

Pairing Wine and Food

Rutgers Home Gardener's School, March 18, 2017, presented by Steve Csontos

Some highlights from the presentation:

You do not need to be able to describe a wine to enjoy it.

Being able to talk about wine has advantages:

You can share your experiences with others

This will enable you to explore a wider range of wines

You will evolve a common descriptive language

This will enable you to identify new wines that go with your favorite foods

How does it look?

Clear and bright

Not cloudy

Color in whites:

-straw pale to amber in table wines

Color in reds:

-Young reds are blue shaded

-Mature reds are a warmer shade of red

Deeper color generally means more body

How does it smell?

Aroma

A distinctive fruity smell associated with the grape variety

Bouquet

The complex smell associated with the fermentation process and maturation

Undesirable odors

-Vinegar, mold, sulfur

How does it taste?

Dry/Sweet:

Describes how much sugar is present

Dry is the absence of sugar (1/2 of 1% or less)

Most table wines are dry (over 90%)

Some wines are made less dry for American tastes

Acidity (the sour taste):

-Higher acidity results in a crisp, fresh taste

-Lower acidity results in a mellow or buttery taste

-As grapes ripen grape acid lessens, sugar increases

-Wines with insufficient acid taste “flat”

Flavors: (positive)

-Various fruit flavors, spice, earthiness, green olive, mint, vanilla from aging in oak, etc.

-Fruitiness increases with ripeness (which reduces acidity)

-Fruiter wines are made for American tastes

Flavors: (negative)

-Metallic, vinegar - always bad; increasingly rare

-Oxidation – what happens when a wine is open too long, or exposure to air in processing

Fruit Flavor Spectrum used to characterize a taste found in various wines:

Lean >>

>> Luscious

Acidic >>

>> Less acidic

*Lemon Grapefruit Apple Pear Orange Peach Pineapple Mango**

Cranberry Cherry Raspberry Plum Blueberry Blackberry Fig#

**Apply to White Wines*

Apply to Red Wines

How does it feel?

Effects you feel more than taste

Body:

- the “weight” of the wine: think: skim milk, 2% milk, whole milk

- or: water, apple juice, prune juice

- increasing weight and complexity

- higher alcohol perceived as more body

Astringency:

- “A dry, puckery, dust in the mouth” feel

- Comes from tannins (stem & skins of grapes) and acid (less ripeness)

- Think: feel of strong, plain tea

- Varies considerably among wines

- More acidic, dryer, European wines have more astringency

- Fruity, lower acid, “softer” California wines have less

“Classic” or popular wine grape varieties and their characteristics:

Riesling

- The famous white grape of Germany
- Used by itself
- Makes a variety of styles from light, dry and acidic to sweeter, medium bodied wine
- Dry versions with acidity can go well with lighter fish, chicken and pork dishes.

Sauvignon Blanc

- The famous white grape of Bordeaux
- Used primarily by itself
- Makes a medium bodied wine that is both flavorful (floral) and acidic
- A versatile food wine for seafood, poultry, and salads.

Chardonnay

- The famous white grape of Burgundy
- Used primarily by itself
- Makes a variety of styles from light and acidic (crisp) to buttery (less acid) and luscious (fruity) wines with more body
- A good choice for fish (including salmon) and chicken dishes.

Pinot Noir

- The famous red grape of Burgundy
- Used by itself
- The classic Burgundy is a flavorful, full-bodied wine
- The California/Oregon style is frequently medium bodied, fruity, and high in alcohol – extremely versatile, can go with almost anything
- excellent with grilled salmon, chicken, lamb and Japanese dishes (sushi & sashimi)

Cabernet Sauvignon

- The famous red grape of Bordeaux
- Used by itself or as a component in blends: blended with Merlot in Bordeaux, USA
- Usually a full-bodied wine with tannin
- Best with simply prepared red meat

Merlot

- The “other” red grape of Bordeaux
- Used by itself or as a component in blends: blended with Cabernet Sauvignon
- Makes a softer (less tannin), fruitier, full-bodied wine
- Goes with a wide range of dishes

Tempranillo

- The popular red grape of Spain
- Used by itself
- Medium/ full body, red fruits (cherry, plum), with leather, tobacco accents, tannin
- Goes with a wide range of savory dishes (e.g., Italian & Mexican)

Malbec

- The popular red grape of Argentina
- Used by itself or as a component in blends
- Easy-drinking style, well colored wine that tastes of plums, berries, and spice.
- Goes with a wide range of meat-based meals, suits Mexican, Cajun, and Indian dishes

Syrah/Shiraz

- A secondary French red grape that became Australia's favorite
- Used by itself and in blends: Cote du Rhone (Fr)
- Makes a variety of styles from soft and fruity medium bodied wines to rich full-bodied wines
- Best with meat (steak, beef, wild game, stews, etc.)

Some regional favorites:

- Pinot Grigio/Pinot Gris – a light white Italian wine
- Beaujolais Villages – a light red French wine
- Cotes du Rhone – a medium red French wine
- Chianti/Sangiovese – a medium to full Italian red
- Zinfandel – a medium to full California red

Food Wine Pairings: Some general suggestions and comments:

Start by pairing the basic wines with your favorite foods. Pairings are general suggestions. For many foods, many wines work. Successful pairings present both the food and the wine to their best advantage. See handouts for pairing suggestions.

“Balanced” foods –properly seasoned, and without any extreme taste characteristics – can be enjoyed with most whites or reds.

Wine styles and the cuisine of a region evolved to compliment each other. They are natural pairings e.g., Italian wines with Italian dishes.

Match the lightness/heaviness of the meal & the level of intensity of its flavors with a wine of similar body and flavor – compliment, don't compete.

Some key pairing characteristics based on food:

Saltiness in food reduces the effect of tannin in wine

Juicy proteins (in meats), and cheese also reduce tannin

Mild acidity (as in tomato sauce) makes red wine taste fruitier

Strong acidity (raw apples, vinegary salads) makes many wines taste thin and metallic

Conclusion match acidity in food with acidity in the wine

Pepper also makes red wine taste fruitier as does a *mild* hot sauce like *Cholula* (Original).

Sweet foods (deserts) make dry wines taste bitter & acidic