

### PAIRINGS

## A Vibrant Vintage That Can Dance With a Lot of Partners

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DELICIOUS food can save the day when there is unexciting wine in the glass. With delicious wine that can stand proudly on its own, the food must measure up.

So many of the red Riojas from the 2001 vintage were well structured, vibrant and complex that deciding on one dish to complement them became a challenge. Anything from a beefy braise of short ribs to rich veal to a chicken sauté finished in a winy sauce to a succulent fish like a monkfish tail wrapped in serrano ham and baked with mushrooms could qualify.

The earthiness of the wines made mushrooms a compelling component. I opted for veal, the thick slices of shank meat usually simmered for osso buco, so the marrow could contribute some gelatinous richness to the sauce.

The recipe is a simple one relying on pot vegetables like onions and celery to enhance a sauce that derives most of its flavor from meat and mushrooms. Some herb, a touch of tomato paste and a final splash of aged sherry vinegar after the sauce has reduced and become syrupy are all it takes. To help sop up the thickened pan juices, I would suggest buttered broad pappardelle or a puree of celery root.

The wines are versatile enough to handle a starter like a plate of charcuterie, a slab of pate mussels steamed with diced chorizo or a salad with sliced beets. And though I usually prefer white wine with cheese, if there is any red Rioja left after the main course, it will beautifully grace a hunk of aged Manchego with some honey or quince paste.