

Red, White and Wine

By Courtney Cochran, Wine Consultant and Sommelier

This much is obvious: as Americans, we love our country. But did you know that we love wine too? Despite the fact that the US of A has traditionally been a beer and spirits nation, a recent Gallup poll shows that in the last year wine surpassed its alcoholic peers in the eyes of American drinkers, usurping both beer and spirits to become the freedom land's alcoholic beverage of choice.

For the first time since the poll began in 1992 Gallup reports that 39% of Americans said that they drink wine most often, compared to just 36% who cited beer. The remainder prefers spirits, with a small percentage apparently liking all three equally. The results have led many to reevaluate what kind of nation we are. Folks are wondering: are we still a beer-guzzling, NFL-watching manly man's land, or by contrast, a country of wine-sipping sophisticates fixated on securing opera tickets and a table at the latest luxe restaurant?

The reality is that we're neither. Statistically speaking, the poll's results are close enough, when the margin of error is taken into account, to be practically the same, which puts wine and beer in a dead heat for America's preferred alcoholic beverage. What's more, the idea that wine is a sophisticated drink while beer the swill of the lesser refined is also nonsense. What some have comically referred to as an ongoing debate between the "Chablis and brie" crowd and the "beer and burger" set deflects attention from the fact that there can be both sophisticated beers and truly pedestrian wines.

Moreover, the United States Department of Agriculture reports that 45% of Americans don't even consume alcohol at all. This statistic throws still more mud in the face of those who would corral the American public on opposite sides of an imaginary divide: beer drinking brutes on one side, wine sipping socialites on the other. It turns out that lots of beer drinkers drink wine, and plenty of wine drinkers enjoy the occasional cold brew. And then there are the nearly half of all folks in this land who don't drink at all.

And so, what exactly does it mean that Americans report preferring wine to beer? Are we, like the wine loving French, going to begin eating baguettes by the bucket load and campaigning for 35-hour work weeks? Not likely. At the end of the day, we're all American, whether we prefer grain to grapes, or the left to the right. That's pretty much all that can be said with certainty in response to Gallup's latest news.

Wine recommendation:

Saintsbury Carneros Garnet Pinot Noir

A great example of Pinot Noir from one of California's pioneering producers of the stuff, this wine is redolent with red fruit backed up by subtle spice characteristic of the grape variety. Its soft tannins give it great mouthfeel and structure. Drink this versatile wine with salmon, chicken or pork, or enjoy it alone.

<http://www.saintsbury.com/index.html>

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