



with Lou Perri from the Stunned Mullet.

palate pleasures

Hello Everyone (or should I just propose a toast to the greatest palate pleasure of all?). This month's column pays homage to life's wonderful tippie, wine and its poetically harmonious relationship with food.

Never has a liquid and a solid fitted together so favourably as Wine and Food. Although one can be most certainly be enjoyed without the other, there is a beautiful synergy which occurs when they are paired together successfully. Matching wine with food is by no means an exact science, but rather an opportunity to happily experiment with your tastebuds while enjoying good company. The main reason we drink the stuff is to relax and socialise, so we should certainly have fun while doing it. There are just a few things to consider when choosing a wine, which can help you navigate a wine list or bottle shop without too much grief.

We can firstly look to established wine regions in countries such as France and Italy for inspiration when it comes to matching wine and food.

The soil and land of a particular area (the 'appellation' as it is referred to in wine terminology) is the soul of the wine, giving it a completely unique structure and flavour profile. From this same soil comes local cuisine and specialities – it is almost unavoidable to achieve a frisson between cuisine and wine from this alone. Classic examples would be from Bordeaux in France – the sublime pairing of Foie Gras and Sauternes, or Alba in Italy where Truffles and Barbera achieve a delectable resonance.

The flavour profile of food changes as soon as we add wine, and the flavour of wine changes as soon as we add food. In pairings such as the above, every aspect of both elements is enhanced to reach their maximum potential, and create a gastronomic pinnacle – eg the lush sweet lemon and honey flavours of Sauternes is a perfect counterpoint to the decadently rich and super smooth Foie Gras.

This is all very well, but we are not in Bordeaux or Piedmont so we need to find a way to peruse the choices available to us here in Australia. Problem is that the most common and popular wines in Australia are not as food friendly as they could be ...

First on the list in the not too friendly stakes is the Great Australian Oaky Chardonnay. It just simply overwhelms every other flavour that crosses its path. As a general rule with wine you need to create balance – a complex food flavour is complemented by a simple wine and vice versa. Such big Chardonnays do neither.

Also a candidate is the bold, tannic, high alcohol Shiraz coming out of the Barossa and Hunter. This stuff is high octane and while it can lend itself to heavy red meat dishes – its spicy

peppery bite is not as versatile with food and is most enjoyed on its own ... rather lonely and unsociable I say.

These two grapes are big players on the Australian wine scene. They've been hugely dominant for around 20 years and are what a lot of us think of when we think of wine. But things are changing in the wine scene, just as in the food scene. Australia's palate has evolved as we have embraced our multicultural heritage. Just as our cities and towns no longer just have a Chinese and an Italian restaurant, our bottle shops no longer just have those couple of varietals on offer.

The diversity of cuisine and wine on offer calls for experimentation. If you try a new dish – try a new wine, or if you stick with the same dish – still try a new wine! Our bottle shops now stock a growing selection of wines from around the world, as well as the bounty of a whole new generation of Australian winemakers who are having fantastic success with grapes from all around the world applied to our soils. Next time you cook spaghetti, grab an Italian red to go with it – or an Aussie red using an Italian grape variety! You'll be glad you did. Or how about

a bone dry Riesling with your Thai takeaway?

Proof that you can drink wine with spicy food.

Learning about wine is a direct result of trying as many different wines as you can. Each time you try a wine you discover more. If you like a wine, write it down. If it went well with what you ate, write that down too. You don't need an encyclopaedic

knowledge about varietals, appellations and vintages – you just need an appetite, some good company and a bottle or two to share ...

As they say "In vino veritas" (in wine, there is truth).

Comments and story ideas welcome loup@focusmag.com.au

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