

LORRAINE MICELI DE MAJO EXPLAINS

FOOD & WINE HARMONISING

Lorraine Miceli De Majo explains that when it comes to pairing wine with food, there are no strict rules that say you cannot eat what you like with whichever style of wine you choose, as ultimately it is what an individual enjoys most and what combination works best for that person. Pairing is simply the decision of which wine will bring out the best, when combined with a given food.

Originally wines styles evolved to complement the cuisine of a region, so

this is often a good starting point for finding a wine and food combination. Also when first trying to pair food and wine it is also a good idea and much easier to select the wine first and then build the food around the wine to find the perfect synergy. An example of this is a simple poached chicken breast with a light lemon herb sauce. This could go with a light to medium bodied wine like a Pinot Grigio /Bianco, Riesling, Gruner Veltliner, Chablis, Sauvignon Blanc, Soave or Gavi. Now add a cream sauce and you can move up in body to a

fuller wine, maybe a white Burgundy or white Rhone, white Bordeaux or Graves (Semillon) or New World Chardonnay, as well as an oaked Sauvignon Blanc or yeasty/brioche tasting Champagne. If on the other hand the chicken is roasted, the flavours are such that it can marry with light to medium reds, like Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, Dolcetto, Beaujolais, Rioja, Merlot or Valpolicella. Grill it and it becomes great with fuller bodied reds, like Bordeaux, Zinfandel, Syrah (Shiraz), Cabernet Sauvignon or Brunello wines.

“For many meat dishes, a rich full-bodied white wine is a better match than a lighter red wine.”

WEIGHT/RICHNESS OF THE FOOD AND WINE

The first and most important element to consider should be to match the weight of the food with that of the wine. Rich heavyweight foods like game, roast meats and red meat casseroles, need a full-bodied wine. Powerful red wines are often the favoured choice, although it is the body of the wine which is the most important consideration rather than its colour or flavour. Lighter food, such as plain white meat or fish, is complemented by more delicate wine. Although white wines are the normal choice, light bodied, low tannin red wines can also be successful. One must also remember the contribution of the sauce. A rich creamy sauce will need a wine of sufficient body to match the food and flavours that will complement the smooth creamy, buttery taste.



Lorraine Miceli De Majo, A.I.W.S. is a working mother of two, advises clients on wine lists, organises wine tastings, and chooses wine we will consume. She likes to garden and entertain and even finds the energy to voluntary work.

FLAVOUR INTENSITY OF THE FOOD AND THE WINE

After weight, the next most important element to consider is flavour and intensity. Flavour intensity, although similar to weight, is not the same. Think of a food that has a lot of weight but low in flavour, say plain boiled potatoes or plain boiled rice; both are heavy in weight but light in flavour. At the other end of the scale think of a plate of raw, thinly sliced red or green peppers; these are high in flavour but light in weight. Wines can be the same. Riesling, for example makes a lightweight wine that is intensely flavoured, while Chardonnay makes a full bodied, heavyweight wine that can be low in flavour. Delicate wines and strong flavoured foods do not match. Also worth noting is the way food has been cooked. Steamed food is lighter than roasted or fried food.

ACIDITY IN THE FOOD AND THE WINE

Sour flavours in food make wines taste less acidic, and therefore less vibrant and refreshing. For this reason any acidity found in the food should be matched by acidity in the accompanying wines. Tomatoes, lemons, pineapples, apples and vinegar are all high in acidity. One of the characteristics of Italian wines is their high acidity. This is because much of Italian cuisine is dominated by two ingredients - tomatoes and olive oil, and other acidic ingredients such as lemons, balsamic vinegar and wine are often used - hence wines that go with Italian foods need high acidity.

'CHEWY' MEAT AND TANNINS

Tannin in red wine reacts with protein. Foods with high protein content, particularly rare red meat will soften the effects of the tannin on the palate. This is why wines from high-tannin grape varieties, such as Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah/Shiraz, go well with roast meats, stews and steaks. Light, fruity red wines with low levels of tannin, like Pinot Noir, Beaujolais and Valpolicella, will complement white meats because these are low in proteins and lighter than meats such as lamb and beef.

FRUITY FLAVOURS

Fruity flavours in food can be matched with fruity/floral wines. For example a Muscat or Zibibbo can be paired with a fruit salad.

SALTY FOODS AND SWEET OR HIGH- ACID WINES

Salty foods are enhanced by a touch of sweetness. Think of classic combinations like prosciutto and figs. The same works with wine. Roquefort cheese and Sauternes, or Port and Stilton are famous matches. Salty foods also benefit from a little acidity. Olives, oysters and other shellfish go best with crisp, dry light-bodied white wines like Muscadet or a Sancerre. It is no wonder that Fino Sherry or Manzanilla are classic accompaniments for olives or salted nuts.

OIL, SALT AND TANNINS

Tannin in combination with oily fish can result in an unpleasant metallic taste, so the general recommendation is to avoid red wines with fish. However, low tannin reds are fine with meaty fish. Wines with high tannin content can also taste bitter with salty foods.



SWEETNESS IN THE FOOD AND THE WINE

Dry wines can seem tart and over-acidic when consumed with any food with a degree of sweetness. Sweet food is best with wine that has a similar or greater degree of sweetness; the sweeter the food, the sweeter the wine needs to be. German and Austrian wines include many late harvest wines. Also sweet Muscat wines like the Passito from Pantelleria, Sauternes and ice wines are excellent for this purpose with puddings and cheese. ☺

SMOKED FOODS

Smoked foods need wines with enough character to cope with the strength of the smoking. Lightly smoked salmon is a classic partner for Brut Champagne; smoked meats like pork can benefit from some slight sweetness in the wine like that found in some German Rieslings; smoky barbecued flavours suit powerful oaked wines like Australian Shiraz

FATTY/OILY FOODS AND HIGH-ACID WINES

Wines with a good level of acidity can be superb with rich oily foods, such as a pate. For example, Sauternes works well with foie gras. Here the weight of both wine and food are similar, and the acidity in the wine helps it cut through the fattiness of the food. This is also an example of matching a sweet wine to a savoury food. Crisp wines such as Riesling and unoaked Barberas can make a good match with fatty meats such as duck and goose. Foods that have been cooked by frying will need wines with high acidity, because the method of cooking increases the fat content.



SPICY FOODS

Spicy foods are best matched by wines that are made from really ripe, juicy fruit, either unoaked or very lightly oaked (many spices accentuate the flavours of oak). Wines such as New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and Rose can work well with highly spiced foods, as can ripe Chilean Merlot. Spicy wines such as Gewurztraminer can also complement spicy dishes. Chablis also works well with these dishes.

On a final note here are some food & wine marriages made in heaven:

- Sauternes or Riesling
- Beerenauslese and foie gras
- Chablis with oysters
- Muscadet-Severe-et-Maine with shellfish
- Claret and grilled steak
- Red Burgundy and hearty stews
- Chateaufeuf-du-Pape with roast lamb (rolled in herbs)
- Port and Stilton (also chocolate)
- Sancerre and chevre cheese
- Fino or Manzanilla Sherry with olives and tapas
- Vin Santo and Cantucci, caramelised peach tart or fruit cake
- Muscat de Rivesaltes (VDN) or Passito di Pantelleria and Apricot Clafoutis or tart

To achieve the best match it is necessary to analyse the basic components in both the wine and the food. The main thing is to try to balance these so that neither the food nor the wine overpowers the other. The main elements to consider are:

1. Match weight / richness / texture of the food and the body of the wine.
2. Match the flavour intensity of the food and wine.
3. Match acidic foods with high acid wines.
4. Match sweet foods with sweet wines
5. Avoid combining oily or very salty foods with high tannin red wines.

Other considerations can help us find wine and food combinations where the wine and the food really enhance each other. Read more about these online at www.indulge.com.nt/foodanddrink

1. Pair chewy meat with tannic wines.
2. Pair salty foods with sweet or high acid- wines.
3. Pair fatty and oily food with high-acid wines
4. Match or contrast flavour characteristics of the food and wine.

Sources: *Exploring the World of Wines and Spirits* by Christopher Fielden in association with the Wine & Spirit Education Trust

TROUBLESOME PAIRINGS

There are a number of foods that always pose the greatest challenge when paired with wine. Here are a few:

Vinegar or vinegar based sauces or relishes like cranberry sauce – Vinegar is wine that has been acted on by bacteria called acetobacter, which turns the alcohol in the wine into acetic acid and water. Because of this, most wines tend to taste spoiled in the presence of vinegar. Look for clean bright, and high acid wines to pair the best; whites being most favorable.

Artichoke and Asparagus – As both have weed-like flavours, again it is a good idea to look for high acid, grassy, herbaceous wines like S. Blanc from the Loire as well as NZ Sauvignon Blanc.

Egg and egg -based dishes – The sulfurous quality of the egg has a similar effect as vinegar, imparting an unpleasant flavour to softer wines. Again look for clean, bright and high acid wines.

Chocolate – The variability of chocolate in sweetness and texture can be difficult to pair with wine. For sweeter chocolate, look for sweeter wines like port or dark VDN. For semi-sweet or even bittersweet chocolate, look for drier wines; for instance the Barton&Guestier Medoc Privee, a dry red which is full of similar flavours and a heavenly pairing to chocolate tart. 