



**Cellar Master's
Food & Wine
Pairing
Seminar**

Principles of Food and Wine Pairing

With so many "right" choices at hand, there is nothing intrinsically difficult about wine and food pairing. It's mostly a matter of learning your own taste and trusting it. Rather than attempting to squeeze the infinite possibilities into one-size-fits-all rules, we suggest you let the basic components of taste and flavor be your guide. The two fundamental approaches to matching wine and food are:

- Mirroring tastes, and
- Contrasting tastes

Wines and foods with similar tastes work well together because their flavors and textural components reinforce each other. A spicy marinated grilled lamb served with a bold flavorful sauce and accompanied by a strong Zinfandel, Cabernet or Rhône blend is a good example of pairing for similarity.

Contrasting wines and foods can also be compatible. Here opposing flavors, tastes and textural components play off each other, creating new flavor sensations in the mouth and cleansing the palate. For an example of a contrasting taste pairing, try hot and spicy chicken curry matched with an off-dry rosé. The slight sweetness of the wine serves as a delicious and refreshing foil for the spice of the stew.

We should note that while "compare" and "contrast" are both good approaches to food and wine pairing, "sort of similar" and "sort of different" matches tend to be much less successful. Most of the best food and wine pairings result from taking a stand. Be bold in your choices, and you may create a match made in heaven. At worst, a miscalculation will teach you more about your own tastes for the future.

Basic Taste Components

To make great wine and food matches, it is critical to understand that the perception of wine flavor is grounded in food's basic tastes. All food flavors within our range of tastes can be described as combinations of the four basic components: tartness, sweetness, saltiness and bitterness. Since wine is a food, it follows that the same is true for the flavors of wine. Let's take a look at how the four taste components of wine affect our enjoyment of foods.

Tartness

Acidity is the single most important issue in matching wine with food. Oddly, the easiest way to judge acidity is by sensation: Acidity has the opposite effect on the tongue as that produced by sweetness. Red or white, any wine that leaves your mouth feeling dry and crisp is called acidic. Whereas a glass of whole milk coats the mouth with a warm sweetness, tea with lemon makes it feel fresh and clean. Acidity in wine affects wine and food pairing in the following ways:

- It penetrates the richness of ingredients or sauces (butter, cream, etc.), to refresh the palate.
- It mirrors tart items such as vinaigrette, lemon, tomatoes and capers.

- It mitigates oiliness in foods like pizza, or anything pan-sautéed or deep-fried.
- It lightens the flavor of oily fish or shellfish.
- It brings out flavors in food. Acid in wines is the gastronomic equivalent of the yellow highlighter pen used to emphasize important elements in a text.
- Low acid wines can be difficult to pair with food. In fact, a wine that may seem too acidic on its own may be ideal with food.

Sweetness

Residual sugar, that which is left in the wine after fermentation has been stopped, is present in all wines. Even wines that are considered "bone dry" may well contain a certain amount of sugar in their chemistry. The perception of sweetness in wines is governed by two factors: residual sugar and level of acidity. Low-acid wines often seem sweeter than they really are, while higher acid wines can mask higher levels of residual sugar. Off-dry wines, those that retain a trace of sweetness, are often perfect for pairing with certain foods. Typical off-dry wines include many Rieslings, Gewürztraminers and lighter style Chenin Blancs. A few tips on the effects of sweetness in wines:

- Moderately hot foods (cayenne, red peppers) can be foiled with sweet wine, which actually takes the edge off the heat.
- Sweet wines can also mirror a slight sweetness in condiments such as chutney or sauces with fresh or dried fruit.
- Slightly sweet wines are a good contrast to the salty flavors in most Asian cuisines, while matching some of their sweeter flavors.
- Very sweet wines may be pleasantly contrasted with salty food, too. Classic examples are Roquefort with Sauternes and English Stilton with Port.
- Dry wines produced from exceptionally ripe grapes can give the illusion of sweetness. They can sometimes be compatible with slightly sweet dishes.

Saltiness

Saltiness is the great craving taste component of the tongue. Most people salt nearly all savory foods. Salt can both cut and accentuate sweetness. While wine itself is not salty, its effect on salty food can be dramatic. When pairing with salty foods, be aware that:

- Acidity in wine cuts saltiness. Therefore sparkling wines and other whites with higher levels of acidity generally work with salty foods better than less tart wines (i.e., most red wines).
- Salt accentuates tannins.
- Salt accentuates alcohol.

Moderately sweet wines can sometimes pair well with salty foods.

Bitterness

Though it may sound odd, bitterness in wine is not necessarily unattractive. Bitterness can add balance, character and appealing flavor components. A number of factors contribute to a wine's relative bitterness, including how the wine grapes are crushed and fermented, how much and what kind of wood it is exposed to during fermentation and aging, and so forth. The most common source of bitterness in a wine is the level of tannins, which are naturally bitter. The higher the tannin level, the more bitter the wine.

- Wines with tannins and bitterness are best matched with like-flavored foods (grilled, charred and blackened foods work well).
- The implicitly bitter flavors of sautéed broccoli rabe, arugula, eggplant and bell peppers are good candidates for pairing with bitter wines.

Alcohol and Oak

Other important elements that affect the basic taste of a wine and its ability to pair with a given food are the level of alcohol and the use of oak barrels for aging.

Alcohol gives wine a sense of body and weight. Generally speaking, the higher the alcohol, the more full-bodied the wine. A low alcohol wine (7 to 10 percent) seems lighter in weight and texture in the mouth than a high alcohol wine (13 to 15 percent). The perception of alcohol can also be exaggerated by heat (i.e., cayenne, capsicums, etc.) and salt. When it comes to body, a good rule of thumb is to match wines and foods of equal weight. Rich meat, fish or chicken dishes that include cream are well suited to full-bodied wines like rich, thick-textured Chardonnay. In contrast, a light, simply-prepared fish would be overpowered by a massive, oaky wine.

The amount of time spent in oak aging affects wine because oak, like grapes, contains tannins, which are naturally both bitter and astringent, and transfers these to wine stored in oak barrels. Food in turn exaggerates the oak flavors in wine. Two guidelines for pairing food with wines that have a dominant flavor of oak are:

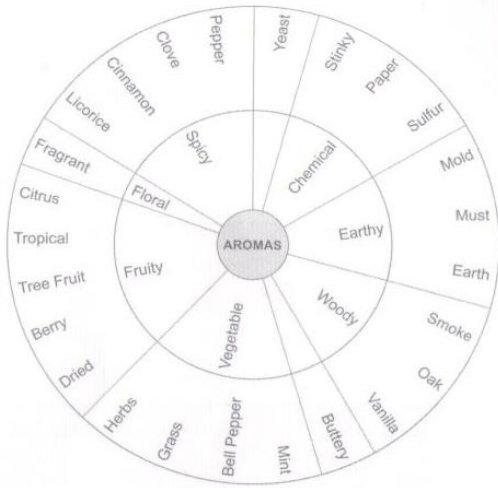
- Matching these wines with similar food flavors (toast, nuts, smoke, caramel, etc.) works best.
- As oak provides a feeling of "roundness" in the mouth, oaked wines can work well with similarly textured food.



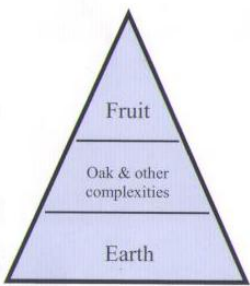
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Food & Wine Pairing

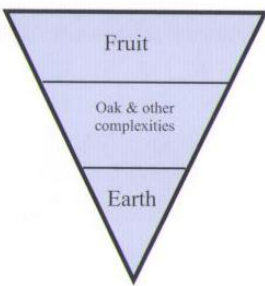
Sensory Evaluation



The Theory of the wines from the Old World versus New World



France, Italy, Germany,
Spain, Portugal, Greece,
Switzerland, Austria



USA, Australia, South
Africa, New Zealand,
South America, Canada





EVALUATE THE APPEARANCE	EVALUATE THE NOSE-AROMA & BOUQUET	EVALUATE THE TASTE
<p>Hold the glass by the stem and to the light. Describe the COLOR with one of the following:</p> <p><u>WHITE WINES:</u> Pale yellow Straw yellow Yellow-gold Gold Old gold</p> <p><u>RED WINES:</u> Purple Ruby Garnet Red Brick red Red-brown</p> <p>Evaluate the wine's CLARITY. The wine should be brilliantly clear without a hint of haziness</p>	<p>Hold the glass by the stem, swirl the wine to release the aromatic components, bring the glass to your nose and smell.</p> <p><u>Describe the nose in general terms:</u> Is the wine FLORAL, SPICY, FRUITY, HERBACEOUS, OR EARTHY?</p> <p><u>Can you define the nose further:</u> Rose, Violet, Jasmine, Anise, Clove, Mint, Cinnamon, Pepper, Apricot, Cherry, Muscat, Orange, Lemon, Blackberry, Apples, Banana, Pineapple, Black Current, Strawberry, Coffee, Smoked, Musk, Truffle, Mushroom, Butter, Cocoa, Carmel, Pine, Honey, Vanilla, Walnut, Almond, Hazelnut</p>	<p>Take a reasonable mouthful of wine, draw in air over palate, roll it round the mouth and swallow.</p> <p><u>Describe the flavor, mouth feel, finish and overall quality.</u></p> <p>Was there an intense flavor?</p> <p>Was it a lingering or short aftertaste?</p> <p>Did you like the wine?</p>