



The perfect match

Science and philosophy mix when you match wine with food, but you can't beat rolling your sleeves up and experimenting

SUSIE & PETER



Illustration: Nicholas Saunders

■ We have a joke in our family that Susie, an inveterate sun lover, has two seasons in her year: summer, and waiting for summer. Autumn is inevitably a season of mixed feelings. The upside is the array of comfort food that arrives on the table – and the hearty wines to wash it all down in delectable fashion.

For some, the mention of matching wine and food elicits raised eyebrows. Isn't it just pretentious tosh for coffee table books and earnest lifestyle telly? On one level, it's hard to disagree. If there's a lot of twaddle talked about wine, the codswallop ratio soars when food enters the equation.

François Chartier's theory of molecular aromatic synergies, for example, examines the compounds shared by wines and foods as a means of predicting great pairings. Rotundone is found in the Syrah grape variety as well as peppers, seaweed and black olives, so they match well. We enjoyed a sensational combination of barrel-aged Cabernet Sauvignon alongside beef tataki with charred red pepper and grilled sesame oil (due to the pyrazines found in both ingredients and wine).

There's no magic formula to getting it right. "We can't reduce this to simple mechanics," commented Josep Roca, sommelier at the vaunted El Celler de Can Roca, who stressed the importance of personal tastes, expectations and circumstances. "It's about understanding people," he adds.

For us, it's simple. Wine is like another condiment on the table – yet one capable of transforming a decent meal into a delightful one. Being natural hedonists, we think that's worth

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a bit of effort to get right. You can't get it spot on every time, but it's fun trying and the occasional fireworks make it worthwhile.

To research our recommendations for *Saturday Kitchen* or the *BBC Good Food Show*, we try a recipe with as many bottles as it takes. (Claude Bosi's halibut with grapefruit and pork pie sauce saw more corks popped than most.) Method precedes the fervour. Think F&W: flavour and weight. First, identify the dominant flavours in the dish (hint: it's rarely pasta or chicken), then think of a wine that sits well alongside these. Carbonara sauce is salty, creamy and rich, so an oaky-yet-crisp Chardonnay will refresh the palate – an underrated benefit of wine – as well as complement the flavours. Fruity rosé soothes the spice and tang of tikka massala sauce. In terms of weight, heavy dishes need richer wines (mushroom risotto often works best with a red, not white) and vice versa – think oysters and Muscadet.

The theory only takes you so far; so we tend to stock our cellar with wines that are versatile with all kinds of food. Our recommendations (right) take in three of the best (and best value): Rioja, Pinot Noir and Chablis. Sauvignon Blanc is another top tip, for fish or fusion dishes (it's also beautiful with goat's cheese). All guaranteed to banish the autumn blues.

• Susie & Peter are wine experts from BBC1's *Saturday Kitchen*. They are the youngest married Masters of Wine and do a mean Sunday lunch. Find out more at susieandpeter.com.

TRY THESE

Aldi French Pinot Noir (£4.49) – fresh, tangy, simple style. Fantastic value and perfect with bangers & mash.

CVNE Rioja Reserva 2008 (from £9.99, Majestic) – smooth, seductive and classic. Brilliant with all kinds of autumnal fare.

Organic Chablis Brocard 2010 (£14.99, M&S) – invigorating and complex; matches everything from poached salmon to roast chicken (we're sure Geoffrey Palmer would approve – see p70).

Next issue: Christmas wines with a twist

