Wine and Food Pairing

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Philosophies
Several schools of thought guide experts and casual drinkers to choose the right wine to go with a particular dish. Traditionalists [link to *Traditional Pairing* section] declare that red wine goes with red meat, while white wine goes with fish and chicken. Professionals in today's wine world [link to *Modern Pairing* section] acknowledge that style, weight, intensity and sweetness level are characteristics to notice in both a wine and entrée when deciding what to put together. And some renegades [link to *New Research* section] even go so far as to say that any wine can go with any food – the key is in the preparation of the food and individual's palates.

Traditional Pairing
Practices become tradition because they work. Few steak lovers deny that the experience of a bite of a juicy New York cut coupled with a sip of an intense Cabernet Sauvignon in one's mouth is pure pleasure. And the right preparation of filet of sole will make your taste of Sauvignon Blanc sing. These striking unions encouraged what is really a relatively recent trend towards setting guidelines for wine and food pairing. For centuries, local wines were simply paired with local foods. The idea of matching the color of the wine with the color of the meat was simply the first stage in this developing art.

Modern Pairing
Subsequent to the basic red wine/red meat, white wine/fish or chicken protocol, chefs and sommeliers realized that flavors in a food's preparation could drive the wine selection, rather than just the color of the meat. Why shouldn't a rich stroganoff with its creamy sauce marry with a lush Chardonnay, even though the dish is riddled with beef? The classic Chicken Cacciatore, whose pieces simmer in a tomato/mushroom sauce is wonderful with a Pinot Noir, like our Reserve Beaulieu Vineyard from Carneros [link].

Connoisseurs then looked beyond the sauce and found that harmonizing characteristics of a dish with characteristics in a wine is also effective in producing a delicious duo. Weight, style, level of sweetness or dryness and intensity are all aspects to consider when choosing a wine for a meal. Almost 30 years ago, the progressive wine list [link] (view ours, as an example) was developed, organizing wines by these flavor characteristics. Examples of categories are *Dry Light Intensity White/Blush Wines* and *Dry Full Intensity Red Wines*.

Chefs and sommeliers experiment with harmonizing one or all of these aspects between the dish and the wine, and sometimes even contrast the elements. See examples below under *Tips* [link to third bullet under *Tips*] for pairing using these criteria.

New Research

Most recent studies find that individuals' palates play a large role in which wines they like. Using the progressive wine list [link] mentioned under *Modern Pairing* above, educators have begun to train wine shop owners and restaurant professionals to quiz customers on the styles of wine they like and to use the list to select a wine. They then might suggest a dish to order with the particular wine based on its intensity, weight, style or sweetness/dryness level.

Additionally, the idea that any wine can go with any food is gradually being accepted. The term "Umami" describes the delicious or savory taste in certain foods and wines that contain glutamate or ribonucleotides. Foods high in umami are certain meats and cheeses, seafood, asparagus, fresh tomatoes, cooked mushrooms and more. But most people don't realize that the umami in these foods can have the effect of making the wine consumed with it taste bitter or acidic. Adding salt or a squeeze of lemon to the food will then magically soften and smooth out the taste of the wine. Effectively, this practice will enable anyone to enjoy just about any wine with any food.

Pairing Tips
- Start with the simplest traditional pairings
  - try a lamb chop with a Cabernet Sauvignon, like our Moon Mountain Vineyard Estate Reserve [link]
  - eat a piece of grilled chicken with a Chardonnay resembling ours from The Monterey Vineyard [link]

- Consider matching a wine to the sauce in your dish
  - serve anything with Hollandaise sauce and pair with Sauvignon Blanc, like that from Sterling Vineyards [link]; although buttery and yolky, the Hollandaise's slight lemon flavor harmonizes with the citrus found in most Sauvignon Blancs, whose acid will also cut through the richness of the sauce
  - pair Mexican dishes that have a red chile and tomato-based sauce with a Sangiovese similar to our Beaulieu Vineyard Maestro Collection [link] offering; the tomato flavor supports the wine's red fruit, and the medium body of the wine matches the medium weight of the sauce
  - sample a coconut-based yellow Thai curry on chicken with a Chardonnay big enough to stand up to its intense flavors – our Edna Valley Reserve [link] will fill the bill

- Think about the styles of wine you like and using a progressive wine list, pair your wines to entrées with similar or contrasting flavor characteristics to wines on the list. (View our progressive wine list [link], as an example.)
  - go to a wine on the list you know you like and note the other wines in the same category – it's likely you'll like those wines, as well
  - choose a wine
  - note the flavor characteristics of the wine – for example, you choose Beaulieu Vineyard Maestro Collection Riesling [link]; this wine is slightly sweet and exhibits delicate florals, light melon and pear; a light Asian dish such as spring rolls with an apricot dipping sauce will probably harmonize nicely with the wine; their common features are lightness and sweetness

- using the same wine, consider contrasting some of its characteristics; try bleu cheese with its rich, salty qualities – the slight sweetness of the Riesling rounds off the strength of the cheese for a surprising *Ahh* moment

- Be a rebel – drink any wine with any dish
  - pick a wine you like, such as the Rosenblum Atoosa Syrah [link]
  - take a bite of a food not considered great with Syrah, like asparagus
  - take a sip of the Syrah – the wine tastes bitter
  - sprinkle some salt on a piece of the asparagus and eat
  - take another taste of the Syrah – the wine tastes smooth!
  - try these steps with any wine and any food