

Wine & Food

Many people are familiar with the old, well established rule of food/wine pairing – “White wine with fish, red wine with meat.” While this rule is not as valid as it once was, the reasoning behind it is sound and deserves examination.

Think of a nice, fresh cut of salmon, neatly grilled. Most of us who enjoy fish would welcome a squeeze of fresh lemon on it. Why? The acid in the lemon “cuts” the intrinsic fish flavor without overpowering it. Thus white wine, with its more apparent acidity and less powerful flavors would be more appropriate.

Now imagine a filet mignon served with marsala jus. The assertive flavor of the jus matches the magnitude the flavor of the beef as would a rich red wine. Just as the marsala jus would overwhelm the salmon, so would most red wines. And just a squeeze of lemon would be lost on the roast beef, so too would most white wines.

The following eight guidelines (not rules) will help you pair your food to wine.

1. Don't dwell on color. There are enough other factors to consider; the color will take care of itself. For instance, chicken dishes can be prepared to match well with any wine, depending on the ingredients. Lighter reds and strong whites can survive most food pairings.
2. Match Strengths. Powerful dishes require wines of the same magnitude. Delicate or dishes need a delicate wine.
3. Opposites Attract. Spicy cuisine needs lighter or sweeter wines to help extinguish the fire. Rich cream or butter sauces are well matched with acidic, “cutting wine”.
4. Regional Affinity. In Europe, it is a truism that regional cooking goes best with local wine. For example, some customers may prefer a Sangiovese from Tuscany to enjoy with their Italian pasta dishes.
5. Simple Wine with Complex Food: Pair simple food with a varietal that isn't too complex such as a Pinot Blanc or a Merlot.
6. Match Price. A \$50 Chianti would be wasted on pizza, but a carefully prepared dinner deserves an equally special wine.
7. Serving Red Wine with Fish. As long as the acid level is high and the tannins are barely noticeable, red wine is fine with most seafood.
8. Serving White Wine with Beef. A well oaked, big California or Australian Chardonnay are definitely up to the challenge!