

# Taster's Choice

## *Demystifying the art of food and wine pairing*

**By Peter Blattmann**

If you're someone who enjoys a casually chosen bottle of wine at dinner without needing to study books or read articles like this one—congratulations, you're the sort of no-frills wine drinker who's at the heart of wine-loving nations.

Then again, you *are* reading this article, so chances are you're that other kind of wine drinker, the kind who takes it a little more seriously—perhaps even loves to babble on about wine and food with like-minded friends. For you I offer the following things to consider for your next gathering.

First and foremost, forget the old rules: we can move beyond white wine with fish, red wine with cheese. That doesn't mean that wine and food pairing need to be complicated. Think what foods go with cheese—apples, grapes, celery—and you're as likely to end up with white wine as red. Or think of grilled salmon with roasted peppers, and it makes sense to pair the meal with a Pinot Noir.

The principles of wine and food pairing, says guru Tim Hanni, boil down to two simple rules: one, food that is sweet or has discernible bitterness tends to make wine taste drier and exaggerate any tartness or astringency; and two, food that is salty or sour tends to make wine taste milder.

Of course, not all tongues are created equal, and so these rules can be applied to your favourite recipes. Wine tasting too soft? Add sugar in the form of honey, fruit or hoi sin sauce. Wine too strong? Add mustard, lemon, vinegar, soy sauce or olives, and of course, salt.

The cookbook author John Ash uses two strategies to match his favourite foods with the right wine. The first is to play on flavour similarities, such as mushroom matched with the earthy flavour in a Syrah. Strategy two, contrasting flavours, is based on the idea that opposites attract: the rich, salty, character of Stilton cheese is the famously perfect match for sweet port.

Ever the generalist, Fiona Beckett of *Decanter* magazine says that the best way to get people to feel confident about wine and food is to first get them matching styles of wine with styles of food. Focus on a whole cuisine such as Alsatian or Pacific Northwest, rather than individual dishes.

As a trained chef attending a regional *chapitre* (a seasonal dinner for elected members, politicians, wine growers, chefs, celebrities, importers and a few industry representatives, like myself) in Burgundy, Rhone, Champagne, Alsace or Bordeaux, I find that drinking regional wines enables me to focus more on

each component of the meal. Each region uses blanching condiments and sauces that have the effect of making their wines taste better.

Planning your own *chapitre*? Try a few of these strategies for food and wine tasting, each one the basis for a rewarding wine and food party.

- Use the Beringer Blass Progressive Wine and Cheese Wheel. By evaluating the balance of sweetness versus salt/acidity in the cheese and grouping them into categories based on taste profile, this device demystifies the art of pairing wine and cheese (a must for every restaurant server).
- Focus on the principles of matching food and wine (sweet, salty, etc) by serving foods from each group; pour a range of wines and be on the lookout for the principles behind it all with the help of the Beringer Blass Wine Tasting Wheel.
- Organize a tasting progression in which one simple dish, such as pasta, is gradually altered by adding ingredients: mushrooms, tomato sauce and finally cheese. Or avocado served in different guises: pristine state, guacamole or transformed into stir-fried avocado with enoki mushrooms and sesame seeds. Serve with two white and two red wines. Notice the effects each additional component has on the wines.

Although philosophies vary, there is one aspect of food and wine that all experts agree on. Half the fun of mating the plate and the glass is not the end result, but the journey of discovery that often leads to unexpected pleasures—and endless reasons to indulge in more food and wine.

*For details on the tools mentioned in this article, go to [www.beringer.com](http://www.beringer.com) or contact Peter, at [blattman@telusplanet.net](mailto:blattman@telusplanet.net)*