



Christmas

ALL WRAPPED UP

FOOD & WINE MATCHING

the experience matters

Matthen Clark

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INTRODUCTION

Food and wine matching is the process of enhancing the dining experience through pairing dishes with complimentary wines.

Wine has a long history at our dining tables, a constant sight in many cultures. Although not the case on our shores, the dishes and the culinary traditions we've borrowed from the world have evolved alongside local winemaking. The art of matching food and wine as it is today, is a relatively modern endeavour. In the years past, local foods were drunk with local wines.

Today, the rules of food and wine pairing can be daunting. You wouldn't be alone in wondering why getting a food and wine pairing right needs to seem like a challenge. If someone has a wine they enjoy, regardless of the situation, why should they have something different? The short answer is, they shouldn't. The main rule to bear in mind when thinking about food and wine pairing is that personal taste is everything. Of course this provides a slight issue. How can you line up some wines to match your menu, with a pairing that is perfect in theory, and tastes great to you, if it could be unenjoyable for someone else?

Well, it's impossible to please everyone but wine is an integral part of the dining experience and there should be careful consideration. The right wines with the right dishes emphasises the best of the meal or can even bring out something new altogether. When it's a good match, it's a very good match, raising both the wine and the food. Likewise, a bad pairing can ruin the dining experience all together.

So while you may not be able to get it right for everyone, it's important to have a notion of what will work and what won't. In this context it may be wise to think of wine as a condiment, and as such there are many options that could be selected to achieve a harmonious pairing.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PAIRINGS

Do food and wine pairings really matter though?

Offering wine pairings on your menu, or having on hand for staff to give advice, is good business. Not only do getting the wine pairings right enhance both the food and the wine, satisfying customers and winning return visits, but it can make the decision of the customer easier and moves them away from a typical choice. Many customers gravitate to bottom end of a wine list, although often not the cheapest. Highlighting great pairings offer a greater experience to customers and guide them to products more profitable to you.

Happily there are thousands of wine and food combinations that can be attempted, and only a few are really 'bad'. However, with so many options it can be difficult to nail down a winning pairing simply because the choice is so great. Its science as well as art. You can, if you like, delve into what makes pairings work. A good example is looking at tannins in red wine and how they work with the fat compounds in meat. But you don't need to know about the molecular composition of food and wines to get great pairings. A few guidelines and some trial and error should get you on the right track.

In the following page we will look at these guidelines. They do not attempt to define exactly what wine should be consumed with what ingredients; quite simply, there are no absolutely correct matches and obviously personal choice is key to which combinations are enjoyed. They do offer suggestions as to the styles of wines that may work well with various ingredients, styles of dishes and cooking techniques.



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GETTING THE PERFECT PAIRINGS

ACIDITY

Acid in food, from the likes of lemons, limes, apples or vinegar will reduce the noticeable acidity in a wine and will help emphasise the wine's fruit flavours.

So, for example, a crisp Sauvignon Blanc from a cool-climate region such as the Clare Valley in Australia would have its fruit flavours enhanced simply by serving it with grilled fish with a liberal amount of lime juice squeezed over it. Foods with a high salt content will also reduce the impression of acidity in the wine. The key is to make sure the wine has enough of the mouth cleansing acidity to cope with the dish, otherwise it could taste flabby and limp and the wine's fruit flavours will seem subdued.

SWEETNESS

Most wine has some residual sugar in it.

Some New World wines, those made from varieties like Chenin Blanc, Viognier and Riesling, may be almost off-dry in style. This off-dry style of wine is an excellent choice when served with savoury dishes that are similarly lightly sweetened with ingredients like honey, coconut milk or palm sugar such as glazed pork or Thai chicken curry. Serving a fully dry wine with these slightly sweetened savoury dishes often creates the impression that the wine is lacking in fruit flavours. Fully sweet wines are the obvious choice for desserts: ideally they should be sweeter than the dessert. They also work well with cheese, particularly salty varieties, a classic example being the sweet red Port with salty Stilton combination.

INTENSITY

Ideally the flavours in the wine should not overpower those in the food.

So a delicate shellfish dish paired with a rich Californian Cabernet would not be an ideal combination; a better option would be a light, subtly flavoured Pinot Grigio from Italy. That Californian Cabernet would be much better off with a rich beef or lamb casserole.



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TANNINS

These are the bitter, astringent, mouth-drying, gum-furring elements, which can be found in the highest concentrations in young, full-bodied red wines.

Tannin acts as a preservative in wine and as the wine ages it is less noticeable. One of the best ways to experience what tannins feel like in the mouth is to sip on a really stewed cup of tea. Whilst often it is best to drink more mature red wines which have perceptively less tannins, wines with plenty of tannins can work extremely well with certain types of food.

Foods with a high content of cream, butter and soft cheeses, particularly when in sauces; and rare, red meats such as beef and lamb, all have a good affinity with tannin rich wines. The tannins and the animal proteins in these ingredients combine almost neutralising the tannin's harsher qualities, and at the same time increasing the perception of fruit and other flavours in the wine. There is also another effect, the wine can appear very refreshing, much in the same way that a good cup of tea can be.

The key is to watch the tannin levels, some dishes can cope with them better than others. In this case better pick a lighter, simpler or juicier wine perhaps from a grape variety such as Pinot Noir or Gamay (of Beaujolais fame). These produce wines with naturally lower levels of tannin than Cabernet Sauvignon or Shiraz.

OAK

It is worth noting whether a wine has had any oak contact as it can be quite a dominant flavour in wine.

Many good wines are either fermented or aged in oak, this tends to add complexity to the flavour spectrum as well as giving the wine a soft, almost creamy, rounded mouthfeel. Whilst generously oaked white Burgundies or Australian Chardonnays can work well with rich, meaty fish dishes, such as monkfish cooked with pancetta, or equally well-flavoured chicken dishes, the oak flavours may be too powerful for more delicate fare.

ALCOHOL

A wine with a high alcohol level, in the 13 to 14.5% ABV (alcohol by volume) range, will tend to taste warmer than one with a lower level.

Pairing a wine with a relatively high ABV content with spicy or peppery food will have the effect of increasing the feeling of heat felt at the back of the mouth. If serving a spicy lamb paprika dish to turn up the heat serve a Californian Zinfandel with a 14% ABV, to mediate the heat of the dish consider a lighter 12% ABV Tempranillo. It's worth noting that when you serve a high ABV wine with spicy food there is another effect, namely that the wine often tastes fruitier.

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FOOD & WINE MATCHING

WHITE

	Salads and vegetables	Fish and seafood	Pasta and other sauces	Meats	Herbs and spices	Spicy foods	Cheeses
Very dry, delicate, light whites e.g. Frascati, Muscadet, Pinot Grigio, Soave	Feta salad, green salad. Light seafood salad. Mozzarella salad. Salade Niçoise.	Clam chowder, halibut, herring. Mussels, oysters. Prawns. Trout.	Very light olive oil and fish based sauces e.g. marinara, vongole bianca.	Generally too light for most meats.	Delicate seasonings of chives, coriander, dill, fennel, tarragon, parsley.	Spicy ingredients usually overwhelm these delicate white wines.	Very mild flavoured cheeses e.g. cream cheese, Feta, Halloumi, Mozzarella, Ricotta.
Dry, herbaceous or aromatic whites e.g. Sauvignon Blanc, dry Chenin Blanc, dry Riesling	Asparagus, avocado. Goat's cheese salad. Olives, ratatouille. Smoked fish salad. Spinach.	Shellfish and delicate white fish e.g. plaice, skate, sole. Clam chowder, kedgerree, smoked fish.	Fish based sauces e.g. olive oil or light cream if clam sauce. Apple sauce. Beurre blanc (with lemon) Tartare sauce.	Steamed, baked and casseroleed chicken, pork, veal.	Chives, coriander, dill, ginger, lemongrass, lime, tarragon, parsley.	Especially good with Thai dishes and some lighter milder Indian meals e.g. tandoori fish.	High acid cheeses such as goat's or sheep's cheese e.g. Chavignol, Pecorino.
Juicy, fruit-driven, ripe whites e.g. 'New World' styles of Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc Semillon, Viognier	Caesar, chicken, egg, fish or seafood salad. Carrots. Onion tart. Parsnips.	Seafood and firm white fish, grilled, BBQ, baked and casseroleed. Paella. Salmon, scallops.	Chestnut sauce. Fish based sauces. Light creamy sauces. Hollandaise. Parsley sauce, pesto.	Grilled, BBQ, baked, casseroleed white meats: chicken, pork, turkey, veal. Duck.	Basil, coriander, fennel, light garlic, ginger, parsley, tarragon.	Thai, Chinese and light Indian dishes e.g. korma, rogan josh, tandoori.	Semi-soft cheeses e.g. Brie, Camembert, Chaume, Mozzarella. Some mature Cheddars.
Full-flavoured, nutty, oaked whites e.g. Burgundy, Australian, Californian, South African, Chardonnay, Graves	Caesar salad. Grilled peppers. Onion tart. Ratatouille.	Crab, lobster. Deep sea fish e.g. monkfish, swordfish, tuna, turbot. Paella, salmon, smoked fish.	Butter and cream based sauces e.g. carbonara. Pancetta. Porcini.	Roast chicken, duck, ham, pork, turkey.	Basil, chives, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, fennel, garlic, ginger, nutmeg, parsley, spring onions, tarragon.	Coconut flavoured dishes, Indonesian and some lighter Indian dishes.	Mozzarella. Semi-soft cheeses, smoked cheeses.

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RED

	Salads and vegetables	Fish and seafood	Pasta and other sauces	Meats	Herbs and spices	Spicy foods	Cheeses
Light, simple, delicate reds e.g. Beaujolais (Gamay), light Vin de Pays reds, light Chianti and Valpolicellas	Grilled and roasted vegetables. Charcuterie (salami etc). Olives, Prosciutto, ratatouille. Smoked meats.	Bouillabaisse. Cod with pancetta. Seared salmon, sea trout, tuna.	Tomato based sauces, e.g. arrabiata, napoletana. Lasagne.	Light pork dishes. Roast chicken, turkey. Salami.	Basil, coriander, garlic, nutmeg.	Italian and Spanish dishes with spicy sauces e.g. chorizo, arrabiata.	Cheddar, Dolcelatte, Mozzarella, Parmesan, Port-Salut.
Juicy, medium-bodied, fruit-led reds e.g. Pinot Noir, Chilean Merlot, Chianti, Grenache, Rioja Crianza	Roasted vegetables. Charcuterie (salami etc). Smoked meats. Tuscan bean salad. Wild mushrooms.	Tuna or salmon grilled with sauce made using similar wine.	Bolognese, carbonara. Cooked tomato sauces. Lasagne. Truffle or wild mushroom sauces.	Chicken, duck, turkey. Light beef or pheasant dishes. Smoked meats. Sausages.	Basil, chives, coriander, garlic, mint, nutmeg. Thyme and rosemary in moderation.	Moderately hot Indian dishes. Black bean sauces. Italian and Spanish dishes with spicy sauces e.g. chorizo, arrabiata.	Cambozola and other creamy blue cheeses. Goats cheeses. Mature Cheddar. Parmesan.
Spicy, peppery, warming reds e.g. Shiraz; Rhône Reds, Barbera, Zinfandel, lighter Malbecs	Meat salads (using those meats listed in the meat category).	Generally too heavy for fish and seafood.	Cream based sauces, e.g. carbonara. Lasagne. Bolognese. BBQ and pepper sauces.	BBQ, grilled, roasted. Casseroled game: duck, goose, pheasant, venison sausages. Beef, lamb.	Black pepper, chives, cloves, coriander, garlic, nutmeg. Sage in moderation.	Rich, creamy-based Indian curries e.g. korma, balti. Black pepper steaks. Tex-Mex. Chorizo.	Cambozola and other creamy blue cheeses. Emmenthal, Munster, Pont l'Évêque. Stilton.
Oaked, intense, concentrated reds e.g. Cabernet Sauvignon, Barolo, Shiraz, Malbecs, top Riojas	Meat salads (using those meats listed in the meat category).	Generally too heavy for fish and seafood.	Cream based sauces, e.g. carbonara. Cheesy sauces, e.g. Parmesan, Gorgonzola.	Grilled, roasted, BBQ, casseroled game: boar, duck, pheasant, venison. Beef, lamb.	Black pepper, chives, garlic, mint, nutmeg, rosemary, thyme.	Some good combinations but careful experimentation required.	Brie, Camembert, Chaume. Cheshire, Edam. Parmesan. Pont l'Évêque. Red Leicester.

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ROSÉ, SPARKLING & SWEET

Alongside dry white and red wines there are other styles of wine available and these offer other opportunities for food and wine matching. These sparkling, rosé and sweet wines are often the ideal solution for matching with foods on occasions when dry whites or reds just won't do.



ROSÉ WINES

Without doubt over the last few years one of the most noticeable trends has been the rise of the rosé wine. Rosé wines have become more popular for a number of reasons, not least because of the attractive nature of the wine's colour. They often have more fruit flavours than white wines which is also an attractive trait. Rosé wines are extremely versatile with different foods and this can make them a great choice for when a group of diners are each eating different dishes.

There is quite a range of sweetness levels in rosés, from the dry wines of Sancerre and Tavel in France to the wines often described as 'blush' from California. This term is now being used quite widely around the wine world to describe very delicately coloured rosé wines, that are not particularly high in alcohol, but have a distinctly sweetish palate. Their less dry styles are extremely popular, particularly in bars with consumers who don't enjoy wine made to a dry style. These styles need to be recognised when matching with food and as such it is worth noting the sweetness guide when selecting them. However, all rosés do have common ground when it comes to tannin levels, as they all have quite low amounts.

Rosé wines work well with dishes that have high acidity levels, whether from vinegars, citrus or other fruits. This is because high acidity levels in the food can make wines (usually reds) with higher tannin levels taste bitter. So rosés can be great partners with dressed salads and full flavoured fish and chicken dishes with fruit based sauces.

The off-dry wines from countries such as Australia, Chile and California work very well with Asian influenced dishes, such as a Thai prawn salad or with light creamy curries flavoured with mangos or coconut.

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SPARKLING WINES

Rather like rosé wines sparkling wines offer up a range of styles that can be experimented with to find some absolutely brilliant food pairings. Generally sparkling wines have quite high acidity levels, which have to be taken into consideration, but this also means they are very cleansing on the palate. Champagne served with slightly salty canapés, is an excellent way of getting the appetite going. The saltiness will also bring out the wine's fruit character enhancing the wine.

Served at the start of a meal sparkling wines also work very well with quite a wide range of soups; Champagne and many dry sparkling wines are also ideal partners for shellfish and other seafood dishes. The more fuller flavoured prestige and deluxe styles will obviously cope better with richer dishes and sauces, and are great with crab and lobster as well as chicken and veal.

When matching sparkling wines with delicately flavoured dishes it is well to remember not to overpower the dish and select wines with a similar intensity of flavour. In this case Cava and Prosecco and Chardonnay dominated Champagnes make an excellent choice.

The richer, often fruitier, New World sparkling wines, particularly those made from grapes grown in warmer climates, can be very flexible food partners and are a great choice for celebratory meals when a wide variety of dishes are being enjoyed: at a buffet perhaps.

Sweeter sparklers like Piper-Heidsieck Sublime Demi-Sec are also very versatile whether at the beginning or end of the meal, with foie gras, salty cheeses or summer-fruit desserts; the wine's acidity and generosity of flavours make it a winner here. Asti with its low level of alcohol also makes for a refreshing end to a meal when paired with fruity and lighter, summer-time desserts.



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There is significant upsell opportunity for sweet wines at Christmas as people look to indulge. They're not just for pudding either, but can accompany a wide range of foods from cheese to seafood. We're strong believers that these delicious wines don't get the attention they truly deserve.



REFRESHING, RACY, MEDIUM-SWEET WINES

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LUSCIOUS, RICH, STICKY, SWEET WINES

This is a remarkably diverse group of wines, ranging from the sweet but clean-cut acidity wines such as Tokaji Aszú: just too sweet to make the 'Refreshing, racy, medium-sweet wines' category, to the sticky-sweet wines of a Campbells Muscat from Rutherglen Australia with its 17.5% ABV.

Initially the sweetness level of the wine is the most useful indicator for its pairing with food; the essential guideline being not to let the sweetness of the food be overpowered by that of the wine. However, two other characteristics are particularly worth mentioning. The first is to remark on the grape variety used: Muscat-based wines such as the Brown Brother Late Harvest and the Muscat de Beaumes de Venise are really best either as a very chilled apéritif on their own or at the end of a meal with summer-fruits or chocolate. Most of the other luscious sweet wines can be slightly more versatile, especially those that have been produced under the influence of Botrytis cinerea otherwise known as 'noble rot'.

Such wines include Sauternes, Cérons and Monbazillac as well as examples from South Africa. This 'Botrytis' influence gives the wine an extra dimension that allows it to partner savoury dishes such as foie gras with sensational results, a pairing that is definitely more than the sum of its parts. Whilst it is a more commonly seen partnership on the continent than in Britain these wines are also great with cheese, particularly blue cheese like Roquefort, another example of salt and sweet working together brilliantly.

These wines will of course also make wonderful dessert wines, and in many cases they will partner fruit-based dishes even more successfully than some of the heavier Muscat wines, because their natural acidity will balance better with that of the fruit.

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MAXIMISING MATCHES

Effectively communicating food and wine pairings often leads to guests spending more money on higher quality wines, and opting for that second bottle. Not every restaurant, bar or pub is fortunate enough to benefit from sommeliers. However, it is possible to develop staff skills and to guide customers towards great food and wine partnerships through menu design, point of sale and promotions.

In this section we're looking at some example ways of maximising the opportunity good food and wine matching can bring. The goal of course is to encourage those extra bottle sales and developing wine as a quality driver in your business.



MAKE YOUR MENU WORK HARDER

Our in-house design team use a method we call 'Menu Engineering' when creating a menu for our customers. It's a series of techniques designed to maximise profits through design. Some of these techniques can be applied to any menu to influence customer decisions when ordering wine.

One of the key elements that will help in maximising pairings is arranging a menu by style. Most lists opt for listing wines by country or price which makes the task of choosing the right wine more difficult than it needs to be.

At Matthew Clark we segregate our wines using 'Wine Expression', a classification system of different wine styles. It's designed to segment wines into recognisable styles and provides a great framework with which to build a wine list. Simplifying and highlighting the differences and similarities between wines on a list allows your staff and customers to discuss and choose wines with confidence. Customers always look for a risk-free purchase, but they will experiment if they are confident with the information they have available. If your wine list is confusing to read, with no hint as to the styles of the wine, people will go for the cheaper, perceived-safer options instead of one that is right for the dish.

A second, simple option to entice customers into more profitable choices is by simply highlighting the pairings. A sentence or so accompanying each dish recommending the best wine to enjoy it with can have an instant impact. It's also proved successful with desserts, an area for extra wine sales that often gets overlooked. It takes very little time to add a recommendation to a menu and an easy way to gain incremental sales with dishes across your menu.

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LET CUSTOMERS KNOW

Customers do not know what they are going to drink before they enter your outlet. Your outlet is your shop window and there is opportunity to influence customer purchase decisions with your bar merchandising and bar point of sale.

Beyond a menu designed to aid your customers decision you can further maximise food and wine matches using a range of printed items. Boards and displays attract eyes and are a great place to make recommendations on food and drink, so too are tent cards and menu hangers. You could also use bottle tags or hangers on your back bar display to promote matches. For example suggesting a bar snack that would be enjoyed with a certain wine.

Simply making recommendations alone is effective, however you can also use point of sale to showcase specific promotions that help you drive sales. For example you could have a set price for a 2 dishes and glasses of specially selected wine, with the option to trade up for the full bottle.

DRIVE DEMAND

We often work with customers on creating wine and food evenings. These allow an introduction into the joys of food and wine pairing for many consumers. These can take the form of one-off, not to be missed events or a regular occurrence that increase covers at quieter times.

Whether it's an evening with an invited winemaker or a member of our wine development team running an evening of education or a set menu with a different wine with every course, the most important thing is that your customers will leave feeling more comfortable about taking recommendations in future, moving away from the risk-free.

TRAINING FOR CONFIDENCE

Perhaps the most important element of maximising food and wine pairing is ensuring that staff are confident and prepared to make recommendations around your menu. Having confident and knowledgeable staff will undoubtedly help when it comes to increasing your sales.

Training staff can take many forms. At Matthew Clark we take a blended approach with the venues we work with, offering modular online training service Flow and accredited wine education from the Wine and Spirit Education Trust alongside bespoke training build around a menu and wine list.

Giving front-line staff a knowledge of wine basics and some guidelines on food pairings gives them real confidence to talk about wine with their customers and make appropriate recommendations. Training guides which cover basics such as pronunciation, tasting notes, food matches and interesting facts to highlight the wines' individuality, are also handy to have close by as something for staff to lean on. We're we've worked with outlets on staff training we've seen an increase in the volume of sales and also, more importantly, a real shift upwards in the quality of wines sold.

