

Fish Tacos perfect pairing

By Bill and Karen Garlough – August 2008

This summer, we have done our fair share of backyard grilling, including fish, chicken and beef dishes. Being the adventurous type, Karen is always looking for variety. While sitting out on the patio, our thoughts turned to Mexico. One of our favorite dishes is fish tacos which we usually enjoy with a cold glass of Mexican beer.

Karen issued a challenge to me; find a good wine to pair with fish tacos. Given all of the flavors and spices, this is not an easy pairing. After learning the sauce for the recipe will be mayonnaise and yogurt based, a couple of white wines came to mind. While the herb, peppers and lime flavors of tacos might pair well with the herbaceous and citrusy New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs, I decided that the Spanish Albarinos are the way to go.



Karen and Bill Garlough, owners and founders of My Chef Catering.

Wine Facts

While Spain has a long and storied wine history, it was always known for Sherry, sparkling cava and red wine. Very little attention was paid to white wines and their quality suffered. Today, the Rias Baixas wine region, located in Spain's northwest corner, is making exciting white wines. White Albarino grapes are the star in this region, with a refreshing style that is an ideal partner for seafood.

The Rias Baixas wine region is a rural part of Spain, and until better transportation routes were recently opened, was somewhat isolated. It has its own distinct customs and language and has a spirit of independence. The people of this region are renowned fishermen and catch fish both off-shore and far out to sea. Seafood dominates their diet and Empanadas are a local specialty. Empanadas are made with pie dough that is folded over and the edges crimped. The filling is commonly seafood, sautéed in olive oil with tomatoes, peppers and garlic. This seafood stuffed bite-sized pie reminds me of fish tacos, as both are shaped in a half-moon and have similar fillings. With Albarino their wine of choice, it seems natural like a natural pairing for this dish.

Food Pairing

Albarino wines tend to have good acidity, with notes of honey. While they are light, citrusy and refreshing in nature, they have a slightly creamy style that is all their own. This is what tips the scale for me to choose Spanish Albarino whites over New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs.

Karen's Recipe Notes

Fish tacos traditionally feature deep fried fish. In this healthier version, we grilled cod but Tilapia or any mild white fish will do. Corn tortillas are the favorite in Mexico but we found that flour tortillas held up better and were easier to eat. The broccoli slaw mix was colorful, had a nice crunch and good nutritional value.

We started out with a casual appetizer of fresh guacamole (purchased from a local Mexican restaurant) and tortilla chips, a salad of mixed greens, black beans, crumbled goat cheese, roasted corn (one shucked fresh ear roasted for about 10 minutes in the broiler – turn often) and dressed with a sun dried tomato vinaigrette. Ended with chilled watermelon wedges and lemon cookies. Enjoy!

Grilled Fish Tacos with Baja Sauce - Serves 4

1 lb Cod Filets
12 Corn or Flour Tortillas
1 Pkg. Mann's Broccoli Slaw Mix (Jewel) or Cole Slaw Mix
2 Fresh Limes – cut into Wedges

Baja Sauce

1 6 oz container Plain Yogurt (Greek Yogurt is a little thicker)
2/3 C Mayonnaise
3 Tbsp Fresh Lime juice
1 Fresh Jalapeno Pepper minced (about 2 Tbsp)
1 tsp Capers minced
1/2 tsp EACH Dried Oregano, Ground Cumin, Dried Dill Weed
1/4 tsp – 1/2 tsp Cayenne Pepper (start with 1/4 tsp and add to taste – this stuff is hot!)

For Baja Sauce, in medium bowl mix together yogurt, mayonnaise and lime juice. Add jalapeno, capers and spices. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Prepare the grill – medium heat (350 degrees). Rinse fish, pat dry and lightly coat with olive or vegetable oil. Cod is very mild so season liberally with kosher or garlic salt and pepper. For optimum grill flavor, place fish in metal grill basket (that you can flip) or on foil for easier clean-up. Grill for approximately 5 minutes per side or until fish flakes.

Wrap tortillas in foil and heat on grill on indirect heat or in a conventional 350 degree oven until warm – about 7 minutes.

To serve, place fish on a platter and surround with slaw mix and wedges of lime. Serve with warm tortillas and Baja Sauce. Take a tortilla, place fish on tortilla, top with slaw mix and the Baja Sauce.

Bill's 2006 – 2007 Rias Baixas Albarino Wine Picks (with suggested retails):

Martin Codax	\$13
Burgans	\$14
Nora	\$15
Senorans	\$23

Bill and Karen Garlough are the owners and founders of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the winner of the U.S. Chamber's 2007 Small Business of the Year award. Bill Garlough is a Level 1 Master Sommelier and can be reached at info@mychef.com.