

The Art of Food and Wine Pairing

When considering which wine to pair with your dish, follow **Lindsay Groves'** simple guidelines



Chilean Seabass on Spinach and Mushroom paired with white wine

Photo: Courtesy: Michael Klein, 19th World Hotel, Bangalore

BUILDING THE MATCH

In pairing wine and food, start by looking at the structural elements: weight and intensity. The key word here is balance. If your match is lopsided, one item will overwhelm the other. This defeats the purpose of creating a harmonious match in which both parts have the opportunity to shine.

WEIGHT

The weight of a wine or food can be divided into light, medium or full, heavy. When talking about wine specifically, we refer to weight as 'body'. To put weight into perspective, try tasting a glass of water compared to a glass of mango juice. When pairing a food and wine, the items should be of equal weight.

Examples:	Light Bodied	Heavier/Full Bodied
Wines	- Riesling - Sauvignon Blanc - Pinot Noir - Beaujolais/Gamay	- Oaked - Whites/Chardonnay - Dessert Wines - Cabernet Sauvignon - Super Tuscans
Other Drinks	- Water - Apple Juice - Green Tea	- Cream, yogurt - Mango Juice - Assam Tea
Foods	- Salad - White Fish - Raw Vegetables	- Dal Mahkni - Red Meat - Tandoori vegetables

Advice: Match the weight of the food with the weight of the wine.

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WINE Basics

INTENSITY

Intensity refers to the concentration of aromas or flavours. As with weight, we are looking the intensity of both elements to be equal so that neither one nor the other dominates.

Advice: Match the intensity of the food with the intensity of the wine.

FLAVOUR

When analyzing the components of a dish, determine what gives the dish its flavour. Is it the main ingredient? The sauce? Spice? Marinade? Or maybe the cooking method? Once you have established what the dominant flavour component is, build your match around that. Basic foods such as paneer, chicken, tofu, rice, etc, may well be the major ingredient; however it is how they are prepared that gives them character.

Examples:	Light Intensity	Pronounced Intensity
Wines	- Pinot Grigio - Unoaked Chardonnay - Cool climate Pinot Noir	- Gewürztramine - Muscat - Oaked Chardonnay - Cabernet Sauvignon - Orange Juice - Cola
Other Drinks	- Water - Club Soda - Camomile Tea	- Assam Tea
Foods	- Most breads - Sushi - Plain chicken - Unripened, mild cheese	- Heavily seasoned dishes - Barbequed/tandoor-cooked foods - Smoked foods - Aged and blue cheeses

Advice: Determine what gives the dish its flavour character and pair to the dominant element in the wine.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

The importance of matching aromas and flavours tends to be overemphasized. In actuality it is only the icing on the cake. But getting it right can mean the difference between a ho-hum pairing and a memorable event. The terms aroma and flavour can be used interchangeably, aroma typically referring to what we smell, whereas flavour refers to what we taste. The two should generally correspond. Choosing a wine that complements the aromas/flavours found in the food will work to knit your pairing together and help mesh all the elements into one harmonious whole. Major aroma families include: fruity, vegetal or herbaceous, floral, spicy and earthy.

COMMON WINE CATEGORIES

Given below are examples of some of the wines that fall into the more common categories and how they can be paired:

Fruity: Wines that are fruity work well with foods that are spicy

or smoky such as foods cooked on the barbeque or tandoor.

Example: Riesling with Thai curry or hot-climate Merlot with barbequed meat

Vegetal/Herbaceous: Wines that display vegetal or herbaceous character work well to complement foods that also have a vegetal element. Vegetables would obviously fall into this category, as well as foods that include herb seasonings.

Example: Sauvignon Blanc with salad or Cabernet Franc with herb-crusted lamb

Floral: Wines that are known to have strong floral aromas are normally white varieties such as Riesling, Gewürztramine and Muscat. Reds can also sometimes show notes of violets, roses or dried flowers, typically grapes like Pinot Noir or Nebbiolo. Floral wines pair nicely with foods that are fruity, have sweet spice notes or floral/perfumed character.

Example: Muscat dessert wine with vanilla crème brûlée

Spicy: Gewürztramine and Syrah are two grapes commonly described as spicy. Use wines that have a spicy element to complement spiced foods.

Example: Gewürztramine with Chinese noodles or Syrah with kebabs

Earthy: Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, especially from Burgundy, have a tendency to develop a pleasant earthy character reminiscent of mushrooms or a forest floor. Aged vintage Champagne can also show earthiness. These wines are natural partners for dishes containing mushroom or truffles. Pinot Noir in particular works very well with fowl and game meat.

Example: Chardonnay with wild mushroom pasta in a cream sauce or

Pinot Noir with Coq au Vin

COOKING METHODS

When putting your match together, consider the cooking method used in the preparation of the food:

Lighter Cooking Methods: Boiling, Steaming, Poaching

When these methods have been used, no additional flavour is being added to the food. Because of this, the food is normally more delicate and subtle. Choose a wine that is lighter in body and equally delicate in character.

Quick Fry Methods: Stir-Fry, Deep-Fry, etc

All these methods involve the addition of oil/fat. Wines that have prominent acidity work well with greasy foods, for the same reason finger bowls with a slice of lime may be offered at the end of a meal. Acidity cuts through grease and leaves your palate clean and refreshed. Fresh, cool-climate wines



Tandoori kababs paired with Gabbiano rosé

are the natural choice; wines such as Riesling, Muscadet and Sauvignon Blanc.

Heavier Cooking Methods: Grilling, Roasting, Barbeque, Tandoor, etc

These cooking methods add more intensity and weight to the food as well as smoky flavours. Look for wines with more body and intensity that can hold their own. New World wines made in a concentrated, fruit-driven style tend to work very well.

Slow Cook Methods: Braising, Stewing

When foods are cooked over time, they lose moisture and the flavours are concentrated. They are also denser and heartier in weight. Choose wines that are more robust and have enough flavour to compete with the dish.


These guidelines will point you in the right direction and give you a basic knowledge of food and wine pairing. All of this, however, is only the theory. Nothing takes the place of practice and first-hand experience. Experimentation is an integral part of learning. Have fun and don't be afraid of making mistakes, at the end of the day it is about what you personally enjoy drinking with what you are eating. ♦

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LIFE'S RICHER




 Gooseberry & Grass

 Spicy Indian food, preferably starters & snacks.



 Tropical fruits with a hint of sweetness.

 Indian food, preferably starters and snacks.

