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DRINKS

The New Rules

Forget red wine with meat, white wine with fish. Here are the new rules for picking a wine to go with dinner (hint, it's all about the food). **BY MARNIE OLD**

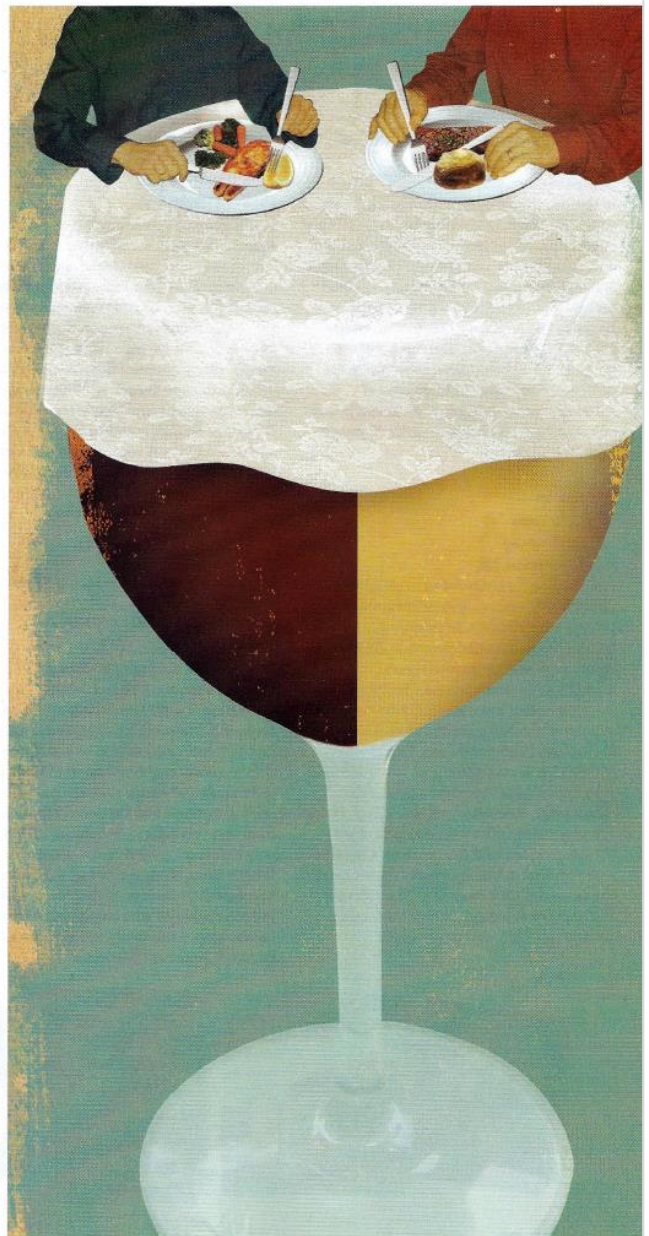
WINE AND FOOD ARE, FOR THE MOST PART, good friends. And when a meal is matched with the right wine, both taste better than they would on their own. That's where the "rules" of food and wine pairing come in, to help people confidently pick wines that taste good with their food. You've heard them before: White wine goes with fish and poultry, red wine goes with red meat, and so on. But the food world has changed, so these old-school rules don't necessarily fit the way we cook and eat these days. Today's recipes, ingredients, and cooking methods are more diverse, and so are today's wines.

So what's a wine-loving cook to do? Start by putting the food first. The new, food-centric pairing rules here will help you focus on what's on your plate, and then successfully pick a wine to go with it.

RULE 1 Consider the food's flavor profile

Forget the protein. Instead, pick wines according to the strongest flavors on the plate, which usually come from the seasonings, sauces, and cooking methods of a dish. For example, the same wine can flatter both salmon tartare and beef carpaccio. These two appetizers may fall on opposite sides of the fish-meat divide, but both dishes are raw and very lightly dressed to let the clean flavor of the protein shine through. A sparkling wine (like prosecco) is an ideal pairing for both, because the wine's subtlety and acidity will help focus attention on the delicate taste of the salmon or beef.

Similarly, a flavorful red wine makes more sense for both grilled filet mignon with a demi-glace (veal stock reduction) and salmon prepared the same way. The cooking method (grilling) and sauce (rich and concentrated) call for a red wine with some depth and complexity, no matter what the protein. A dense, dark Argentine Malbec would be a great pairing for the steak, while an oak-aged red on the lighter, paler side, such as Spanish Rioja Crianza, would be more fish-friendly.



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RULE 2 Pair like with like

Weight Class The food and the wine should share dominant characteristics; most important, they should be in the same “weight class.” Just as oils and fats add richness to foods, alcohol gives wine its body and texture. So, to match by weight, serve low-fat foods with lower-alcohol, lighter-bodied wines. For instance, Riesling and Beaujolais are delicious with salads, sushi, and vegan cuisine. Heavier dishes, like stews, cheesy casseroles, and meat dishes, call for stronger, fuller-bodied wines, whether they’re white or red. Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon suit these heavier-hitting dishes.

For a happy middle-ground somewhere between crudo and cassoulet, try serving food-friendly wines that weigh in at around 13.5 percent alcohol; they pair well with the widest range of dishes. Light reds like Oregon Pinot Noir and Italian Chianti, and rich whites like Central Coast Chardonnays and Alsace Pinot Gris are all delicious options.

Flavor Intensity Pairing like with like also works when matching a wine with the overall flavor intensity of a dish. In other words, the more delicate the dish, the more understated the wine should be. And as seasonings get bolder, the wine’s flavor impact should also increase. For example, simple sautéed shrimp fares best with a sheer, refreshing white like French Muscadet. Boost the flavor quotient by adding, say, coconut curry to that shrimp, and you’ll need a wine with more oomph, like a vividly aromatic California Viognier.

RULE 3 Use your senses

Two competing sources of a similar sensation generally seem weaker together, not stronger. When it comes to flavor, our taste buds can’t process sweetness from two sources at the same time. This means that with sugary pastries, dessert wines always seem drier, not sweeter. In fact, the more sugary the dish, the sweeter the wine needs to be to achieve a sublime effect.

Acidic foods have a similar effect on our tastebuds. Recipes that call for citrus or

Illustration by Ellen Weisenborn

Food + Wine: A Cheat Sheet

If you put the food first and consider your senses, it’s easy to pick a wine to go with dinner. This chart will help get you started.

If the food is...	The wine will taste...	So choose...	Such as...
Salty	Less acidic	A high-acid wine	French Sancerre or Oregon Pinot Noir
Sweet	Less sweet, sharply acidic	A sweet wine with moderate acidity	Washington Riesling or South African Chenin Blanc
Acidic	Less acidic	A high-acid wine	New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc or Italian Barbera
Fatty or oily	Lighter in body; reds less tannic	A full-bodied wine; high-tannin reds	California Chardonnay or Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon
Spicy	More alcoholic	A light-bodied wine preferably off-dry	Portuguese Vinho Verde or German Riesling
Smoky or caramelized	Less oaky	An oaky, barrel-aged wine	Australian Chardonnay or Spanish Rioja

vinegar need wines of equal or greater acidity to hold their own.

To taste what I mean, try this experiment: Take a sip of a Portuguese port before and after tasting dark chocolate. You’ll notice how the sweet wine tastes much less sweet after the chocolate. Or take a sip of a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc before and after biting into a dill pickle; the pickle will dramatically reduce how much acid you taste in the wine.

RULE 4 Consider cause and effect

Everything we put in our mouths changes how the next bite or sip is perceived, often in unexpected ways. Salt, sugar, and tannins, in particular, have dramatic effects on how wines taste. Salt temporarily blocks our perception of acidity. Since all foods are salty to some degree, wine therefore seems less tart or acidic with food than it does alone. This explains why so many wines seem too tart on their own but just right with savory foods. If you’re cooking something salty, serve a high-acid wine, like a French Sancerre or an Italian Barbera.

Sugar does the reverse, amplifying acidity in a way that can seem as shocking as orange juice after toothpaste (which explains why

dry wines taste thin and sour with sugary sauces like barbecue and teriyaki). So, pair sweeter appetizers and main courses with off-dry (slightly sweet) Rieslings or rosé wines, and as the sugar content increases to dessert levels, serve fully sweet dessert wines like Moscato, port, or Sauternes.

Foods high in protein and fat also counteract the astringent, mouth-drying tannins found in some reds, like Cabernet Sauvignon and Sangiovese. These wines can seem brittle and bitter when tasted alone or with low-fat foods like green salads. However, their tannic grip is a perfect foil for richer, oilier foods like creamy risottos and braised meats, in the same way that a dry bread crust is ideal for sopping up a rich sauce.

At the end of the day, wine is like another sauce on the side. If you put the food first and follow these rules, you’ll always know just what wine to serve with dinner.

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