

PAIRING FOOD & WINE

IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT MATCH



BY JACLYN KOLBER
FORMER EVENTS COORDINATOR & CHEF
SAM'S HIGHLAND PARK

Flavors of wine and food can be enhanced when paired correctly. Of course, that begs the question: how do you find the right pairing?

When you choose a wine to pair with a dish, consider not just the protein or "main dish," but also the seasonings, spices, sauces and even the cooking method itself.

For example, let's consider a chicken breast. Prepared as its simplest – lightly seasoned with salt and pepper, baked and served on its own – this light, mellow neutral dish would work best with an unsmoked Chardonnay. Why? Because both are mild and the wine has decent acidity to stand up to the light seasoning.

Now, consider the same chicken breast, but grilled rather than baked. The additional flavor of grilling char requires a heavier wine, such as a big, oaky Chardonnay or Cru Beaujolais.



Just as acid balances fat, so does tannin. That is why a heavily marbled steak needs an astringent wine, such as Bordeaux. The tannin cuts through the fat and cleanses the palate. But when drinking this type of wine be careful of too much salt, which accentuates the tannin (this is also true of wines with high alcohol content as the salt will magnify the taste of alcohol).

One of the most difficult elements to pair is sweetness (in wine, it is its residual sugar). Like acidity, sweetness pairs with sweetness. Foods such as fruit, pastries and even caramelized onions match well with off-dry white wines (such as the Riesling recommended with the mango salsa) or young, fruity, low tannin and low alcohol reds (e.g., Pinot Noir). These wines also work nicely with spicy foods because they mellow the heat. ☞

"...consider not just the protein or 'main dish,' but also the seasonings, spices, sauces and even the cooking method itself."

And a final preparation of the same chicken breast: both grilled and topped with a mango salsa. The tropical fruit changes the focus of the dish from the chicken to the salsa, the strongest element, which would work well with a Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc.

Another consideration for successful food and wine pairing is to consider the level of acidity in both the food and wine. A food high in acid (for instance, a salad tossed with a vinaigrette) requires a wine with the same degree of acidity, such as Chablis or a dry Riesling. On the other hand, a salad tossed with a Ranch dressing is lower in acidity and benefits from wines of similar character, for example Marsanne or Roussanne, both rich, low-acid Northern Rhone white wines. A good way to look at acidity is like a double negative: acidity plus acidity balances out each other.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

DOMAINE DE VAUFEGET, VOUVRAY 2005...\$9.99

Medium-bodied dry French wine with some residual sugar, with pan-seared tilapia, lemon and toasted almonds.

LÉON YATAN "LES MOULINS BALES," SANCERRE 2004...\$19.99

Medium-bodied acidic French white wine, with lobster, avocado and grapefruit salad served over romaine hearts tossed with champagne vinaigrette.

ALLEGRI, VALPOLICELLA CLASSICO 2005...\$12.99

Italian light-bodied red wine, served with oven-roasted chicken and mushroom risotto.

SEÑORIO DE VALDERMOSO, CRIANZA,

RIBERO DEL DUERO 2003...\$12.99

Full-bodied Spanish red, with grilled lamb chops and roasted root vegetables.