

The Perfect Marriage – Matching food & Wine

During my long and arduous career I have had the privilege to taste literally thousands of wines. For me matching food & wine is part of my daily life, a part which I enjoy immensely and something I am passionate about, but can I claim to be an expert? No! I cannot taste what you taste & I cannot profess to know your likes & dislikes. What I can do however is draw on a huge wealth of tasting & flavour profiles and a pretty strong understanding of food science. Armed with this knowledge I can steer you and help you to find wines which will excite & intrigue you.

When trying to pair wines with dishes there are a multitude of factors to be considered, the most important issue is balance. You do not want the wine to overpower even the subtlest flavours on the dish nor do you want to lose the complexity of the wine so the 'weight' of the wine is all important – light wines with lighter foods and big robust wines with more hearty dishes. The next consideration is flavour combination, here there are two opposing schools of thought - compliment or contrast. The former tries to align similar flavours, the second operates on the theory that opposites attract. For me neither is right or wrong, but a perfect pairing will employ both strategies. Matching the length and flavours on the finish and aromas of the wine with the more subtle elements of the dish whilst allowing the more up front flavours to go head to head with the main component.

Firstly the science...

We have 5 main flavour receptors in our tongues, sweet, sour, salty, bitter & savoury. Understanding which flavours stimulate each receptor will enable you to balance flavour combinations – for example strawberries have very low levels of sugar and very high levels of acidity even though our brains tell us that they are sweet, hence the long-established pairing with brut Champagne. For the very same reason that we put yogurt with spicy foods or salt with caramel... It is all about balance!

Next the history & geography...

Over the millennia regional cuisine has naturally developed to reflect the abundance of local food sources and evolved hand in glove with the local brew. It is no coincidence that rich hearty red wines have become popular in more inland areas dense in woodland and abundant in game and earthy vegetables. Nor is it any more surprising that hot costal areas have cultivated fragrant & zingy, tropical white grape varieties which work harmoniously with salty sea food. For this simple reason an almost fool proof guide is to pair wines with their local cuisines!

Finally, mood...

Not a conventional theory, but one which I firmly stand behind. After all, aside from sustenance why do we consume? For pleasure! One day you may feel decadent yet the next you may feel humble. One day you may wish to be adventurous, yet the next demure. If we accept that we also have to accept that what will be appropriate on one day may not be the next, and almost certainly what works for one person will absolutely not for another. With that in mind it comes down to individual preference, the single most important consideration which is almost always overlooked in the aloof world of wine!

The only concrete rule of wine pairing is... there are no rules! Taste is entirely subjective, and as such you, and only you know what you like and therefore you cannot be wrong (all of a sudden my job makes a lot more sense!). With this in mind I would urge you to ignore the advice of any self-professed expert and try as many different flavour combinations as you possibly can. Drink what you like, eat what you like, but if nothing else... TRY EVERYTHING!