

Wine

*Become A Wine Connoisseur –
Learn The World Of Wine Tasting, Pairing and Selecting*

James Waldorf

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Introduction

Wine is drunk the world over, and it has been drunk by various civilizations for much longer than you probably imagine. People commonly attribute the reach of wine over the world to the Romans, and it seems logical, since they conquered half of the world and exported their cultural refinements with them. However, the oldest winery known to exist was discovered in a cave in Armenia around 4100 BC, and the remnants of fermented fruit and rice in China was uncovered almost 3,000 years before the Armenian discovery, back in 7000 BC.

That said, the Romans did more than any other civilization before or since to spread the pleasures of fermented grape juice. These days, there are so many different wines of varying quality you wouldn't manage to try them all, however long you lived. It can get really intimidating when you're confronted with endless rows of different wines when you go to pick up a bottle of red to go with your steak!

This book will teach you everything you want to know about wine, and help you to master the art of pairing so that each and every bottle you uncork is both a pleasure on your palate and a perfect companion to your meal, or even an event you're organizing.

Some people say that as long as you like the wine, it doesn't matter whether it's a traditional pairing. If you prefer white wine with your steak, and red wine with your fish, then go for it – the world won't end because you chose the wrong color wine! However, if you're aiming to impress, and you want to create the perfect partnership of food, wine and ambience, you'll find all you need to know in here. Settle down and enjoy the journey as you learn how to pair wines with food like a true sommelier.

Chapter 1: A Potted History of Wine

You may wonder why you need to know the history of wine, when all you're really interested in is how you pair it with foods or choose wines for particular events in the here and now. However, to get the most from anything, you need to know something of the back story, and wine is no different. So, here's a potted – or maybe that should be bottled! – history of the oldest drink in the world.

As was mentioned in the introduction, wine or something very similar has been produced and enjoyed since at least 7000 BC. And there is some evidence that grapes were cultivated in Mesopotamia as long ago as 6000 BC, although the earliest proof of wine production on a commercial scale comes was found in Phoenicia around 3000 BC. The Phoenician word for wine – *cherem* specifies a drink made from grapes.

There are many Biblical references to wine, with some scholars being certain that Cana - where the miracle occurred of the water turning into wine – is close to Tyre in Phoenicia. In fact the Canaanites were enthusiastic wine drinkers, who sometimes died through quaffing a surplus of strong wine. Clearly there is nothing new under the sun!

Back then, most of the wine consumed was drunk at mealtimes, and it was almost always diluted with water. So the practice of pairing wine with food is an ancient one, not an invention of modern wine critics! Only at certain religious rites was pure, unadulterated wine consumed. Inevitably some people became intoxicated as a result, so the belief was that being tipsy was a spiritual state, as it only seemed to happen when rituals took place. Remember usually, wine was drunk at table, at the same time people were eating, and it was diluted. The ancients weren't au fait with how alcohol behaves in the body, and they thought drunks could communicate with the gods, and effectively become earthly channels of communication. So it was considered something special to be drunk.

Wine was exported all over the known world by the Phoenicians, and transported in jars known as amphorae. Originally, they were not corked, so flies and oxygen found their way into the wine, causing it to spoil. The Phoenicians hit on the idea of putting a thin layer of olive oil on the surface of the wine. While this was a barrier to both insects and oxygen, it was not very practical in rough seas, so there was a lot of wastage.

Obviously, the wine needed something to stop it spilling, and originally discs of wood were sealed into the necks of the amphorae with a resin compound. The discs later became corks, which were still sealed with resin. This imparted a distinctive flavor to the wine, and also acted as a preservative. Even now, the famous Greek Retsina wine is matured in special barrels Plugged with resin.

Winemaking in Greece probably originated around 1600 BC on the island of Crete. and it seems clear that this stemmed from the Phoenicians too. Wine was also made on Cyprus - a Phoenician colony - from approximately 3000 BC. There are Biblical references to this in the Song of Solomon, and the poet Homer was impressed by the Cypriot wines.

These days, Italy is acknowledged as the biggest wine producing country in the world, but this wasn't always the case. The Roman love of wine originated from the Phoenicians, and being pragmatists above all else, when the Romans picked up a good idea, they modified and improved it. When they believed they had perfected viticulture and wine production, they spread the craft all over Europe.

The Romans turned wine from a guilty pleasure of the rich and privileged to something the masses could enjoy as well. They opened bars that catered for all classes of citizens, and even slaves enjoyed an inferior quality of wine, which was diluted with water. The Roman palate liked sweet things, so their wines were often flavored with flowers, honey, and herbs and spices. Mint was a particular preference, although they would also flavor some wines with garlic and onions.

These days, Spain is justifiably famous for its wine production, but it goes back a long archaeological discoveries in the Valdepeñas area give evidence of wine production as long ago as 700 BC. The grapes grown are thought to be Tempranillo, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, which figure prominently in Spanish viticulture to this day. Mallorca was probably producing wine ahead of that, so Spain is certainly not new to viticulture in the Mediterranean region.

The New World wines which are so well regarded now do not have such a long and distinguished history. For around 175 years, Australia has been producing wine, but recognition of the quality of some of their wines has only been forthcoming in the last 20 years or so. Today, South Australia's Penfold Grange wine – which is produced from shiraz grapes – happens to be one of the most sought-after and expensive red wines in the world.

New Zealand has been into viticulture for approximately 200 years, but it's also taken a while to find its niche. Now, Hawkes Bay Chardonnay and Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc are famous, although New Zealand remains a relatively small wine producer by global standards. Most New Zealand wines are rather strongly flavored, with herbaceous notes. If you don't like your wine heavily oaked, you won't enjoy most New Zealand offerings.

It's been 350 years since South Africa first produced wine, and the country ranks at number eight in the global league table of wine producers. South African wines have a lot in common with European wines, since many of the most prominent growers travelled to France to study viticulture. Stellenbosch, near Cape Town, is one of the finest areas for South African wines.

Wine arrived in Chile and other regions of South America way back in the 1500s, courtesy of the Spanish and Portuguese missionaries, who planted grape vines to produce wines for communion. When Spanish rule ended in 1810, the Chileans began to import vines from Bordeaux and other important wine regions. When the phylloxera outbreak of 1870 decimated around 75% of France's vineyards, Europe came to Chile - which had escaped the disaster – to source healthy young plants to be grafted onto phylloxera-resistant rootstocks. 150 years later, Chile still boasts flourishing ungrafted European vines.

Buena Vista – which was California's first commercial winery – started production in 1870, but it was 1976 before Californian wines took their place in the world'. This was a direct result of the so-called 'Judgment of Paris.' British wine merchant Steven Spurrier organized a blind tasting, and the Californian wines beat the French wines in every single category. Again, wine

found its way to North America with the Spanish missionaries. Since 1890, Zinfandel has been the most popular grape in America, and California is still best known for producing quality wines from Zinfandel grapes.

Some other significant developments in the history of viticulture and wine production include the introduction of the familiar modern wine bottle shape in 1830, and the first appearance of wine boxes back in 1964. More recent innovations include the use of screw tops, and corks made from other than natural materials. New things are always happening in the world of wine – the oldest alcoholic beverage has stayed prominent by moving with the times, along with the people who produce it.

Chapter 2: Choosing A Good Wine

If you're pairing your wine with food, choosing the wrong one can completely spoil the meal. And the success of your event can be tarnished by making the wrong selection. There are so many different types of wine around that it can be a real problem finding the right pairing for your palate, your menu and your budget. Cheaper wines are not necessarily poor wines, and more expensive may not be the best for your purpose. Not all wines are improved with age, and even if they are, some vintages are superior to others for all sorts of reasons.

A few years back, if a wine boasted a screw top, it was a marker of poor quality, but that's not necessarily the case these days. Wines which are best enjoyed young often sport a screw top, while corks can be made from other materials that may preserve the wine more effectively. Here are some hints to help you to choose your wine wisely

Read the reverse of the bottle

That smart label that caught your eye in the wine store doesn't give any indication of the wine's quality, although that's where you'll learn the grape variety and when it was bottled. Swivel the bottle around, and check out the information on the back label – it's much more informative. You'll see tasting notes, and learn which region the grapes were grown in. as well as finding out for how long the wine has been aged, and exactly how. If you're not keen on heavily oaked wines, avoid wines from California and most Chardonnays. Pinot Noir is very often oak aged as well. Oaked wines don't usually carry the fruity, fresh taste you expect from the grape, but they full-bodied in the mouth. You will discover all this from the label on the back of the bottle.

The alcohol content of the wine is a good indication of how it will taste on the palate. An alcohol content of 12% alcohol by volume (ABV) or lower will give a nicely balanced flavor. If you prefer your wine with a light, fruity taste, look for something that's two years old or younger.

If the wine you're looking at is estate bottled, you can tell from the label, and that's a good guide to quality. The same people who produced the wine grew the grapes for it as well, so they have a major investment in the product, so they are pretty much guaranteed to produce good wines consistently.

The back label will also advertise any awards the wine might have won, and mention good reviews. If the wine is an award winner, or consistently attracting five star reviews, it's a good one. That doesn't mean that wines that are not award winners are poor, awards do give an extra indication of excellence.

Check the geography

Some wine regions will always produce superior wines, because of soil properties, the ambient temperature, average hours of sunshine, grape varieties that will grow there, and many other

factors. Even in the most famous wine producing regions, some areas will produce a better product every time. For a good Spanish red, consider a wine made in the Rioja region of Northern Spain. And the Californian wines from the Napa Valley are something else.

If you want a sweeter, more fruity white wine, try a moscato (or muscat) from Italy or France's Rhone Valley. Do your research, and discover which areas of the world are famous for producing the styles of wine you really love.

Price

Wine price is not necessarily a reliable marker of quality. However, if you are trying to choose between two Merlots, one priced at \$5 while the second bottle is \$10, it's likely that the \$5 Merlot will be somewhat heavy on the tannin, but the \$10 bottle will be much smoother on the palate.

Try not to settle for the cheapest bottle you can find, but you don't need to choose the most expensive wine in the store either. One way to find a reasonably priced, good quality wine is to browse special offers and bin end deals for your preferred grape varieties. You can often find the more expensive wines discounted by up to 50%, so keep checking out those shelf labels, and snag yourself a bargain. Remember to peruse the label as well, to be certain you're actually buying what you enjoy drinking. Don't allow price alone to influence your selection, be it high end or low end. You're pretty much guaranteed to be sadly disappointed if you do.

Grape variety

If you're not au fait with the different grape varieties, read up on the main taste characteristics of some of the better known ones. That way, you will get a good idea of which grapes exhibit the typical flavors and aromas you prefer in your wines, and that should help you in making appropriate selections. Without exception, you will find the closest matches to your preferred tastes if you opt for a single grape variety wine. However, that may not always be practical or possible, so you might be obliged to settle for a blended wine.

The major problem with blends is that you can't know the exact ratio of the blend, or how that will influence the end product. What works for the wine maker may not sit well on your palate, so you should note blends you might – or might not – enjoy. If you don't really like dry white wines, you should steer clear of those blends that feature Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio and/ or Reisling. It's well worth doing your homework so you can both eliminate and include the relevant grape varieties.

These hints should guarantee that you don't get back from the liquor store with something horrible, but what about when you take the cork out of the bottle? How can you know whether you've chosen a quality bottle of wine or merely 'plonk'?

Aroma

A decent wine should be pleasant on the nose, even if though it may not smell exactly like they describe it on the label. The wine trade is well known for its fulsome, flowery, but not always completely accurate, descriptions. Everyone's nose for wine is individual, so that means different people pick up on different aromas. That said, if something doesn't smell quite right to you, the chances are the wine won't taste right to you either, because somewhere in the mix, the balance is wrong.

It's difficult to provide much more specific guidance on this, because it's a matter for the senses, and there are so many variables. However, once you've got your nose around quite a few different bottles of wine, you'll see what we're getting at here, and you will learn to tell the difference between a good bottle of wine and one you really don't feel like proceeding further with, even before you actually taste the stuff.

Balance

Balance has already been mentioned several times, particularly in reference to alcohol content and aroma. Put simply, when you taste any wine, if something indefinable appears to be not quite right, then the balance of the wine is wrong. Most wines will demonstrate a pretty perfect balance for most people. When you find the sweetness, acidity, alcohol and tannin levels work in harmony together, you've got yourself a well balanced wine and it's all good. But if the wine is too sweet or dry, or if is acidic or flat, or maybe heavy on the tannin, chances are it's not the best wine for your taste.

So, how can you know if the wine contains too much tannin or is heavy on the alcohol? Normally, you'll experience a swift hit on the tongue, before the taste fades rapidly. If the taste lingers on your palate, and you experience it all round the mouth, then the wine is perfectly balanced.

Of course, any discussion about good wines can only be subjective, once you have checked out the label and the production facts, because everyone's expectations and tastes are very different. However, the guidelines here should help you to select a wine you can enjoy – and really, if you enjoy it, then it's a pretty good wine, regardless of the provenance or the price.

So, now you have some ideas on choosing wines, it's time to look at the various types of wine, and see how they pair up with different foods. While there's a certain amount of truth in the assertion that if you like it, any wine is okay, if you're aiming to impress, there are certain classic pairings that just shouldn't be ignored. As you become more familiar with various wines, it will become easier to pair them, but in the beginning, you're going to need all the help you can get, and this book is going to give you that help.

Chapter 3: The Basics of Wine Pairing

As long as people have been drinking wine, they have been pairing it with food. In fact the early wine drinkers only actually drank wine at the table, so wine pairing is a tradition going back thousands of years, even though it was pretty basic in those days, and the wine was watered down. These days, it's a bit more of an exact art, although there are plenty of opportunities for being creative with pairings.

Before actually introducing the subject of which wines to pair with which foods though, there are some basic pairing rules that you need to be aware of if you are going to avoid unhappy marriages of wine and food. Remember pairing the right wines with the right foods will add an extra dimension to even the simplest meal, and it can make something special even more memorable. However, the wrong pairing will not do justice to either food or wine. If you bear these points in mind when you're pairing, you will avoid the most obvious pitfalls.

Acidic food needs a high acid wine

If you're not quite sure what an acidic food or meal is, it's basically anything that works well with lemon as a condiment, so that means many fish meals, and paella, which is almost always served with a wedge of lemon, and incidentally often includes fish in the ingredients. Meals with tomato-based sauces are also likely to be acidic to some degree. If you can't find the acidity level from the wine bottle, the guy in the liquor store should be able to help you on that one.

Wines with high tannin work best with fatty foods

Tannins are plant polyphenols that are found in the skin, seeds and stems of the grapes. Bitter and rather astringent to the taste, the tannins give the wine its flavor and complexity, and help in the aging process. Wines also pick up tannins from being aged in wooden barrels – particularly oak barrels.

Cabernet Sauvignon is fairly high in tannins, as is Tempranillo, although it is a lighter wine than Cabernet. So, if you were sitting down to a hearty roast beef or roast lamb with a lovely marbling of fat, a nice tannin rich red is a great pairing, because the fat in the meat smoothes out the astringency of the wine.

Fish pairs best with acids, not tannins

The classic rule about having white wines with fish and red wines with red meats isn't a color thing – it's about the pairing. You don't tend to get an abundance of tannins in white wines – unless you're serving a heavily oaked Chardonnay. The main reason you usually pair white wines with fish is not to color co-ordinate the table – it's because fish needs some acidity to

complement it, rather than the astringency offered by tannins, which could swamp the flavor of the more delicate types of fish.

Pair the wine with the star of the plate

As has been mentioned before, pairing wine with food is all about enhancing the meal so the wine brings out the best of the meal and the food seems as if it's just made to be served with the wine you've selected. In other words, the wine should be the extra ingredient in the recipe – the garnish to the meal, if you prefer to think of it like that. So, if you're serving a sauce with your meat, pair the wine with the sauce, rather than the meat itself.

Whatever is the most dominant flavor on the plate is what you should be pairing the wine with. If you're serving beef with a creamy mushroom sauce, you might find a white or a light red is the best pairing, while pork in a rich red wine sauce demands something more robust, so a high tannin red may be the best choice.

Sweeten the heat

You might think that a fiery Mexican chili needs a robust red to partner it, but nothing could be further from the truth. A high alcohol, tannin rich red is likely to increase the heat of the food and have your guests heading for a cold shower. What's needed here is something lower in alcohol, with a hint of sweetness about it. Lower alcohol wines which are not too dry tend to be sweetened with sugar syrup after fermentation, and that sweetness is a perfect foil for spicy food. Experiment with a Gewurztraminer, or maybe a Riesling. Many German wines are slightly sweeter, and considerably lower in alcohol content than most French, Spanish, Italian and New World wines.

Sweet food needs sweet wine

Even if your palate prefers dry wines, nothing beats the pairing of a sweet dessert wine with a decadent cheesecake or gateau. A semi-sweet sparkling wine or Moscatel will also work well. Sipping your dessert wine before you actually start on the dessert prepares your palate for the sweetness that's coming, which means your dessert tastes even better than you expected, and the wine is not as cloying on the palate as you may have feared.

By region

At a purely basic level, you can pair wines and foods from the same region – they're usually going to work pretty well together since they are both produced under the same environmental conditions. However, that's going to get a bit complicated once you're out of familiar territory, and it can be quite limiting too. And some regional pairings just won't work – for example,

you'll be hard pressed to find an Indian or Mexican wine to go with curry or chili. Still, it's a starting point, and it may be an interesting exercise to explore the various combinations of wine and cheese from the same region, or serving Italian wines with pasta, pizza or risotto.

By type and color

This is also a fairly basic way to pair foods and wines. Acidic sparkling wines tend to go well with both soft and hard cheeses, and also carbohydrates and green vegetables. So if you're having home-made vegetable soup with rolls for a light lunch, you could set it off with a nice glass of crisp Spanish cava for a touch of elegance. It may surprise you to know that sparkling wines also pair well with fish – although that's just the light white fleshed sort. More meaty or strongly flavored fish such as tuna, swordfish and crab needs something more substantial – in fact you might even decide to pair a light red wine with this type of fish.

A light, dry white wine such as Pinot Grigio or Sauvignon Blanc is also a good fit with any type of vegetables, and white fish. It goes well with carbohydrates too, so that might be an alternative choice to go with that soup and roll lunch. Lightly flavored white wines are not going to be as versatile as some other wines, simply because their flavor can be overpowered by strong tasting ingredients. However, it's a very popular choice for many people.

A rich oaked Chardonnay or Viogner wine is a perfect match for rich fish, white meats, roasted vegetables and carbs. It has the depth of flavor to cope with more robust foods, although a heavily oaked wine may be too much to take for some palates.

A slightly sweeter white wine such as Chenin Blanc or Reisling is perhaps the most versatile of all white wines. It can be enjoyed with both white meats and cured and smoked meats, so it will go equally well with chicken or ham – two very different tastes. It's also ideal with cheese and carbohydrates, as well as dessert, so a bottle of Chenin Blanc will carry you through the entire meal if you want to keep the wine choice simple. Of course, if you are going to stick with a single wine, you'll need to make sure you have enough to keep it flowing throughout the meal.

If red wine were your tippie, you'd be surprised how versatile it can be. A light red such as a Pinot Noir or Grenache will happily pair with white meat, fish, carbs, hard cheese and roasted vegetables. However, it's probably not up to the challenge of most red meats. Light reds also make a pleasant aperitif, or an accompaniment to snacks and tapas type meals.

Medium reds such as Tempranillo and Merlot are also very versatile, and the good news is, you won't have to pay out a lot of money to get a good quality wine. And if someone is a bit particular over wine, medium reds tend to suit most palates. This is the wine type for the carnivores in the family, because medium reds go with red meat, white meat, and smoked and cured meats. However, they're not so successful when paired with fish, although they go really well with hard cheese.

Once you move on to big rich reds, you're into the classic pairings with red meats, smoked and cured meats and hard, flavor-rich cheeses. These wines include Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Zinfandel, and they are not to everyone's taste. If you're offering this as a choice for guests, it's a good idea to offer a medium red option as well.

Dessert wines such as various types of port and sherry make good accompaniments for desserts, smoked and cured meats and cheeses. Bear in mind that these wines are stronger and heavier than most, ranging from 15 – 20% alcohol by volume (ABV). Therefore it's not a wine you'd want to be serving all through the meal, or in large quantities. Most dessert wines have a certain level of fortification, which gives them their stronger flavor and increased alcoholic strength. Also, serving a rich dessert wine too early in the meal is likely to conflict with some of the flavors in the food.

In this chapter, we've covered the very basics of wine and food pairings. Now we're going to get into a bit more detail. The following chapters will give you all the information you need to successfully pair wines and foods, whether it's an intimate dinner for two, a celebration dinner party, or a big social or charitable event. It may all seem a little intimidating at first, but once you've done a few successful wine and food pairings, you'll become more confident in your abilities to partner just about any food with its perfect wine companion.

And if all else fails, just go with your gut instinct and serve what you enjoy, giving some regard to the basic rules at the beginning of this chapter. Try not to get too bogged down in the technicalities though – eating good food and drinking good wine should be a pleasure, not a pain!

Chapter 4: Pairing Wines With Meats

The go-to rule is red wine with meat, but what sort of red, and what sort of meat? And if the meat has a sauce, what happens then? It's not as simple as it appears at first glance, but it's not really difficult either. In fact, it's probably easier to pair a wine with meat than with anything else, because there is so much information out there to help you. Meat is seen as the heart of the meal, so all the experts are falling over themselves to help you choose the right wine to go with your main course.

While a lot of that information is accurate, it's also somewhat outdated, because these days, for many people, meat is not the focal point of the meal. It's a small part of the whole, which may include vegetable dishes, meat substitutes and pulses and legumes. However, there has to be a starting point, and this book is going to start with pairing wines with meats.

Keep in mind that lighter foods need a lighter wine, both in flavor and alcohol, while something richer needs – and deserves – a fitting companion. Some wines are designated as 'food wines' because they complement the foods they are served with. Rieslings and Pinot Noirs are good examples of food wines, because they are light enough not to overpower the food they are served with, while having enough flavor to be memorable, long after the dishes have been cleared and the meal has been digested.

Other wines are the 'big beasts' that like to compete with the main course, but because they are so robust, they need something hearty and full flavored to be their perfect companion. Think Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon here. So, bearing these introductory comments in mind – and remembering that rules are made to be broken – here are some ideas for pairing wines with meats.

Charcuterie (cold cuts)

Charcuterie gets a mention here because you'll come across it a lot, and if you're hosting a drinks party, chances are you'll go with a charcuterie platter for a quick, easy to serve option. At dinner parties, charcuterie makes a great starter, because it can be prepared and presented ahead of time, then covered and refrigerated to keep it cool and fresh.

Charcuterie meats are generally processed, which means they could be smoked or cured, and pates also figure in charcuterie plates. So you have a range of tastes and food types to pair with appropriate drinks. You've got a range of flavors to consider – charcuterie meats can be salty, smoky, spicy or fatty, and you need to select the right wines to go with them.

One pairing that may not spring immediately to mind is sherry. The drier types such as fino, amontillado and manzanilla are the perfect foils for processed meat, and because there is a certain level of acidity, it will counterbalance the fatty meats.

When you're serving cured meats, with distinctive flavors, forget about the equally distinctive and world famous wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Shiraz. They have their

good qualities, but pairing with charcuterie is not among them. Instead, go for white Rioja from Northern Spain, or maybe a Beaujolais from the Burgundy region of France. These wines have the required acidity to be able to make themselves heard above the strong flavors of the meat. Some experts also recommend a light sparkling wine, or a fruity rose, but all these pairing suggestions have something in common – they are light, fairly low alcohol wines that complement the charcuterie rather than compete with it.

The main thing is not to get too fussy here, and try to match wines to the individual meats on the charcuterie platter – which often includes cheese as well. It's probably best to fix on a maximum of three wines – a sherry, white Rioja and a Beaujolais, for example. Allow your guests to make their own choices from the selection, depending on their individual preferences. Pairing wines with charcuterie food really is as much a matter of personal taste as the right combination of flavors, since many wines will work equally well, for different reasons.

Some people may wish to stick with one choice, choosing a full bodied Amontillado sherry, which will pair happily with a variety of smoked and cured meats. Others may enjoy a dry Fino sherry with fatty meats, while opting for something like a Riesling, with more residual sweetness, to accompany lean smoked meats such as chicken breast and duck breast. Fortified wines such as Sherries and ports are often overlooked for food pairings. People tend to think of them as wines to be enjoyed as an aperitif or digestif, as a curtain raiser or finale to the meal, but it's surprising how versatile they can be. That's the real beauty of pairing – often you surprise yourself as much as your guests!

Beef

Beef and red wine is the classic pairing supreme, but it's not quite as simple as just opening any bottle of red to breathe while the rib roasts in the oven or the steak sizzles on the barbecue. The way the meat is cooked, and the specific cut, as well as any sauces the beef may be cooked in or served with will all influence the wine pairing. Referring back to the basic rules, a fatty cut of beef or a robust stew will require something heavy on tannin, whereas a spicy beef curry or chili needs something to take the heat out of the food.

As an example, if you cooked braising beef in a rich red wine sauce, the best wine to cook the beef in would be a Pinot Noir or Gamay, since these wines come from the same French region as Boef Bourguignon – the classic French stew with wine. That will cut through the fat in the meat to create a perfect balance of flavors. If you want to step away from tradition, a Malbec or Shiraz will work well too. These are both hearty wines with an excellent color. To accompany the meal, you could go for a slightly better quality of the same wine type you cooked with, or you may prefer something slightly different, but still rich in tannin. Cabernet Sauvignon is a good choice.

However, if you're using the same braised beef to make a curry, you're adding something different to the mix – spices. These create a variable element of heat in the food, which can make pairing a wine with it difficult. That's why many people suggest you forget about wine with curry and go for a refreshing cold beer instead. That's the lazy way out though, because if you put some thought into it, there are a lot of good pairings that work with different curries. The

secret is, rather than choose several different wines for different courses, go for one particular wine that pairs well with the dominant flavor of the meal.

The classic pairing for a curry is Gewurztraminer, because wines paired with hot foods should be lower in alcohol and have some sweetness to counteract the heat of the spices and allow the flavor of the wine to come through loud and clear. However, that won't work with a mild curry, such as a coconut-based mild Thai or Massaman beef curry, because the wine will overpower the delicate spices. Go for a Pinot Gris or a Riesling for the best combination if your taste in curry tends to the mild end of the spectrum.

For a curry with more heat, such as a Rogan Josh, Madras, or Thai red curry, Gewurztraminer is ideal. Another interesting pairing is a fruity rose with a bit of attitude. Many young Spanish and Portuguese roses will fit the bill, although classic Provencal roses are a little too delicate to do justice to a really hearty curry. They are happier with lighter meals such as salads.

The best wine to go with a steak is clearly a red of some description, but it will depend on the cut of the meat and how well you like your steak cooked. For most people, steak is an occasional treat, since a good steak can be quite expensive, so you don't want to ruin it with the wrong wine pairing. Your red needs to be food friendly, and if you're not too sure about what to choose, you can always play safe by choosing a nice Merlot. Because it doesn't need to be aged too long to be food friendly, it's lighter on the oak, and a little more fruity. Merlot will work well with most cuts of steak, no matter how you cook them, but if you want to get a bit more into the specifics, here are some ideas.

If your preference is a rare fillet or sirloin, you're not going to want a wine that's heavy on the tannin, but if you're happier with a medium rib-eye steak, something oaked and aged is a good pairing for you. Malbec works well with steak that's more well done. It's strong tasting notes pair nicely with the smoky flavors of the seared steak. Cabernet Sauvignon also works well with fattier cuts of steak, because it has the tannins to compete on the taste front, and the acidity to cut through the fat.

For leaner cuts of steak, a fairly young Shiraz works well. It's fruity and fresh, with just the right amount of acidity and tannin to complement the steak rather than compete with it. Shiraz is the name of the grape used in the New World – Australia, California are particularly known for their excellent Shiraz wines. If it comes from France, it's called Syrah, and a Rhone Valley Syrah is a perfect accompaniment.

If you really can't face a red wine with your steak, consider a Riesling. This is just about the most versatile wine there is, and in Germany – it's original and spiritual home – it's drunk with anything and everything. While Riesling is a fruity and refreshing wine, it also has the strong flavors needed to bring out the best in a steak.

So, now you have some great ideas for pairing wines with beef, whether it's a prime steak, a curry, a hearty stew, or beef in a sauce. Now you've got those ideas under your belt, let's take a look at the best wines to pair with other meats.

Lamb

Lamb seems to be one of those ‘love or loathe’ meats – there is no middle road. Some people love the flavor that the marbling of fat through the meat imparts – in Spain, lamb is the first choice for celebration meals. Very young milk-fed lamb is very popular in the Mediterranean countries, where a fine wine is a must to accompany it.

Other people, however, find even spring lamb too fatty for their taste. It certainly doesn’t have the universal appeal of steak, which is a pity, since perfectly cooked lamb is a real taste sensation. And it’s very wine-friendly meat too, since it is equally happy with a good Spanish Rioja or a hearty Bordeaux.

If you’re tucking into a leg of spring lamb – maybe around Easter time – a Pinot Noir is a great accompaniment. And rose also works well with spring lamb. For something a little different with a touch of class, why not try a dry rose champagne or cava? Lamb deserves the best! Rose is best with lamb that is served up when it’s still pink in the middle – if the lamb is well done, the meat can overpower the wine, unless you choose something robust. Try a good Chianti Classico from Italy, or a red from the Rhone valley in France. And of course, Rioja is a good pairing too. Go for a more aged Rioja, like a Reserva.

For a lamb curry, the same sort of rules apply as for beef curry. Anything too heavy on the tannin or too high in alcohol just won’t counteract the heat of the food. Something rich but without the tannin is called for, and a Portuguese Duoro fits the bill nicely. Portugal is also the home of port, and Duoro has a hint of that flavor about it. Another good choice for curry is Zinfandel. If the curry is really hot – or if any of the side dishes are – there’s always the good old curry standby, Gewuztraminer.

Possibly one of the most famous lamb dishes is hotpot, and because it’s cooked simply with root vegetables and herbs, wines that are tanked up on tannins will kill the flavor. Go for an inexpensive but tasty rustic French red, such as Vin de Pays de L’Aude, or maybe Cotes de Rhone du Villages.

As you can see, pairing wines with lamb is rather different than choosing wines to accompany beef. Generally, lamb tends to be cooked for longer, and not at such a high heat, so the chemical changes brought about by the cooking process are different. That calls for different wines, but if you have trouble getting the wine you really want, a nice mid range Rioja is a good failsafe.

Game meats

Game meats can include all sorts of creatures – particularly in countries where hunting for food is a popular leisure pursuit. However, the most common game meats served at table are venison, rabbit, duck and quail. One wine that will pair happily with all game meats is a red Burgundy from France, so that’s a good standby if you don’t feel knowledgeable enough to make a different selection.

Game is darker and more richly flavored than many meats, and because effectively you’re eating wild animals rather than livestock raised on a farm or ranch who don’t need to go looking for their food, the meat is likely to be much leaner. So, no fat to smooth out the alcohol or the tannins.

Venison is full of flavor, so it can take a robust Cabernet Sauvignon or a high end Bordeaux from France. Anything else is not really a worthy companion for what most people consider to be the king of game meats, although the best reds from the Rhone Valley have to be considered. If your venison is cooked with a creamy sauce, the Cabernet may be a little too robust for it, but if it's in a port wine sauce, it should be good to go. Or you might want to try that Portuguese Duoro with it, for an interesting variation.

Rabbit is probably the mildest of the game meats, with a hint of sweetness about it, so although you can go with the Burgundy as a failsafe, you might want to think about alternatives. Go for a lighter Burgundy, or a Chianti. Beaujolais pairs well with rabbit as well. You can even try white wines, especially if the rabbit is cooked in a sauce. In that case, consider a Sauvignon Blanc, a lively Pinot Grigio or a Pinot Gris – either of which have a nice depth of flavor to complement the more delicate taste of the rabbit.

Duck is possibly the fattiest of the game meats, although the customary method of cooking over a rack after piercing the skin with skewers to allow the fat to drip out will reduce it considerably. As a side note, do remember to save the fat that comes out of the duck – it makes fantastic roast potatoes. But let's get back to the matter in hand.

You need a wine with some acidity to counteract the residual fat in the meat, but wines that are heavy on tannins don't pair well with duck. Instead, aim for a slightly earthy flavor with your wine. A more mature Pinot Noir or Burgundy is a good choice. For something slightly different, you could try a sparkling wine made with earthy red grapes such as Pinot Noir. And some wine experts recommend Rioja, particularly for smoked duck breast.

Quail

Quail is a small game bird that can pair really well with an oaked Chardonnay, so it's a good choice for fans of game who don't enjoy red wines. Pinot Noir, Beaujolais and Merlot are recommended reds for pairing. Chianti and Rioja also work well with quail – this bird might be small, but it's big on pairing options!

Game meats deserve to be paired with good wines to bring out their very different flavors and smooth out some of the stronger tastes in the meat. While generally reds offer the best pairings, you can experiment with whites, and even carefully chosen sparkling wines in some cases. It's worth taking the time to find the best wine to go with your game, because the right pairing will lift your meal to a whole new level.

Pork

Like rabbit, pork has a certain sweetness in the taste, and it is often heavily seasoned and spiced in the cooking, which makes pairing wines with it more difficult, but certainly not impossible. Look for red or white wines that are low on tannins but have some acidity to counteract the fat, because unless you're cooking pork fillet, there is going to be a certain amount of fat. It's also a lighter meat than beef or lamb, so a fruity wine is a good companion.

A fruity Merlot works very well with both grilled and roast pork, and it's a lighter red with low tannins, so even people who don't drink a lot of red wine should be happy to try this. Pinot Noir is another good choice – particularly for pork tenderloin – while lightly oaked Chardonnay goes well with pork chops or a simple roast. Gewurztraminer also works well with chops.

With baked or boiled ham, serve a young Beaujolais to act as a foil to the saltiness of the meat. This also works well with sausages. There are a number of great wine pairings for pork – both white and red, and some roses also work well. It's a matter of personal preference, and also taking into account any sauces you may be serving with the meat. Experiment a little and see what suits your palate, and pleases your guests.

Offal

Offal is not to everyone's taste – some people can't countenance the idea of eating the insides of an animal, although they'll quite happily tuck into a juicy steak or a nice pork chop. Other people love the stronger flavors and different textures provided by liver, kidneys and other offal, and naturally want a decent wine to pair with it. Then of course, many fine pates are made from offal, and you'll want a decent wine to go with that.

Because of the strong flavors most beef and pork offals carry, you need a wine that's up to the challenge. Poultry and lamb offal is milder tasting though, so there's the risk of overpowering the meat with the wine.

Good old Gewurztraminer is a great pairing for offal, for all the reasons that it works so well with curries and strongly flavored meat dishes. It's not intimidated by strong tastes, and it's lively enough to be memorable even when paired with the most exquisitely cooked offal.

Many recipes call for the offal to be cooked in a wine sauce, and a good rule of thumb here is to go for a better quality version of the cooking wine, to avoid too many strong flavors competing for the attention of your taste buds. You want to experience both the food and the wine at their best, so that means choosing your pairings with care to ensure there are no clashes of personality.

Pinot Noir is another good choice, as it can cut through the fat in the meat and leave its own impression. Offals are always going to come with a layer of fat that can't be removed, so your wine has to work with that.

French wines work particularly well with offal – try a red Minervois or white Corbieres from the Languedoc Roussillon region. These wines are inexpensive, yet full of robust yet smooth flavors, and the sheer rusticity of the wines pairs well with the no-nonsense taste of offal.

While it can be a challenge to successfully pair wine with offal, it's not too difficult once you learn more about the characteristics of different wines, and the way offal reacts to the cooking. Offal in a sauce is going to have a more mellow and rounded taste than pan fried offal, so it will work well with a smoother wine.

It's a good idea to become more confident in pairing wines with pork, beef and lamb, before moving on to the more challenging but equally satisfying prospect of successfully pairing wine

with game meats or offal. If you really don't feel up to the task, ask the staff at your liquor store for some advice to get you started. Once you are familiar with the characteristics of various wines, and the main flavor attributions of different meats, you will develop an instinct for pairings that work, and learn which wines are best avoided with certain foods.

As a useful exercise to increase your knowledge of wine and food pairings, switch it around occasionally – don't always start with the food or the wine. Head out and buy a wine you want to try, then work out what would go well with it. Or cook a favorite recipe, then make a suitable wine selection. Approaching the task from different angles will generate fresh ideas.

Above all, remember that pairing wines with food should be a pleasurable experience, not a trial – enjoy it. And if you love the combination of a certain wine with a particular meat, then it's a good pairing – whatever the experts say!

By now, you should have some idea of which wines pair well with red meats, game and offal. Some people class pork as white meat, because of its appearance and sweeter flavor, but conventionally it's treated as red meat. Now let's take a look at pairing wines with poultry.

Chapter 5: Pairing Wines With Poultry

Poultry – or white meat – is basically chicken and turkey, although goose, duck and pheasant is also classed as poultry. In this book, duck has been dealt with under game meats, because that's the way tradition dictates. We will cover other birds under this section, but for most people, poultry means a straight up choice of chicken and turkey. Both are inexpensive meats, and while at one time turkey was out of the reach of most people, other than for celebrations, these days it's widely available all year, whether as a whole bird or as breast fillets or drumsticks.

The same goes for chicken – compared to red meats, it's often ridiculously cheap. However, just because the meal is cheap, it doesn't mean you shouldn't take care with the wine pairing. The truth is, matching the right wine with the right food lifts the whole meal out of the ordinary, so it's well worth while taking the time to get the right pairing.

Chicken

Chicken is both inexpensive and versatile. It's everybody's friend as far as food is concerned, because it's so easy to knock up a chicken meal in no time at all. And if you're watching your weight as well as your budget, you'll know that chicken is low on fat and calories but high on flavor and filling power. And there are so many different recipes for serving chicken, you need never tire of it. Whether you prefer plain roast or fried chicken, a stir fry, curry or casserole, you're in for a treat on the taste buds, and the right wine pairing will give your chicken dinner that extra little something.

Traditionally, wine experts recommend white wine with chicken, but these days rose is very much in vogue, and some reds are light enough to pair with chicken. Wines that are heavy on alcohol and tannins will swamp the delicate flavor of the chicken, and since it absorbs the favors of spices and sauce ingredients very quickly, there is a risk that you may get the wrong call for the wine. Therefore, you need to look at the ingredients for the sauce, and decide whether it's better to pair the wine with those, rather than the chicken itself.

A light to medium oaked Chardonnay is the perfect companion for just about any chicken dish, other than curry. It's smooth, and it presents a nicely balanced flavor that gives the chicken an extra dimension and lifts it out of the ranks of the ordinary. Reisling is another good pair, and that will also go with curry or a spicy sauce. Gewurztraminer is probably a bit too beefy to serve with chicken, unless you're having a seriously hot curry, in which case, it's the most sensible choice to make.

If your chicken is cooked in a creamy sauce, the wine you pair with it needs some sort of acidity. Pinot Grigio and Sauvignon Blanc are fresh and crisp, and will pair well with chicken cooked in a creamy sauce.

On the other hand, if you're cooking the classic coq au vin, you should use a good Burgundy to cook it with, and the same or an even better Burgundy to drink with it. However, if you don't really do Burgundy, a decent Pinot Noir is a good substitute. You may want to try a rustic red

from the Languedoc Roussillon region to go with chicken chasseur, which has a tomato-based sauce. Italian red wines tend to pair well with tomato sauces, so Chianti is another option.

As was previously mentioned, if a sauce is involved, it's often better to pair the wine with the key ingredient in the sauce. This is particularly true with chicken, because it tends to absorb the flavors and characteristics of the sauce. Many chicken dishes include mushrooms, and they tend to impart an earthy characteristic to the dish which pairs well with fruity reds that are not too high in tannins. Merlot fits the bill quite nicely for that, and Pinot Noir also works well with dishes containing mushrooms, as long as it's not a creamy sauce.

Chicken is a popular choice for the barbecue, and this requires a slightly more intensely flavored wine, to offset the smokiness of the barbecued meat, and any rubs or marinades that have been used with it. A New World Sauvignon Blanc or Zinfandel is a good pairing here. Pinot Noir also fits the bill.

If you're serving up chicken, you have a great range of wines to choose from, across the color spectrum. Sparkling wines also work well with chicken – particularly with cold dishes like coronation chicken. It really is a matter of personal taste, and it's difficult to get it wrong – unless you select a high alcohol wine that is heavy on the tannins. That's just going to overwhelm your chicken dish, so it's really not a good call. Think clean, crisp and fruity wines, whatever colors you settle for, and you won't be disappointed.

Turkey

Turkey is similar in flavor to chicken, although it tends to be slightly drier, and not quite so juicy. Most of the rules and guidelines that apply to pairing wines with chicken are also good for turkey – you need a measure of acidity in white wines, and a low dose of tannins in the reds. If anything, reds pair better with turkey than with chicken, because there's a larger proportion of dark meat, which means the overall flavor is not quite so delicate.

The main difference between the two is in the way they are cooked. As stated previously, chicken is cooked in a variety of ways – roasted, fried, stir-fried, curried, and cooked in casseroles and stews. While the same things can be done with turkey, it's more usual to serve it roasted, with an array of accompaniments such as stuffing's and sauces, along with sausages and a variety of vegetables. It's often served as a celebration meal for Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas. So you have a number of different flavors to pair the wine with.

German wines pair particularly well with turkey – think Gewurztraminer and Riesling, which are gutsy, fresh and good matches for all the savory trimmings that go with turkey. Sauvignon Blanc is another option, or Pinot Grigio. All these wines have fresh, citrus or fruit flavors, often with hints of herbs, which are the perfect pairing for stuffing's, onions and gravy. Remember you want the wine to pair with all elements of the meal, not just the meat. Less robust wines will be overwhelmed by the array of different tastes, and eminently forgettable. That's not what you want to happen at a celebration meal. On the other hand, the turkey is the star of the show, so you don't want it to be overshadowed by the wine. These choices will guarantee that doesn't happen.

If you prefer a red wine with your turkey – or you want to offer an alternative to your guests – a Pinot Noir is a good choice. It's earthy and fruity, and not too high in tannins, so it will pair really well with the side dishes and stuffing's. For a wine with a bit more depth, try a Zinfandel. This is particularly good if you're serving a lot of sides with a wide range of flavors. It will pair well with fruity or spicy stuffing's, while at the same time sitting well with the turkey.

At Thanksgiving, you might want to go topical and pair your turkey with a Beaujolais Nouveau. Coming from the Gamay grape, the new run of the wine is always released on the third Thursday in November, at the perfect time for you to sample it ahead of Thanksgiving and make sure it's what you want!

All red wines tend to have a wider spectrum of tastes than most whites, which makes them an excellent choice for turkey, and the various accompaniments that go with it. However, if you want to stride the middle ground, there are some roses that will work well with turkey too. In fact, dry roses are very food friendly, and one with fruity notes will sit better alongside all the different flavors of the meal than a white Zinfandel, which can be rather sweet. Try a rose from Provence, or if you like sparkling wines with your turkey, why not experiment with a cava Rosado? Spanish sparkling wines pair very well with poultry, but go for the brut option rather than the semi-seco.

It's both a pleasure and a challenge to pair wine with turkey. It's a pleasure because so many wines go so well with it. As long as the wine isn't too heavily oaked or too high in tannins, it's a good fit. The challenging part comes when you're serving your turkey with all the traditional trimmings – and maybe some more. You need to be sure your wine will sit well with everything. This is one instance where it's probably better to choose one wine and serve with all the courses, otherwise you run the danger of being swamped with too many different tastes. Let the food take the starring role, and let the wine be the supporting player that makes the whole production something to remember.

Goose

Traditionally, goose was eaten at Christmas, and it still is seen as a celebration bird, because it's expensive, and it doesn't yield much meat. It's also very fatty – if you prick the skin and set the bird on a roasting rack, then collect the fat that runs out, you'll have enough to make fantastic roast potatoes well into the New Year. Goose also tends to be served with rich stuffing's that include the liver, and prune or apple and brandy sauces, so it can be a challenge pairing it with wine. Because the goose is not cheap and it's a special occasion, you don't want to make an expensive mistake and spoil the meal for everyone.

The wine you serve should have a certain level of acidity to counterbalance the fat of the meat and complement the somewhat gamey flavor, so an acidic late harvest Riesling would work well, or a Gewurztraminer, which is acidic and also pairs well with strong flavors. Gewurztraminer and late harvest (or spatlese) wines are also high quality wines that are perfect for special occasions, and goose certainly demands something special to keep it company.

If you prefer red with your goose – or if you want to serve both, which is a good idea if there are traditionalists around the table – go for a wine with low to medium tannins. Too much will compete with the goose rather than complement it. That standby and crowd pleaser Pinot Noir is a good pairing, but if you want to go for something a little more special, try an aged

Rioja Gran Reserva. Barolo is another excellent special occasion wine to serve with goose. It has the strong taste without the high tannins, yet there's enough acidity to counterbalance the fat in the meat. Don't go for a very young red, and uncork the wine for at least an hour or two before serving to bring out the best in it.

Provided you choose your wine with care, serving goose as the centerpiece of your Christmas dinner is something you and your guests will look back on with pleasure for many months. It's a hard act to follow if you get the wine pairing right.

Pheasant

Pheasant is classed as a game bird, but is also traditionally classed alongside poultry, unlike duck, which is also poultry but treated as game. Confused? Don't be, because what really matters is not the classification of the bird, it's the pairing of the wine to get the best from it. Pheasant is the most strongly flavored of all the game birds, even if it isn't traditionally hung. So it's going to need a robust wine as a partner. Pheasant can be tough, and it's often slow cooked, which means even more intense tastes to consider.

The only white wines that are likely to be up to the challenge are good old Gewurztraminer and maybe a Pinot Gris. When it comes to red, pheasant can take a higher alcohol, high tannins wine such as Cabernet Sauvignon, but it also pairs well with rustic wines from the Languedoc Roussillon region. An oak aged Sangiovese from Italy is also an excellent choice. Often, pheasant is cooked in red wine, and if that's the case, opt for a slightly better wine to drink than the one you cooked with.

Pairing wines with poultry is a bit of a mixed blessing, because if it's versatile chicken, there are numerous options, whereas turkey with all the trimmings, goose or pheasant requires a little more specialized knowledge about both the food and the wine. Let your preferences be your starting point and you should soon be able to get the right pairing of wine and poultry.

Chapter 6: Pairing Wines With Fish

You'd expect it to be easy to pair wines with fish – always light, and always white is an often heard mantra. The problem is, these days there are so many different varieties of fish which are easily accessible to everyone, ranging from white fleshed, delicate tasting plaice and sole, right through to the more meaty and more strongly flavored swordfish and even shark, with everything that falls in between such as cod, haddock, monkfish, tuna and salmon. Then there's stuff like prawns, crab, mussels, and other seafood.

Still, it doesn't have to be difficult, if you know the characteristics of the various wines, and if you've been paying attention so far, you should be pretty familiar with several red and white wines by now. You also need to know how to differentiate between the different types of fish.

The main types of fin fish are light and flaky fish, of which sea bass, pollock, haddock and tilapia are good examples. Medium and flaky fish includes trout, cod, monkfish and halibut. Then we move on to firm and meaty fish like salmon, swordfish and tuna. These have a more meaty texture, similar to a tender steak. Finally there are the more strongly flavored fish such as mackerel, sardines and anchovies.

With fish, as with meat, any sauces you serve with the fish may change the nature of the wines you pair with it. Tomato based sauces will need a wine with a higher acidity level, which may not actually fit the profile of the fish. And when fish is battered and fried, consider pairing it with Cava, Champagne or Prosecco to cut through the fat and provide a lively pairing with the fish. Since many wines combine with more than one type of fish, this section is not as detailed as the ones on meat and poultry. However, you will have all the information you need to successfully pair any type of fish or seafood with the right win.

Light flaky fish

Light flaky fish is delicately flavored, and it needs a refreshing wine with character to avoid the meal being littered with insipid tastes. Pinot Grigio, a young Verdejo from Spain, a light sparkling cava and Muscadet from France all have the right characteristics and citrus notes to pair well with this sort of fish. Sauvignon Blanc is another interesting option, if you prefer something with a bit more of a taste hit and lightly less freshness on the palate.

Medium flaky fish

Cod – the traditional fish associated with the iconic British fish and chip supper – comes under this heading. The texture of this type of fish means they can happily pair with something a little more full bodied and even oak aged. You want something fairly dry, so a Soave is a good choice. Sauvignon Blanc also works well, along with a dry spectrum Riesling. Chardonnay and Pinot Gris also pair nicely with this kind of fish. For something a little more special, with a more complex flavor structure, try a good white Rioja from Spain.

Meaty fish

Meaty fish have the firm texture and more complex flavor reminiscent of some meats, and they will happily pair with oaked and aged wines. In fact, some reds will work well with this type of fish. They are also more likely to have a thicker layer of fat around the skin, so something acidic and with medium tannins if you're talking red wine will also work well. Pinot Noir from Alsace is a good choice for red, and if you're going for white, Chardonnay and vintage champagne will also pair nicely for a more special taste experience. White Burgundy, a dry rose from Provence or a Viognier are also good choices.

Strong tasting fish

Fish such as sardines, anchovies and mackerel are likely to be a little salty and have more of a taste of the sea about them. These types of fish require something robust for a successful wine pairing. Pinot Noir is a good choice, along with sparkling wines such as French Cremant and Spanish Cava. Chianti works well with strongly flavored fish too, although if the fish is cooked in a spicy sauce it's best to avoid red wines and go for acidic whites.

Seafood

Seafood is pretty much anything that isn't a fin fish, and in fact many people class anything that comes out of salt water as seafood. However, for the purposes of this exercise, seafood means shrimps, prawns, clams, mussels, crab, lobster, scallops and anything similar. With one notable exception, seafood is always best paired with white wine. Most seafood is low in fat, so choosing a red wine – even one with low tannins – is likely to overpower the centerpiece of the meal. The exception to this is shrimps and prawns, which pair very well with Fino Sherry – the drier the better!

For most other seafood, sparkling wine such as brut Cava or Champagne is an excellent pairing. Sake – Japanese rice wine – works well with crab, while versatile, zesty whites such as Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and dry Riesling will pair well with just about any type of seafood. Think light and think white, because most seafood has a very delicate, fresh flavor, and the last thing you want to do is swamp it with an oaked wine or tannins.

While white wines do work best with most fin fish and seafood, it is possible to pair reds with fin fish successfully. However, if you are catering for guests when you serve fish, ensure to have a white wine choice available for the more traditionalist guests. Some people just cannot get their head around the idea of red wine with fish. Unless you are pairing a wine with meaty fish or something strongly flavored like sardines or mackerel, the 'light and white' wine rule works best. There is some room for experimentation, but not as much as there is with meats and poultry.

Conclusion

Pairing wine successfully with food does not have to be the exclusive preserve of the wine experts. With a little knowledge of cooking processes and the characteristics of wine, anyone can learn how to match wines with both the centerpieces of the meal and the ingredients of various sauces. You just need to be aware of some of the basic rules to avoid potential pitfalls.

The most important thing is to remember that tannins and acids in the wines are necessary pairings for foods that are fatty and/or strongly flavored. The acid and tannin smoothes out the fats, and some foods demand a more robust wine. The main point of pairing is that the wine and the food complement each other, rather than compete for attention. In a successful pairing, you won't notice the wine over the food or vice versa, but you will rather remember the meal as exceptionally enjoyable, because the wine and the food will have contributed equally to its success.

Pairing food and wine can be challenging, but it is also very rewarding, and these days there are a lot of wines to choose from at very reasonable prices. That means that somewhere out there is exactly the right pairing of wine and food for you, whether your preference is red, white, rose or sparkling.