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Sipping Tequila like it's a fine wine

Friday, June 25, 2010 at 5:11 AM in [Between Meals, Wine](#)

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Diners tasting Tequila and wine at Jardiniere (Photos: Folio Wines 2010)

It seemed like an odd coupling: a dinner at Jardiniere hosted by Partida Tequila and Michael Mondavi Family Wines. I'd never been to a tasting where Tequila and wine were poured side by side at the table.

Traci Des Jardins prepared the menu, and all through the meal we had three Tequilas: Blanco, Reposada and Anejo; and three wines: 2008 Isabel Mondavi Chardonnay, 2006 Emblem Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon and 2006 M by Michael Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon. Diners were told to taste around and see what they thought.

www.tequilapartida.com





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Pork three ways to match with Tequila or wine

I loved the Chardonnay with the seared scallops on a bed of tomatillo nage with cipollini onions, fava beans and drizzles of cilantro coulis. It was a classic marriage but I quickly dispensed with the wine and headed to the Tequilas. I was surprised how well the Blanco went because the floral flavors in the blend came to the forefront. The spirit was powerful, but the food stood up to it pretty well.

For the main course, Des Jardins cooked pork three ways: braised belly with caramelized shallot-plantain puree and roasted cherries; a square of shoulder with crisp polenta and a smoky tomato sauce; and a loin with red wine-macerated walnuts and fresh blackberries. After we started eating the chef sent out crisp sweetbreads with mustard-glazed onions and a plate of roasted porcini mushrooms.

The loin, which had a more subtle flavor than some of the other preparations, was a great match with the Reposado, which has a golden color and a slight caramel sweetness. The fattiness of the belly was exceptional with the richer, more powerful Anejo. Because of the smoky tomatoes, I suspect, the elegant M Cabernet was the ideal match with the shoulder.

However, two pairings were made in heaven. The sweetbreads with the anejo were spectacular, and when it came time for dessert, Partida owner Gary Shansby passed around the Elegante, a umbery Cognac-like spirit to accompany a creme caramel with peanut brittle on the side. The match was perfect: the custard took the fiery alcoholic edge off the Tequila and it was like a great tennis match with the two flavors volleying back and forth across the tongue.

Afterward, I talked to Mondavi because his wines, particularly the M, is so food-friendly. He said that when they get settle on the top six or eight blends for the vintage he and his staff take bring them to lunch to see which goes best with the food, and which glasses are empty. That's the blend they end up bottling.

However, the wines, as good as they were, were upstaged by the novelty of the Tequila. Shansby says he always serves the Tequila in stem glassware because he's fighting the image of Tequila as a cheap spirit.

Mondavi and Shansby are going to reprise this tasting in other cities. I predict Tequila may become the darling of the high-end tasting menus as sommeliers looking for something unusual to wow diners. It only proves Shansby's point: Premium Tequila is a very food-friendly wine.

