

HOW TO THROW A FUN, EASY, AND SAFE

Pandemic Party

By Lauren Bonney



The sun is shining, the weather is hot, and it's time to party! Well, sort of.

As regulations begin to relax, don your best mask, give those hands a 20-second scrub, and enjoy great food and even better company with three easy **SMALL GATHERING** ideas that support local businesses to boot!



Homage pizza kits and local beers will make your party fabulous!

WINE AND CHEESE

GIVE THIS PARTY STANDARD A LOCAL UPDATE.

When it comes to wine tastings, few know better than Wendy De Coito. In 2018, the fifth-generation Suisun Valley native opened **The Filling Station**—a vintage gas station—inspired tasting room—to spotlight local vineyards and artisan winemakers who don't have tasting rooms of their own. The Filling Station also offers a variety of local goods, such as jams, olive oils, and artisan popcorn.

EASY, GO-TO WINE & CHEESE PAIRINGS

Here are some of De Coito's suggested pairings for that perfect glass of wine to go with just the right bite of cheese. 2529 Mankas Corner Rd., Fairfield, suisunvalleyfillingstation.com

WINE: 2019 Eclipse white pinot noir, Tolenas Vineyards and Winery

This deliciously crisp summer wine is similar to a chardonnay but has a velvety-smooth texture and fruit-forward notes. The soft wine is killer with aged cheeses.

CHEESE: Gouda, Asiago, and Manchego

WINE: 2018 Sir Pig dry rosé, Rockville Cellars

This rosé has a wonderful aroma and flavor profile thanks to a blend of grenache, counoise, and tempranillo grapes. Couple it with a salty cheese, and it's time to party.

CHEESE: Feta, Pecorino Romano, or dry Jack (aged for at least one year)

THE WINE: 2018 Love zinfandel, The Filling Station

Fruit-forward and light in body, the estate-grown zin works well as a summertime sipping red wine and is best complemented by cheeses that offer a bit of funk or tang. (Psst, blue cheese on a crunchy cracker with a drizzle of honey is really good.)

THE CHEESE: Blue cheese, chèvre, Brie, and Parmesan

PRO TIP: Precut your cheese into bite-size chunks and use toothpicks to limit your guests' contact with the food.



Suds & Slices

BEER AND PIZZA ARE GREAT BY THEMSELVES, BUT WHEN SHARED WITH YOUR PANDEMIC CREW, YOU'VE GOT THE MAKINGS OF A MEMORABLE SUMMER HANGOUT.

If you've ever dreamed about flinging a wheel of pizza dough in the air while singing "That's Amore," now's your chance. Head to **Homage** in Martinez and pick up a pizza kit to feed your fellow slice lovers.

Choose from seven kits, including a classic pepperoni and mixed veggie, the Forestier (sausage, green olives, mushrooms, and spinach), and the Farmer's

Wife (soppressata, cabernet-poached figs, fiore di latte cheese, and arugula). Each kit comes with four personal-size dough balls, San Marzano tomato sauce, and fresh mozzarella, plus cookie dough for a sweet treat to bake fresh at home. Order your kit online and choose between pickup or delivery. (Note: Deliveries must be ordered two days in advance.) 712 Main St., Martinez, homagemartinez.com

THE BREWS

THE CARQUINEZ REGION IS BLESSED WITH A PLETHORA OF LOCAL BREWERIES. HERE ARE A FEW SUDS THAT GO GREAT WITH A CHEESY SLICE AND EXCELLENT COMPANY.



VALKYRIE BLONDE ALE
Five Suns Brewing

Golden blonde with a white, foamy head, the Valkyrie has lightly roasted malt flavors and a lemony zing. This light-bodied brew pairs nicely with any pizza, and it's great on a hot day. 701 Escobar St., Ste. C, Martinez, fivesunsbrewing.com



BALLS BACK PALE ALE
Del Cielo Brewing Co.

Featuring bright citrus notes with hints of pear, watermelon, and stone fruit, this pale ale will cut through the richness of your 'za without overpowering the flavors. 701 Escobar St., Ste. A, Martinez, delcielo brewing.com



HYDRAULIC SANDWICH IPA
Mare Island Brewing Co.

This IPA elicits notes of citrus and guava without too much hop, perfect for leisurely sipping. It goes great with bold flavors, such as pepperoni and olives. 289 Mare Island Way, Vallejo, mareislandbrewingco.com

THE PANDEMIC HOST WITH THE MOST

Malena Clegg and Krystal Endsley, the bosses behind Martinez's event planning and coworking space **The Gala**, offer helpful advice to keep your small gathering safe and fun for everyone.

SWEET ENDINGS

FORGO THE TRADITIONAL DINNER PARTY AND HOST A DESSERT-AND-COFFEE SOIREE. WHETHER YOU'RE THROWING A MORNING EXTRAVAGANZA OR A POST-SUPPER AFTERPARTY, IT'S THE BEST TIME TO INDULGE IN THE SWEETER THINGS IN LIFE.



VALERIO'S TROPICAL BAKE SHOP

Steeped in Filipino tradition, Valerio's serves up uniquely flavored and scrumptious baked goods such as the Haba Haba Macapuno—a sweet pastry loaf filled with a choice of coconut, cream cheese, or ube (purple sweet potato) and covered in a buttercream-like frosting. Or consider taking home a cassava cake, an uber-moist cake made with grated cassava, coconut, and condensed milk, and topped with a rich layer of custard. 3495 Sonoma Blvd., Ste. B, Vallejo, valeriotropical bakeshop.com



HUMMINGBIRD BAKERY & DESSERT BAR

Gorgeously decorated cakes, tarts, pies, eclairs, and more shimmer in the display case at Hummingbird Bakery & Dessert Bar. From the decadent chocolate raspberry mousse cake to the bakeshop's signature hummingbird cake, any of the artfully made baked goods and patisserie delights will add a bit of "wow" factor to your casual gathering. 3272 Sonoma Blvd., Vallejo, hummingbirddesserts.com



STARBREAD

StarBread makes a variety of comforting baked goods such as donuts, mini cupcakes, and more, but no trip here is complete without an order of the shop's famous Señorita Bread. The soft, warm, slightly sweetened rolls of dough come in several flavors, including cinnamon, nutella, and cream cheese, and will have your guests begging for seconds. 3718 Sonoma Blvd., Vallejo, starbreadca.com

ARE YOU INTO FITNESS? TRY FITNESS WHOLE TART IN YOUR MOUTH!



A few days before your party, check in with attendees to make sure everyone's healthy, and take temperatures before guests enter your home.

Use disposable plates and silverware to cut down on both cleanup and the risk of virus exposure.

Use preassembled plates rather than platters in order to minimize exposure.

Designate a bartender to dole out drinks so only one clean set of hands is touching barware.

Provide guests with cleaning or sanitizing stations with access to soap and water or hand sanitizer.

Encourage your guests to decorate their face masks and host a mask contest, awarding prizes for the funniest, prettiest, or most creative designs.



Roasted Heaven

COMPLEMENT YOUR DESSERT WITH THE PERFECT COFFEE BLEND.

Fabrice Moschetti, owner of Moschetti, Inc. in Vallejo, knows a thing or two about coffee. Since immigrating from France in 1990, the java guru has spent almost three decades sourcing, roasting, and blending coffee beans from all over the world to brew up delicious cups of Joe.

"There's no rhyme or reason.

There's no right or wrong," he says of roasting and creating blends. "It's cool to be able to create different levels of flavor. It's about discovering how it tastes—the terroir—and [that] depends on where it was grown and how it was harvested."

As for your dessert-and-coffee party, Moschetti recommends looking for a balance between your drinks and sweets. For rich desserts such as creme brulee and chocolate cake, the roaster suggests a more fruit-forward bean—the high acidity level in the coffee will help cut through the sugary richness. For treats with a warm spice profile, Moschetti says you can't go wrong with a Central or South American bean (like Guatemala or Brazil), which exhibit nutty notes that will enhance the flavors of your desserts.



PRO TIP: Sit outside or go for a summer evening stroll with your coffee for plenty of fresh air and room to stretch out.