

EXTRAS: TALKING ABOUT WINE & FOOD MATCHING

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Talking about food matching is a wonderful way to connect with a broad range of people without baffling them with complex wine language. The key to being confident is knowing WHY a dish is a good match rather than just reciting the ingredients in the dish. This gives the customer confidence in your expertise and gives ideas for the 'future use' of the wine - which is a great sales tool.

There are three things to consider when designing a good match:

1. Try to match the weight of the wine with the weight of the food - i.e. light bodied food + light bodied wine
2. Consider the structural elements of the wine and how they interact with food - i.e. acid, tannin & sugar
3. Don't underestimate the effect of 'bridging ingredients' - i.e. dairy, nuts and olives

The most important factor is weight. Weight in wine refers to how the combined sense of alcohol, extract, sugar, acid, flavour and texture can create a sense of 'bigness'. This can be interpreted as 'body' - as in 'light', 'medium' or 'heavy' body. As for food, 'weight' takes into account the main ingredients and, importantly, the methods used to cook them.

As a guide, the diagram below can be used to find a good match. The left column is a list of cooking methods, which, as they descend, impart more flavour to the ingredient. The right column is a list of common types of protein, which, as they descend, become richer in flavour. With a ruler, draw a line from the protein to the cooking method: the section in the **middle** where the line crosses through can give you an idea of the wine style that will likely be a good match. Of course there are exceptions but this is a great place to start.

ESTIMATING 'WEIGHT' IN FOOD AND WINE



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STRUCTURE - THE BIG FOUR

Acidity, sweetness, saltiness, bitterness: these four sensations are as much a part of wine as they are of food, so try to think of how you can balance them.

ACIDITY

Generally speaking, try to match high acid wine with high acid food. You can add acid through olive oil, citrus, vinegar or tomatoes.

Acidic wine has the ability to 'cut through' oil, butter and natural fats – if you feel compelled to squeeze a lemon over whatever you're eating, a high acid white wine is probably a good option.

Acidity in wine will highlight naturally beautiful, fresh flavours – especially simple, fresh, uncomplicated wines that allow the food to sing. Think fresh curd cheese, zucchini flowers, tomatoes and oysters.

Great high-acid varieties include riesling, sauvignon blanc, chenin blanc, muscadet, sangiovese, nebbiolo and pinot noir.

SWEETNESS

Generally speaking, try to match off-dry wines with spicy food, and dessert wines with dessert. In addition to spicy oil-based dishes, slight sweetness in food is a wonderful complement to mild sweetness (off-dry) in wine – think about chutneys, grilled nectarines, mango salsa and raisins. Be careful around high coconut levels – coconut milk & cream is very mouth-coating and can make a sweet wine seem out of balance.

Dessert wine should be sweeter than the dessert it's served with. Think meringue-based desserts with moscato, stone fruit-based desserts for late harvest and botrytis wines, and chocolate-based dishes for fortified wines. An interesting contrast is dessert wine with salty, rich blue cheese.

SALTINESS

Saltiness in food enhances the flavour of the wine, so be sure whatever you're drinking is good. You probably will do best with something cleansing and light. Tannic reds with salty, oily food can feel metallic, so avoid cabernet sauvignon with your next Friday-night-fish-and-chips – instead try a light pinot noir or zippy pinot grigio.

TANNIN

Tannin is fundamentally bitter, so can be balanced with bitterness in food. Think charred meat and bitter leaves. Adding pepper also is a good move.

When your mouth is clean, tannin binds to your saliva, resulting in the puckering sensation. If you have some fat and protein though, it binds to that instead – which makes the wine seem softer and less drying. Try it next time you have steak for dinner – just note that the effect is increased the more you chew your food.

High tannin clashes with fish oils, most hot spices, low protein food and very creamy cheeses – and can make some food seem metallic. So avoid fish, tofu, and oily spicy dishes like curry.

If you are eating anything dark and spicy – try a fruity, low tannic red – grenache and gamay are good options. For green curry, pinot gris is a good option – as is apple cider.

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THE IDEA OF BRIDGING INGREDIENTS

Say you have a poached piece of firm white fish – your instinct might be to simply pair it with white wine, but the sauce, condiments and other ingredients you serve with it might influence your choice: a vinaigrette or citrus-based sauce will introduce a sharpness (try a citrus-driven white), whereas a sweet relish or chutney will introduce fruitiness (which can be offset nicely by an off-dry wine). Buttery sauces will enrich the mouthfeel (complimented nicely with a textural white like chardonnay or pinot gris) and soy-based sauces will introduce salty and savoury notes (which can be enhanced with a more savoury styled light red, or even off-dry white). If you serve it on a bed of lentils cooked with speck and caramelised onion, or wrap it in prosciutto and fry it, then you're heading into light red territory (consider pinot noir or gamay). Once you get the hang of it, you can use particular ingredients to help 'build a bridge' between your wine and your meal.

CONSIDER THESE

Here are a few ingredients that do a great job of 'bridging'.

Mushrooms // Stronger mushroom flavours (especially from dried mushrooms) will generally add earthiness and intensity and be suitable for red wines. Milder white mushrooms can add creaminess and texture but without the strong flavours – and so can be suitable for white wines.

Nuts // When roasted, nuts can highlight the nutty notes in oaked wines.

Herbs // Soft herbs will highlight similar characters in the wine, whereas woody herbs can add richness and flavour intensity and are often nicely complimented by red wine.

Beans and Legumes // White beans mesh nicely with textural whites, and since legumes soak up flavours, what you choose to cook them in can swing the dish from white to red.

Cheese // Cheese adds richness and texture when cooked into a dish. Goats' cheese and feta can introduce a pungent/vibrant aspect to an otherwise earthy dish (roast vegetables, for example) and tilt it towards white wine.

Cured Meats // The concentrated meatiness of cured meat, when combined with fat (in good salami or pancetta), can add depth, richness and intensity to a dish which will often call for red wines or even good rose.

Olives // Green olives are a great match for white wine, and black olives for red wine – especially Cabernet Sauvignon.

Remember, this is a guide only and every person has a different opinion based on their preferences and palate. The key is to try new things, ask the people around you for their opinions and continue your research so you can better understand the physiological and neurological mechanisms at play when we eat and drink.

Best of luck!