

## **MATCHING WINE WITH FOOD**

Matching wine with food is not really all that complicated. Just think in terms of appealing combinations of flavors, textures and intensities and you have the strategy for making great marriages. For instance, a full-flavored red wine is right for lamb shanks – the wine echoes the taste of food. Sometimes, however, a contrast is equally pleasing. If you add a squeeze of lemon to accent poached trout, it is likely, a tart crisp and light wine will set off the flavors of the fish in a similar fashion.

Following is a guide to help you make such informed decisions. In most situations the food is chosen first, so that is how we have organized our recommendations. For each category there are broad suggestions for the types of wine that will often make the best matches.

Dry, light and crisply tart whites are ideal appetizer wines. Their refreshing acidic edge wakes up the palate and serves to counterbalance savory canapés like cheese twists, pates and smoked salmon. A light Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon/Fume Blanc are all good choices.

“Bubbles”, however are perhaps the best choice since the tingling tartness of Champagnes and sparkling wines plays well against salty and smoked foods, soups and plain fish or vegetable dishes.

### **Pasta:**

As a basic ingredient, pasta contributes very little to the flavor of a dish – the other ingredients and the sauce determine the overall taste. For example, pasta primavera is happiest with the herbaceous quality of Sauvignon/Fume Blanc or a simple Italian white such as Soave. A meat-based pasta dish with a zesty tomato sauce is best matched with a flavorful, slightly tannic (with a “bite”) red wine such as a California Zinfandel or an Italian Barbera. Medium-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon will nicely fill the bill.

### **Fish:**

Light, dry white wine is the usual choice because it does not mask the more delicate flavors of white-fleshed fish or shellfish. Faced with an unfamiliar fish dish, you will rarely go wrong recommending a Sauvignon or Fume Blanc. With its herbal notes and fair acidity it is a wonderful condiment. Chardonnay is appropriate for white-fleshed fish but it must be one that is lean and tart enough – the big, buttery, oaky Chardonnays are better with “meaty”, oily fish such as salmon, tuna and swordfish. These fish can also be successfully paired with red wines such as Pinot Noir, Beaujolais, and some of the lighter Cabernets.

### **Poultry – Pork – Veal:**

These mild-flavored, light meats pair well with a variety of wines – both reds and whites. The recommendation depends largely on the method of preparation and the sauces and spices used.

A round, fruity, oaky California Chardonnay or the same from Australia is great with the flavors of poultry with tarragon and nearly any pork or veal dish. Light reds such as anything from the Beaujolais also pair well with these meats as do medium-bodied reds such as Chianti, some Pinot Noirs and Zinfandels.

### **Red Meat and Game:**

Beef and lamb call for wines with enough astringency – mouth puckering tannins to cut through the meats fattiness. White wines have little tannins so reds are the obvious choice. Low tannin reds such as Pinot Noirs (which includes any red wine from Burgundy) are perfect with prime ribs of beef. Roast leg of lamb requires something more sturdy, perhaps a Bordeaux or Cabernet Sauvignon from California or Australia.

Grilled and highly seasoned meats, lean and pungent venison and wild boar, are best with fruity, young red wines that will not be overshadowed by the meat. A Cotes-du-Rhone or California Petite Sirah or Australian Shiraz will prove successful.

Rabbit and quail are mild game dishes. They will be enhanced by Pinot Noir or some of the light bodied red wines from Italy.

Pates and cold cuts, even though quite fatty, are best with a refreshing red from the Gamay grape – either Beaujolais or American Gamay – they also pair well with an off-dry German Riesling.

### **Asian Dishes:**

Because many Asian dishes feature spices such as ginger as well as hot peppers, a light whites with some sweetness is often best. This would include Chenin Blanc, Riesling, and Gewurztraminer. Some dishes, particularly those with soy flavors, do well with lighter Cabernet-based wines. Extremely spicy dishes will overpower most wines and are best accompanied by a well-chilled off-dry white as a palate cooler.

### **Mexican Dishes:**

Sturdy reds – especially spicy California Zinfandel – can stand up to assertive chile-fired south of the border flavors.

**Cheese:**

Contrary to popular belief, cheese and wine do not always make great partners. Pungent, strong-flavored cheeses such as Gorgonzola will overpower subtle, aged reds are best presented with a simple yet robust red such as a Cotes-du-Rhone, Shiraz or bold Cabernet. Mild and delicate cheeses such as triple crèmes, pair well with Cabernet and Merlot-based wines from Bordeaux and Pinot Noir-based wines such as anything from Burgundy. Tangy, fresh goat cheese is a classic for a Sauvignon or Fume Blanc, and there is perhaps a no more perfect match with Port and Stilton. The saltiness of cheese is balanced by the fruity sweetness of the Port. Gamay based wines such as anything from the French Beaujolais go with a variety of cheeses, and crisp aromatic whites, like Gewurztraminer, also work well.

**Desserts:**

A delicious sweet wine matched with an equally delicious dessert is a memorable way to end a meal, but planning is required to make the combination work well. Sugary desserts, especially those prepared with pastry creams or those with sharp citrus flavors seem to strip flavor from a sweet wine. Instead, you should choose simple, mild desserts to pair with fine Sauternes – and serve the wine first so that it can be tasted on its own. The wines that do best with chocolate desserts that are not too sugary are Ruby Ports, and big Cabernets and Merlots.