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15 Like many of you, I enjoy my wine, and I drink a fair amount of it. But

I'm tired of the standard wine reviews where every wine gets a good or positive rating to avoid offence. There's nothing worse than buying a recommended bottle and then hating it when you open it. The truth is that not all wine is good, and your enjoyment of it can be influenced dramatically by the food and people with whom you share it.

The reality is you don't need to know a lot about wine to enjoy it – and you don't need to have a huge bank balance either. Many of Australia's best wines (and I mean quality, not the price tag) never make it to the large retail outlets or chain stores. For many years now I've been scouring the country's wine regions to find Australia's hidden gems. I've been hanging out with vignerons and winemakers from the Barossa to the Tamar and Yarra Valleys, and beyond. I even got so passionate about wine that I went to learn more about it – and received London's International Wine Spirit Education Trust Level 3 qualifications. In fact, I have also almost completed my two-year Diploma in Wine and Spirit (WSET4).

I'm sure you'll agree that one of the best things about drinking wine is sharing it with friends over some good food. The matching of wine to people is actually quite a difficult skill, but it's something I just kind of 'fell' into and have become pretty good at. So much so that my friends regularly ask me for wine suggestions – from everyday drinking wine to special occasions; and from drink nows to exploring the benefits of cellaring.

Matching food to your wine can also be a challenge, and something many people get a little nervous about. The old adage that white wine can only be matched to chicken, fish or seafood no longer applies. For years I've been designing food matches from simple 3-course meals to extravagant 14-course degustation dinners with my wife, Mrs Matchmaker, who creates the recipes. Together we enjoy exploring the flavours of wine and how each could be amplified and complemented with various dishes, and it's something we've become pretty good at together.

So, in a nutshell, that's what Wine Matchmaker is all about: no holds barred reviews of everyday wines I taste, as well as some of my favourite 'hidden gems' for you to explore; how each wine could be best matched to food, and what kind of person would enjoy each wine. This, coupled with a few recipes you can cook at home means you can create your own perfect dinners that are sure to impress and delight. We also run exclusive wine dinners and education sessions, and commencing in October 2020, they'll be run through our very own back vintage wine bar – Life's Too Short Bar in East Melbourne – so you can learn even more, should you wish.

So please have a look around, read some of the posts and give me your thoughts and feedback. Whether you agree with me or not please feel free to leave your constructive thoughts.

Enjoy,

Antony Anderson

The Wine Matchmaker.

Wine and food pairing: An introduction.

One of the most common questions I get is around matching wine to food. In this eBook I'll talk about how to know when the right wine is matched with the right food - that's where the magic happens and they become more than the sum of their parts. In future articles, I'll cover matching wine to specific cuisines, but let's start with a general introduction to the basics of wine and food pairing.

There are some general rules that work well, but the rules are not always hard and fast. For example, you've probably heard you should match white wine with white meat and red wine with red meat. Whilst this is a good general guide it's important to look at all aspects of the dish. So grilled chicken does go really well with white wine, but as soon as you put a red sauce on it like chicken cacciatore, it tends to match better with a light red wine which compliments the richness of the tomato flavours.

It's also important to not just think of any red or white wine, but to also consider the elements in the wine itself. For example both acid and tannin in wine are great for cutting through fatty food. That's why at a recent Get Wine Confident event I matched salami with an acidic white wine, and everyone agreed that the acid in the wine went really well with the fat in the salami. The acid was softened by the fat, and the salami didn't seem so fatty as the acid toned it down ... it was a very pleasant combination. This is also why red wines with tannin go so well with a juicy steak. The tannin in the red wine cut through the fat and softens the wine at the same time, making both more enjoyable. The same goes for red wine and hard cheeses where the butter fat in the cheese is balanced by the tannin in the wine ... a tannic red matched with an aged cheddar is my favourite.

Try also to match the weight of the wine with the weight of the food. A light zesty Riesling goes better with seafood than a big buttery Chardonnay which would be better with a dish with a creamy sauce. The same goes for red wine - a light red like Pinot Noir goes better with Duck, whilst Cabernet Sauvignon is a good match for a lamb roast or beef bourguignon.

With desert there is one simple rule ... the wine needs to be sweeter than the dessert. This means that a late harvest or botrytis wine is often the best choice as most deserts are quite sweet. Having said that I often break this rule and have been known to serve a big Barossa Shiraz with a platter of hard cheese, dried fruit and very dark chocolate at the end of a meal ... who needs sugar on sugar at the end of a big meal?

Now there are some foods that are difficult to match to food. Salty food (anchovies, tapas, salty cheese, etc) is particularly difficult as the acid and tannin in the wine has a tendency to clash with the salt. But there is a particular type of wine - dry sherries - that are an excellent match ... very different to the sherries your grandmother used to drink. Curries are another difficult match which is why people usually drink beer, but there are some light reds that work well. Spicy food can also be a challenge, but I've found that white wines with a little residual sugar can balance that chilli burn nicely. I'll share more on this in future articles when I introduce matching wine to specific cuisines, as well as great matches for vegetarian and vegan food. So if you are just starting out on your wine and food pairing here are some great combinations to try...

3 Riesling and seafood (especially prawns)

Chardonnay and chicken

Pinot Noir and duck

Cabernet Sauvignon and lamb

Shiraz and steak

4 Explore these combinations and let me know how you go. But remember: rules are made to be broken.

Half the fun is experimenting to see which combinations work for you.

Cheers Antony.

Drinking good wine,

with good food in
good company is
one of life's great
pleasures

5 White Grape Varieties and food matching

I want to talk about grape varieties used to make white wine. If you would like to listen to my podcast on the topic, visit our website here - www.winematchmaker.com.au/podcasts

Choosing wine often comes down to the grape variety and people will often choose a favourite grape. For example, they know they like Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand but few people give any thought to why that is the case. Grape varieties have certain common characteristics although it does vary slightly on where they are grown, for example, Chardonnay from cooler regions tends to have more citrus fruits while Chardonnay grown in warm climates can have tropical fruits although it still has the underlying Chardonnay characteristics. Understanding these differences help you choose wine, get more out of it and also help with food and wine pairing.

Grapes are generally divided into White and Red Varieties determined by the colour of their skins. For more information listen to my podcast on winemaking. So in this podcast, I would like to explore some common white grape varieties, how to pronounce them, common characteristics and some examples of each. For more information please see the individual grape podcasts that go into more detail.

So let's get started.

I like to talk about wines in terms of body or how heavy they feel in the mouth and then go from lighter to heavier wines. This is especially important for wine and food pairing as wines that are lighter in body generally go better with lighter foods e.g. Sauvignon Blanc goes very nicely with seafood.

There are common white grapes that you will be familiar with but I would also like to include some that Australia is well known for but also a couple that are just great varieties worth exploring. The list is by no means complete but a good start.

Let's start with Marsanne (pronounced maa-san) a little known variety in Australia but it is well known in the South of France. The best-known example is from a winery called Chateau Tahbilk near Nagambie in Central Victoria. As a young wine, Marsanne is light-bodied with aromas and flavours of pear and melon with some blossom. Like many of the lighter white wine varieties, it is quite high in acid that makes it a good wine to pair with light meat dishes...think seafood and pork. Marsanne from Chateau Tahbilk has incredible aging potential and can last for decades. As it ages the wine slowly becomes deeper in colour developing honey flavours and a richer palate. Quite readily available and I recommend trying a few bottles.

6 The next grape variety is Semillon (pronounced sei-mee-on). Another little known variety but Semillon from the Hunter valley in New South Wales is well regarded globally and because it isn't well known it can be quite a bargain. As a young wine it has aromas and flavours of fresh citrus and green apple with some good acid. It has a bit more body than Marsanne and can have an almost waxy or lanolin character to the wine...weird to explain but quite pleasant. Once again it pairs well with light meat dishes such as seafood and pork but I also like it with soft cheese. Good examples are available under the Tyrrell's and Mount Pleasant brands.

I get more questions about the next grape variety than just about any other one...Pinot Gris or Pinot Grigio. They are actually the same grape variety but the difference is how the grapes are handled and the winemaking techniques. Grapes to make Pinot Grigio (pronounced pee noh gree joe) are normally picked a bit earlier so they have more citrus flavours, melon and are higher in acid...this is the fresher style normally made in Italy and goes well with pasta dishes. Grapes to make Pinot Gris (pronounced pee noh gree) are normally picked a bit later so they are riper with more sugar, ripe pear flavours and a bit lower in acid...this is the richer style normally made in France and goes well with their richer dishes. A good example of Pinot Gris is Delatite and most Pinot Grigio from the King Valley in Victoria is very good...it was settled by Italians after all.

Why not get together with some friends or clients to experiment with white wine varieties in my wine confidence workshops. Message me for more details.

The next grape causes more debate than any other: Sauvignon Blanc (pronounced saw vee nyon blahnk). Originally grown in the Loire Valley in central France it is now dominated by Sauvignon Blanc grown in New Zealand but in particular the region of Marlborough. In Australia we sometimes refer to the very high volumes of this wine as the "savalanche"

...get it...an avalanche of Sauvignon

Blanc. Anyway...the New Zealand style is quite forward with passionfruit, gooseberry and a herbal note that some kindly refer to as asparagus or unkindly as "cats piss"

. It is an easy drinking style that often

has a bit of residual sugar that isn't normally noticeable due to the high acid. It pairs very well with seafood and cheese. Some examples of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc I enjoy include Stoneleigh and Matua Valley although there are some boutique producers that are excellent e.g. Seresin.

My favourite white grape variety is Riesling (pronounced reez-luhng). Now I know some of you are already turning your nose up thinking about the sweet Riesling of the 1970's and 1980's such as Blue Nun but like Chardonnay, Riesling has changed with the dry varieties i.e. without residual sugar, now dominating the market. One of the reasons I like this variety is that it is one style when it is young but good examples can age for decades becoming a completely different wine. Young Riesling is normally very citrus i.e. lemon and lime, sometimes with grapefruit and minerality (think wet stones) and lots of acid making it a very crisp clean wine. But with age the wine changes into a deep colour, with kerosene on the nose (you either love it or hate it) and a honeyed palate with softer acid. They are very good food wines with young Riesling pairing well with seafood and old Riesling going very well with smoked fish and cheese. Traditionally grown in Germany there are excellent examples in the Clare Valley in South Australia. My favourite producers include Pikes and Leo Buring.

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There are also plenty of white wine blends with common ones being Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc and Marsanne is often blended with Roussanne or Viognier. The intention should be that the blend is more than the sum of its parts but some wineries make blends because they have excess wine or are trying to cover up inferior grapes. I am a bit of a purist preferring single grape variety wines although I do love a good Marsanne/Roussanne blend.

Cheers, Antony.

Sparkling Wine & Food Matching

Have you recently bought a bottle of Sparkling wine, but now you are wondering what food will go well with it? I'm glad you asked because in this article I am going to explore the food that matches well with different Sparkling wines.

Thus many of the great Sparkling wine and food pairings involve fatty food. I'll explore this further shortly.

One of the common features of Sparkling Wine is the high level of acid they have. As I noted in a previous article acid is great for cutting through fat in foods.

Champagne

Champagne is probably the best-known Sparkling Wine and is often associated with luxury food.

One of the most famous Sparkling Wine and food pairings to Champagne and Caviar. The little salty fish eggs in caviar are surprisingly fatty and the acid in the Champagne cuts through the fat to enhance the flavours of both. The Citrus i.e. lemon and lime, flavours in Champagne compliment the fishiness of the Caviar reducing the salty flavours. One of my favourite cruises lines, Seabourn, offers Champagne and Caviar on demand and included in the cruise fare. Many an afternoon I would sit on the balcony sipping Champagne and eating Caviar, with fresh cooked blinis, whilst watching the world glide by...pure bliss.

One of the other great combinations with Champagne is smoked salmon. Once again the acid in the Champagne cuts through the fat in the salmon and the citrus flavours compliment the fish flavours. It works well as a entree as the Champagne acts as a digestive and the salmon is a nice first course. It is worth noting that what pairs well with Champagne also pairs well with most Cremant, French Sparkling Wine made outside the Champagne Region, which is often just as good at a fraction of the price. So if you want to experiment with food and Sparkling Wine pairing Cremant can be an inexpensive way of doing this in case it doesn't work out as well as expected. A good example is Simonnet-Febvre Cremant de Bourgogne from Burgundy which can be found for around \$25 a bottle.

Prosecco

Whilst Champagne is often dry with a limited amount of residual sugar Prosecco, from Northern Italy, can be sweeter but still with the high acid. Thus it matches well with heavier dishes including salami and other cut meats. It also goes well with hard Italian cheeses such as Asiago and Provolone.

Imagine a charcuterie plate with some Italian hard cheese, crusty bread and a glass of Prosecco on a warm sunny afternoon. Give it a try and let me know what you think.
If you need a good example of a quality Prosecco check out the Rebuli Prosecco Superiore D.O.C.G. Valdobbiadene N.V.

9Cava

Not to be confused with the drink Kava from the Pacific Islands, Cava from Spain has the same high acid and lower sweetness as Champagne.

It has some unique herbal and floral aromas sometimes described as rubber. These flavours mean that Cava pairs well with artichokes and asparagus. It also pairs well with rice dishes such as Paella especially if it has seafood in it as well as different styles of Tapas. A very versatile and inexpensive Sparkling Wine. Check out the incredible value of the Freixenet Vintage Reserva Brut Cava.

New World Sparkling Wine

This is Sparkling Wine made outside Europe, the old world, but usually using the same grapes of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and sometimes Pinot Meunier. It is in no way inferior to the old world sparkling wines with the Yarra Valley's Domain Chandon, owned by the French Company LVMH, producing some high-quality Sparkling Wine.

These wines are usually very dry but still with high acid making them great with seafood but especially shellfish. Mrs Wine Matchmaker does a lovely dish of Thai style prawns which goes very well with the readily available Domain Chandon Brut or Yarra Burn Vintage. Great food and wine without breaking the bank and staying local.

So whatever Sparkling wine you prefer there are some great food matches that will enhance the experience...because Life's Too Short not to enjoy good food and wine.

I would love to hear your experiences of pairing Sparkling Wine and Food and I'm happy to provide some free advice if you get stuck.

Cheers Antony.

Matching Wine to Italian Food - How to pick the perfect match

Italy has a great and long-established wine and food culture. In fact, it is hard to think of Italian food without also thinking about Italian wine. As I learnt in my Wine and Spirits Diploma.

This often means that over many years the locals grow grape varieties and make styles of wine to match the local produce and dishes. So it is no surprise that Italian grape varieties go well with Italian food.

Firstly, a reminder about some basics of wine and food pairing:

Acid and tannin cut through fat;

Wine can compare or contrast with food. That is you can have wines with similar aromas and flavours to the food or different but complementary flavours and aromas;

Always consider the sauce that is being used with the dish. For example, a chicken dish with a white sauce would pair very differently than a chicken dish with a tomato-based sauce.

So now that we have that out of the way let's dive into Italian food and wine pairings.

Pasta is a mainstay of Italian food and often comes with olive oil, cream or white wine sauce. Who hasn't enjoyed a pasta carbonara or a pasta seafood dish with olive oil? These pair beautifully with white wine, of which Italy has many varieties, especially Pinot Grigio or wine from the region of Soave made from a grape called Garganega. These are high acid wines that are great for cutting through the fat and oil in the sauces as well as citrus and floral aromas and flavours which go very well with seafood.

There are a number of other Italian grapes that have been introduced to Australia that also go well with these type of pasta dishes including Fiano and Vermentino. Saltram in the Barossa Valley make an authentic Fiano and Fox Creek Wines from the McLaren Vale make a good Vermentino.

Tomato is a major ingredient in Italian cooking, including pasta sauce

and the base for pizza's. **11** The challenge for matching wine to tomato-based sauces is that tannin in wine clashes with tomato

sometimes giving it a metallic taste. This means that a lot of Australian wines that are high in tannin just don't go well with tomato-based sauces. Although a notable exception is Grenache which is usually made in a fruity low tannin style. Hemera Estate in the Barossa Valley makes an excellent old vine Grenache.

Fortunately, Italy has a number of grape varieties and wine styles that are low tannin and go well with tomato-based dishes.

The most widely available in Australia include Sangiovese and Montepulciano. Now you often won't see Sangiovese on the label of Italian wines but rather the region the wine is from as is common with Old World wines.

The Chianti region in Tuscany makes wines that are usually 100% Sangiovese with the original or classic Chianti region, between Florence and Siena, referred to as the Chianti Classico region but either way they would normally be 100% Sangiovese. A good very reasonably priced example is Badia Di Morrona Caligiano Chianti D.O.C.G.

The other Italian grape variety that is becoming more common in Australia is Montepulciano and just to confuse things the Town of Montepulciano is in southern Tuscany and makes wines from Sangiovese. So to differentiate the area from the grape variety wines made from Montepulciano normally have the name of the region that are made appended to the grape variety i.e. Montepulciano

d'abruzzo, which is Montepulciano from the Abruzzo region of Italy.

Good examples are fruity with lots of cherry, red berries and are low in tannin such as Cantina Tollo Villa Diana Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOP.

Now there are some Italian foods that go well with high tannin wines. Think of fatty meat dishes such as Osso Buco, meat ragu or a big juicy steak or bistecca as the Italians call it. These dishes need tannin to cut through the fat and wines such as Nebbiolo which are high in tannin go very well.

Once again, you won't often see Nebbiolo on the label but rather the regions of Barolo and Barbaresco in Piedmont in northwest Italy. These regions make high tannin wines which are long-lived but due to their popularity are quite expensive now i.e. over \$100.

Wines from the broader region of Langhe can contain Nebbiolo amongst other grapes, are often labelled as Rosso (red) and are very affordable. Good lighter examples include Maretti Langhe Rosso.

So whatever Italian food you are eating there is an Italian grape variety to match.

Cheers Antony.

12 Food and Wine matching: Thai Food

Thai food is traditionally difficult to match with wine, but there are some options to pair with white, and even red wine, if you understand the reasons why wine can clash. Read on to find out more.

There used to be a Thai Restaurant, not too far from us, that we frequented with some good friends of ours who also are wine lovers. Now, I know everyone thinks their local Thai restaurant is the best, but ours was! After many annual trips to Thailand, we got to know real Thai food – Paladarr Thai Issan was the real deal. Unfortunately, it's now closed, its 'shy' chef and one-time Buddhist Monk, Chaloem, and his partner Bryan having moved back to Bangkok. Their food celebrated a regional style of Thai from the Issan region which borders both Laos and Cambodia...great food and terrific people.

We frequently visit this restaurant, with our wine friends, and have been doing so for years. There always is, of course, some serious debate as to which wine to bring. That's because it can be quite tricky to match Thai food with wine, for two main reasons:

Thai food is often based on a salty fish sauce which is difficult to match to wine;

Thai food usually includes green or red chillies, which don't pair well with wine.

But it is possible to find wines that match Thai food, let's explore some.

It's important with wine and food pairing to find wines that either:

Compliment the food, that is they have similar aromas and flavours. For example hints of ginger in the wine will match ginger in the food;

Contrast with the food, that is they have different aromas and flavours that amplify those in the food. For example the sweetness of red berries in the wine might be amplified by the heat from the chili.

As a general rule white wines go better with Thai food, especially crisp aromatic fruity white wines. And although it isn't fashionable, white wines with a little bit of residual sugar match best. The sweetness and viscosity of the residual sugar help to soften the heat of the chilli whilst also counterbalancing the saltiness of the sauce.

Suggested grape examples include:

Riesling, especially from the Clare and Eden Valleys in Australia;

Gewürztraminer, especially from the Alsace region of France;

Pinot Gris from pretty much anywhere.

For Thai food, what's key is to get wines that include these grape varieties and that contain residual sugar, otherwise, the acid will clash with the heat and spice. The other great thing about these grape varieties is that many of them also contain complementary aromas and flavours also found in Thai food. For example, Riesling has citrus flavours that compliment the lime juice used in many dishes; Gewürztraminer has ginger notes.

One of the big mis-matches with Thai food is choosing a big, heavy red. This is because chilli clashes with the tannin found in red wine which can leave an unpleasant metallic after taste. The solution is to find a red wine that is fruity and low in tannin. In Australia Grenache, especially old vine Grenache from the Barossa or McLaren valleys, can do the trick. Great examples come from Yalumba including the Bush Vine Grenache.

So next time you are getting some Thai take away, or heading to your favourite restaurant, try one of these choices and let me know what you thought of the match on my Facebook page. Also, if you know of an authentic Thai restaurant then please let me know as we're in search of our next Paladarr!

To get more food and wine pairing tips, head over to our events page. I am also happy to tailor corporate events to your needs and budget – perhaps a Thai meal with some white and red wines to mix and match. Feel free to reach out to me here for an initial discussion.

Cheers,

Antony.

Questions for Tony

Has all this insight left you with some burning questions?

List them here and send through a photo of your questions to
Facebook.com/winematchmaker, for Tony to answer them.

Questions: Check Out our other businesses

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