

p a r i n g W I N E & F O O D

A century ago it was easy. The set menu was the excepted norm and the old rules from white to red, from young to old and from dry to sweet was in place. Today, most fine-dining restaurants offer tasting menus choosing wines to match the food. The clever restaurateur will introduce some unknown wines; will sometimes stretch his imagination to offer rarities and even what might appear on the surface as “mismatches”. Taste is subjective and one man’s intellectual insight might be like a red cloth to a bull for another. Where does this leave us? I think that you should choose what is known to you and at times must allow yourself to be led by the sommelier.

t h e g a m u t o f t a s t e

Wine equals colour, aroma, consistency/weight/structure, taste and aftertaste. The appearance of a wine derives from its ability to absorb and reflect rays that are visible to the eye. White wines can be pale or have tinges of green or a myriad of yellows. Rosé can range from mother-of-pearl darkening by degrees until almost red. Red wine starts from red deepening towards purple and indigo black. If a wine is cloudy with a matt colour, there is a good chance that it will be defective. Old red wines will display an orange towards brown colour. Once they have lost the colour intensity and are brown-brown, they were micro-biologically affected and are oxidized.

a r o m a

Aroma is what you get when you nose the wine and is a clear indication of the character of the wine. Different cultivars have different aromas. This I discuss at the introduction to each cultivar on the winelist. Remember to nose a wine firstly without swirling the glass and smell the intact aroma, then swirl the wine so that it can oxygenate and release it’s aromas. Do not inhale for too great a length. When tasting you are confronted with aromas of animal notes like game, raw beef, beef stew, fish, crustaceans, oysters and cream. Balsamic aromas include pine, resin and balsam. Empyreumatic aromas include smoke, burning, grilling, bread in all its forms, hay, almonds and walnuts, marzipan, even coffee, wood, leather, caramel, toffee and cake. Ether aromas include alcohol, acetone, vinegar, sulphur, sherry, even washing powder and glue. A spicy aroma refers to all the spices but mainly vanilla, pepper, cinnamon and ginger. Floral aromas include Lily-of-the-Valley, Honeysuckle, apple blossom, jasmine, roses and violets. Acacia, lime flowers and even aloe are noticeable. Fruity aromas such as lemon, apple, cherries, gooseberries, banana, mango, kiwi, granadilla, figs and dates, a multitude of berry flavours, including strawberry, raspberry, fruits de bois (wild strawberry) and the whole citrus range of lemon, lime, grapefruit, mandarin and orange. Mineral aromas like limestone, chalk, flint and stone. Vegetable aromas include herbs, green leaf vegetables (including tomato), fallen leaves, mushroom, cooked vegetable, bell pepper, even broccoli, cauliflower, beetroot and green beans. Finally, remember that the grape itself has a grape aroma, fermentation creates a perfume and finally, the aging process will result in a deeper level of all the preceding tastes and aromas .

You can pick some volatile components on the nose of the wine. The nose can already indicate sweetness, sourness, bitterness and can even have a salty nose. Remember what you find on the nose, must be present in the taste and aftertaste.

w e i g h t w a t c h i n g

There must be consistency to a wine. Certain wines are light, others, like Chardonnay, are heavier. Some Rieslings, and definitely Sylvaner, are light, but in the case of Sauvignon Blanc you are confronted with the origin and the style in which the wine was made. Elgin Vintners produce a light Sauvignon Blanc where-as the M. M. Louw from Diemersdal is much heavier. Take the weight of the wine into account when matching it to food. Let us take these two examples. The Elgin Vintners will match lightly poached fish, whereas the Diemersdal with more residual sugar will match a fish soup, not based on cream. Most reds start from medium weight upwards.

b u d d i n g t a s t e b u d s

Taste buds can only distinguish between sweet, sour, salt, bitter, umami and metal. Whatever people might say, smell is the main instrument of what we call taste. I want to take this a step further by distinguishing between objective and subjective taste. Objective taste equals what can be proven and subjective taste is none other than self-opinion. The less your sense of taste is developed during childhood, the less you will like dry wines. (Proof that young ones should be introduced to wine at a young age.) You have to develop a tolerance for acrid flavours like acidity, which inexperienced wine drinkers do not have.

Memory goes hand in hand with taste. You have to store a taste dictionary in your mind. Always allow the wine to circulate throughout your mouth before swallowing it. We experience sweetness on the tip of the tongue, bitterness at the back of the tongue, saltiness and acidity on the sides of the tongue. However, there are taste detectors dispersed all over the tongue; there are gustatory papillae on the palette, throat and epiglottis. Each of these possesses fifty or so epithelial cells that are designed to receive taste impressions. The tongue is also sensitive to contact, temperature, movement and consistency. To conclude, tasting is to my way of thinking, nothing other than to analyze the internal relationship between all the elements present, and in particular, in opposing elements. The wine must have a good attack when you taste it. It must have length in the mouth and a long aftertaste. If a completely new nuance makes its appearance in the aftertaste, you are enjoying an exceptional wine.

match or mismatch

Most South African restaurants offer salad of some kind or the other, normally with vinaigrette dressing. Nothing beats water to match it or perhaps an off-dry Rosé. Should it contain artichokes, rather try a fino. Asparagus on its own asks for a fresh Sauvignon with green nuances. Should it be done in butter and topped with Hollandaise turn to a Sémillon or Chardonnay. Buttery rich avocado needs Viognier. Partner Ratatouille style salads with Blanc de Noir or Rosé.

Oysters are best matched with Blanc de Blanc, Chardonnay or Sémillon. Once guests request chilli sauce to “enhance” (read this as destroy) the oysters, no wine can defend itself! Emily’s specializes in baked oysters. Choose any one of the Chardonnays on the list as a match. Be daring and put the Cederberg David Nieuwoudt Ghost Corner Sémillon to the test! Over the past sixteen years our West Coast baked mussels have become a flagship. It wears a seasonal dress. Sometimes it nestles on avocado or mango with a hint of spice or harissa, sometimes with a sweet curry pineapple chutney, or kerrie-kaaktus (slivers of curried prickly pear blades) and even falafel-style chick-pea puree. They are topped with beurre blanc and crème fraîche which miraculously turn the spiced base into much lighter flavour nuances. Here is a prime example of different components eaten together emerging in a softer taste than the different parts of its components. Tokara White or Klein Constantia’s Mme Marlbrook will be a good match. However, for the sake of variation, be different and try Rustenberg’s incredible dry-dry Roussanne.

Emily’s offers non-force fed foie gras. Our supplier is our secret, but I can empathically ensure patrons that no force feeding is induced. Our robust style of cooking calls for sweet muscats or in descending order of choice: Noble Late Harvest, sweet sherry and at times, pending on the chef’s combinations, even Pineau de Laborie.

Crushed wheat is treated like risotto and prepared with porcinis. Pinot Noir is a perfect partner.

A change over is the difficult Bobotie (baked spiced ground lamb under a blanket of savoury custard) and Pienangveis (sweetly spiced braised lamb). Chenin Blanc or Pinotage will be the answer. Emily’s curry offal and North African style fish curries, enriched with coconut cream, plays in the Chardonnay band. Curried brawn and pickled fish, both high in acidity and served cold, can be approached in two ways: soft Blanc de Noir as understatement or a natural sweet wine with the brawn and a thrilling dry Amontillado with the fish..

Biltong rub, with its empyreumatic aromas, is a term you will sometimes encounter on some beef or venison dishes. Only a block-buster Shiraz, like Boekenhoutskloof, is man enough.

sweet thoughts

The unusual kaleidoscope of ice creams offered by Emily’s include, curry, ginger, double espresso, rose petal, chocolate and balsamic vinegar, elachi (cardamom), lavender, butternut and marmalade, lemon and green peppercorn, beetroot and blueberry, “Springbokkie” (minted Amarula), Cape Brandy Pudding ice cream, pumpkin seed marzipan, suurvytjie, boere-meisjes (apricots in brandy), black olive and makataan (wild melon preserve). All of these are crying out for bone dry champagne – a top note against the sweetness!

Another red cloth area is our British inheritance of baked puddings, which were thoroughly South Africanized over the centuries. They are all drenched in sugar syrup, sometimes infused with citrus and/or spice, even with additional melted butter added. A good wine choice is to go sweeter with wines fortified with brandy, like Daschibosch Nectar de Provision. And then chocolate – some people like some red wines with this – all a bit strange to us, but Pineau de Laborie is a good partner to dark chocolate based desserts.