

Introduction to Food and Wine Pairing

By Jeremy

For years diners have been stifled by dogmatic and overgeneralized rules of food and wine pairing. White with fish or chicken, and red with meat. Clearly if this were sufficient treatment of this topic the discussion wouldn't have continued this long. This being said, how does one know which wine will compliment which dish? The short, clichéd answer is always the one that you will enjoy the most. But obviously this raises many more questions than it answers.

We all have very different tastes. The key is to trust your own palate. So if pairing a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc with a char grilled porterhouse makes you happy, then congratulations! You have made a successful food/wine pairing. Your palate will tell you when you have made a good or bad decision. Probably, in the earlier example the diner would find that the Sauvignon Blanc would interact unfavorably with the charred areas of the steak, making it taste salty and bitter. Likewise the steak would make the wine seem thin and sour (and completely steamroll such a light-bodied wine). So in actuality most would find this pair clashes badly and all of the clues come directly from your palate.

Some of the most fundamental considerations are the respective weights of both the food and the wine. Don't become too fixated on the color of the wine, but rather its body. To get you started, as a general rule heavy goes with heavy and light goes with light. Of equal importance is the preparation of the dish. Chicken Picata with Chardonnay or Viognier would be lovely. A roasted chicken with herbs and root vegetables might need a Pinot Noir. Grilled chicken would perhaps benefit from a Shiraz or Grenache.

Avoid strongly flavored foods with loads of onion, garlic, hot spice, etc. as the wine can pick up these flavors (after all do really want to drink a wine that tastes like onion?). It's very important to consider



Sauvignon Blanc goes with tart dressings and sauces.

Tangy foods won't overwhelm zippy wines like Sauvignon Blanc

Chardonnay for fatty fish or fish in a rich sauce.

Silky whites—for instance, Chardonnays from California, Chile or Australia—are delicious with fish like salmon or any kind of seafood in a lush sauce.

Pinot Grigio pairs with light fish dishes

Light seafood dishes seem to take on more flavor when matched with equally delicate white wines, such as Pinot Grigio or Arneis from Italy or Chablis from France.

Champagne perfect with anything salty

Most dry sparkling wines, such as brut Champagne and Spanish cava, actually have a faint touch of sweetness. That makes them extra-refreshing when served with salty foods.



how one trait of the wine can alter your perception of the food and vice versa. High alcohol wines tend to pair very poorly with spicy foods because the alcohol creates a hot sensation on the palate that magnifies and clashes with the spice present in the food.

With a good moderately spiced dish such as Kung Pao chicken try a nice, cool Alsatian Gewurztraminer. Yet another approach with a spicy Tunisian chicken dish, for example, would be a rosé from the south of France, such as Château Morgues du Grès Les Galets Rosé. In this case the wine would offer enough fruit and body but otherwise not clash with the food taking a recessive role in the pairing. If the flavors of the dish are too overwhelming, such as those in a really spicy Cajun gumbo, maybe you should consider a completely different fermented beverage to accompany it. Wine has boundaries. Respect them.

Wine and cheese is at the same time a natural combination and a confoundingly massive topic to discuss. Here we will lay down one example: Let's say we're starting with the cheese and selecting a wine to match. We have randomly selected an off-white, smelly, cylindrical object from the cheese market. Le Monsieur Fromage in an educated tone has explained to us that this is a French chèvre frais. To this we nod with a look of false understanding and go home to look it up on the internet. Thus we learn that this is a young goat cheese commonly produced in central France in the Loire Valley. A quick reference to Winegeeks.com reveals that they also make some of France's most celebrated white wines from the Sauvignon Blanc grape, and what does it recommend to pair with them? Goat cheese! Coincidence? or centuries of co-evolution?



Syrah matches with highly spiced dishes.

When a meat is heavily seasoned, look for a red wine with lots of spicy notes. Syrah from Washington, Cabernet Franc from France and Xinomavro from Greece are all good choices.



Cabernet Sauvignon is fabulous with juicy red meat California Cabernet, Bordeaux and Bordeaux-style blends are terrific with steaks or chops: Their firm tannins refresh the palate after each bite of meat.



Thus armed with our new knowledge we march confidently into our local wine shop and ask the wine merchant, “Do you have a nice Sancerre to go with my chèvre frais, perhaps a Pascal Cotat?” That evening we discover that the cheese has a slight tartness and dry consistency that wants for a crisp white wine that cleanses the palate with every sip. Each makes the other taste better than it would independently. Obviously this method won’t work in all cases given that there are many more Wisconsin cheeses than Wisconsin wines available on the market. But this should provide a point to begin experimenting on your own, which is how it all starts.

Dessert provides us one last opportunity to pair another wine with our meal. The simple ‘rule’ is that the wine should be sweeter than the dessert. Otherwise the dessert could make the wine seem unpleasantly tart. With an apricot custard try a Sauternes. Dark chocolate? In a word: port. Chocolate and port should be consumed together at every available opportunity.

Many classic examples exist of food and wine pairings that are tried and true. For example: foie gras and Sauternes, grilled steak and Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon or paella and red Rioja. These are reliable, low-risk ventures that will likely result in an enjoyable overall dining experience. In the process we might notice that the proteins in our steak actually soften the tannins in our Cabernet. Where else can we apply this lesson? By revisiting these classics we can learn the how to create tomorrow’s classic pairings.

Article via: <http://www.winegeeks.com/articles/35>



Pinot Noir is great for dishes with earthy flavors

Recipes made with ingredients like mushrooms and truffles taste great with reds like Pinot Noir and Dolcetto, which are light-bodied but full of savory depth.

Malbec won’t be overshadowed by sweet-spicy barbecue sauces

Malbec, Shiraz and Côtes-du-Rhône are big and bold enough to drink with foods brushed with heavily spiced barbecue sauces.

Old World Wines and Old World dishes are intrinsically good together

The flavors of foods and wines that have grown up together over the centuries—Tuscan recipes and Tuscan wines, for instance—are almost always a natural fit.

Zinfandel For pâtés, mousses and terrines

If you can use the same adjectives to describe a wine and a dish, the pairing will often work. For instance, the words rustic and rich describe Zinfandel, Italy’s Nero d’Avola and Spain’s Monastrell as well as chicken-liver mousse.

