fish, especially if there is a delicious cream or butter sauce. Shrimp Scampi is a classic. For a good cheese pairing, try brie on a piece of French baguette with a glass of Chardonnay. And you're welcome!

## Pinot Noir

Try to find one from Oregon. They have the best climate for growing Pinot. There are a few good ones in Northern California, but if you see one from Oregon, give it a taste. Pinot Noir is a lighter red wine, but often with a hint of sweetness. Nothing overpowering, but that sweet edge gives it the ability to pair with some unexpected foods. What you want is a sweet/savory combination. Pork is perfect, but one of the best pairings is Thai food. Seriously. Try it. For a cheese pairing, either burrata or mozzarella would be great. Add basil, a little tomato and olive oil and you have something magical.

## Cabernet Sauvignon

I'll admit, this is a personal favorite for me. I love a wine with a lot of body and flavor. Cabs and cab blends often make their way the dinner table at my house. Pair your Cabernet Sauvignon with beef, salmon and heavier chicken dishes. Also tomato based pasta dishes. I speak from experience when I say Cab and a burger are delightful. For a cheese pairing try gouda or blue cheese. Last but not least...dark chocolate and Cabernet Sauvignon. So good and the perfect way to end a meal.

## Syrah

If you can find a Washington State Syrah, please try it. They're really good here. Syrah is a heavier red wine so it goes well with heavily spiced and braised meats. If you're not sure if you like red wines, don't start here. There's a lot of flavor. For a cheese pairing, try a nice sharp cheddar or a blue or Stilton cheese.

## Champagne

I know you already know this but a sparkling wine can only be called champagne if it comes from the Champagne region of France. Otherwise it's sparkling wine. To open a bottle without "popping" the cork, hold the cork in one hand and hold the base of the bottle in the other. Rotate the base rather than the cork. I know the pop sounds fun, but the flying cork is dangerous. Plus, you lose a lot of champagne and about half the carbonation! Champagne is a magical wine that literally goes with everything. Really! Having something greasy? The champagne will cut through the grease and bring out the best flavors. Fast food? Tacos? Crab puffs? Champagne works. Brunch—well, we already know that one. Birthday cake? Best with champagne.

So those are my suggestions for pairing food and wine. It all comes down to what you like. Don't be afraid to experiment. If you want to know more, see if there's a wine store nearby. They often have tastings on the weekends. Once you've explored the basic wines, you can branch out to other wines and different countries. Cheers!!

## RECIPES

Here are two delicious variations on a basic quinoa salad, completely adaptable to your tastes. Use whichever ingredients you like, omit any you don't. And hey—if you don't like quinoa, use three cups of cooked and cooled pasta instead.

### Thai-Inspired Quinoa Salad with Peanut Dressing

- 1 ½ cups dry quinoa
- 1 large carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 2 green onions with tops, sliced
- ¼ cup cucumber, diced
- ½ cup peanuts
- ½ cup fresh cilantro, minced
- ½ tsp sea salt

#### *Peanut Dressing*

- ¼ cup creamy peanut butter
- ¼ cup + 2 Tbsp mild rice vinegar
- ½ tsp toasted sesame oil
- ½ tsp fresh minced ginger
- ¼ cup vegetable oil

Cook the quinoa using your favorite method. I use my Instant Pot pressure cooker. I use 1 ½ cups of dry quinoa to 1 ¾ cups water, cook at high pressure for 3 minutes and allow 8 minutes of natural release. Allow to cool.

Whisk together the dressing ingredients. Add all ingredients to a bowl and stir well. Allow flavors to marinate. Serve cold or warm.

## Italian-Inspired Quinoa Salad with Vinaigrette

- 1 ½ cups dry quinoa
- 1 large carrot, peeled and diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- ½ cup cauliflower, diced
- ¼ cup frozen peas, thawed
- ¼ cup frozen corn, thawed
- ½ cup cherry tomatoes, quartered
- 4 oz mozzarella cheese, diced
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, minced

### *Vinaigrette*

If desired, you can use about ¾ cup of your favorite ready-made Italian salad dressing.

- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/8 tsp each of salt and pepper

Cook the quinoa using your favorite method. I use my Instant Pot pressure cooker. I use 1 ½ cups of dry quinoa to 1 ¾ cups water, cook at high pressure for 3 minutes and allow 8 minutes of natural release. Allow to cool.

Whisk together the dressing ingredients. Add all ingredients to a bowl and stir well. Allow flavors to marinate. Serve cold or room temperature.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Please note, these questions contain spoilers about the story. We recommend you finish ***The Vineyard at Painted Moon*** before reading any of the questions below.

1. At the Summer Solstice party at the beginning of the book, Giorgio's proposal made several characters reassess their own lives. What was it about this moment that made such an impact? Discuss how this propelled both Mackenzie's story line and Stephanie's. (In fiction writing terms, this is known as the "inciting incident.")
2. What did you think of Mackenzie and Rhys's marriage when the book began? What was your first clue that all was not well?
3. Barbara and Mackenzie shared a love of the land of Bel Apres. Discuss how this influenced their decisions.
4. Mackenzie doesn't have to leave Bel Apres. When she and Rhys decide to divorce, she doesn't have to lose anything but her marriage. No one would care if she got a divorce and then stuck around. In light of all that, why do you think she walked away? What price was she willing to pay for her decision? Did she ultimately pay as severe a price she feared she would?
5. What did you think of the way Rhys's behavior changed after he learned that Mackenzie was pregnant? How did his reaction contrast with Bruno's? Were you surprised when Mackenzie realized she was pregnant, or did you pick up on some foreshadowing that gave you a clue?

6. Susan Mallery promises readers that her books will have a satisfying ending. Were you satisfied with the ending of ***The Vineyard at Painted Moon***? Why or why not? Would your answer change if Mallery hadn't written the epilog? The wrap-up of Barbara's storyline certainly couldn't be described as happy, but did it satisfy your sense of justice? Do you think the book would have worked if Barbara had gotten a happy ending? Why or why not?
7. Four was the youngest of Barbara's children, but the wisest. What do you think made her so wise?
8. Discuss Stephanie's journey. In what ways did she change as the book progressed? What moments motivated her to change?
9. What are the themes of this book? How does each story line—Mackenzie's, Stephanie's, and Barbara's—reinforce these themes?
10. How did you feel about the setting of ***The Vineyard at Painted Moon***? Were you surprised that Washington state has such a robust winemaking community, or did you already know? Did the book make you want to visit that part of the country?
11. If you were going to name your dream vineyard, what would you call it?
12. Share a wine-related memory with the group.