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Air Canada Sommelier Veronique Rivest Talks Wine in the Sky



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Award winning Canadian Sommelier, Veronique Rivest, is Air Canada's very own sommelier. The Quebec-born Rivest explains how she chooses wines for Air Canada's premium customers.

Why did you choose to partner with Air Canada? Tell us about your role as Air Canada Sommelier

Veronique: I've worked with restaurants, hotels, and other establishments—but never an airline! It's definitely an exciting avenue to explore. I'm really proud to be working with Canada's national carrier, which is allowing me to showcase the work of many talented Canadian and international winemakers to a premium clientele who enjoy exploration and adventure.

What makes wine taste good (or bad) in the air?

V: Environment has a huge influence on the way we taste, including who we're with and the space we're in. Then, flights bring up other considerations. I think about the way wine will make customers feel in the air—what will be uplifting instead of making passengers tired. We know from research that food and wine can taste different at 30,000 feet. At the start of my partnership with Air Canada, I did my own tasting in the air and discovered that modern planes might lessen, but not remove the effects of altitude.

Luckily the Boeing 787s are equipped with special technology to counteract dry cabin environment, which vastly improves both air quality and humidity and has a positive effect on taste buds—meaning the wines on our lists taste fantastic at cruising altitude!

How do you ensure wines will taste “right” at 30,000 feet?

V: I try to select wines that are vibrant, without too much tannin or oak, to contrast with the cabin environment and keep passengers feeling energized.

What do you take into consideration when pairing wine with the in-flight menu?

V: First and foremost, because the food and wine menus don't change at the same time, I always make sure to select well-balanced wines. I then assess whether or not the wine is “food-friendly”, as some wines pair well with more foods than others. Overall, I look for wines that have fresh acidity, with moderate alcohol levels and bright flavours.

What types of wines make your lists?

V: The wine list for Air Canada Signature Class changes every three months and is designed to pair with Chef Hawskworth's delicious menu items. Depending on the routes, there are always four to five wines (a combination of reds and whites) on the menu, plus one champagne. In North America Business Class, the wine menu is meant to be paired with gourmet cuisine.

And I always strive to feature at least one Canadian wine to showcase our country's many great wineries and give passengers a little taste of home.

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