

THE PERFECT PAIR

THE IDEAL FOOD AND WINE PAIRING CREATES A BALANCE BETWEEN THE COMPONENTS OF A DISH AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A WINE. BUT WHERE TO START? GISELLE WHITEAKER GOES BACK TO BASICS.



Above: The Wine Library at the Wine House Hotel 1821.
Right: Pairing wine and food can be an art form.

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We've all heard the rule: red wine with red meat and white with white. But rules are made to be broken, an adage that's equally true in the world of wine pairing.

Michele Zonin, Vice President of Zonin 1821, knows a thing or two about wine. The Zonin family has been producing wine since 1821, and seven generations of winemakers can't be wrong. With nine estates situated in the important wine-producing regions of Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli, Tuscany, Apulia and Sicily, as well as the Barbourville Vineyards winery in Virginia, America, Zonin1821 is synonymous with fine wine.

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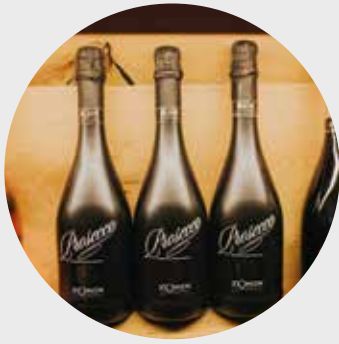
It's a good place to start, but there are a few simple tips that can help the novice wine connoisseur. “I think the sentence “red with meat and white with fish” was useful because it was easy to remember, but these days, pairing wine with food is more specific,” says Michele. “The reason red wine typically pairs well with red meat is that red wine tends to be higher in tannins, which are a good complement to the rich fattiness found in red meat. White wine can be better with fish or chicken because it tends to have higher acidity, just like a squirt of lemon juice can brighten a seafood dish.”

There is some truth then, to the starting rule, but as Michele points out, this is just a general rule. It's more important to enjoy what's in front of you. Each person's palate is unique and will affect their wine tastes. “Many factors affect someone's tastes, even their mood,” says Michele. “The palate tends to change over the years, so age certainly influences wine taste. Also food and drink consumed right before a wine tasting can affect the taste; coffee for example, has no long-lasting or permanent effects on taste or smell, but in near terms, it absolutely does.”

It is this variance that turns wine pairing into an art. “There is definitely interaction between food and wine, but the way wine changes when tasted with food is predictable. Foods that are sweet, whether it's from sugar, fruit or fruit juice, honey, or food high in *umami*, such as well-aged beef, tomatoes, or sauces, make any wine's basic flavour – sourness, bitterness or sweetness – taste stronger,” Michele explains. To test this theory, he suggests taking a sip of a Cabernet Sauvignon, then biting into an apple, and sipping the wine again. The wine in the second sip will taste more bitter, because the sweetness in the apple enhances the opposing bitter flavour.







Above: The Wine Library at the Wine House Hotel 1821.

What you are looking for in a pairing is balance. “Consider the weight — or body, or richness — of both the food and the wine. The wine and the dish should be equal partners, with neither overwhelming the other,” says Michele. “Matching the wine to the prominent element in the meal is critical to fine-tune wine pairings. Identify the dominant characteristic; more often it is the sauce, seasonings or cooking method, rather than the main ingredient.”

The aim is then to craft either a complementary pairing, which creates balance by contrasting tastes and flavours, or a congruent pairing, which creates balance by amplifying shared flavour compounds. There are six tastes to focus on when attempting this pairing: salt, acid, sweet, bitter, fat and spice (piquant). Start by simplifying a dish down to its basic dominant tastes and considering the flavour intensity.

The next step is to examine the attributes of the wine. Red wines tend to have more bitterness, while white, rosé and sparkling wines have more acidity. Naturally, dessert wines lean heavily on sweetness. Now you’re ready to create your congruent or complementary pairing.

Along with the dominant characteristic and intensity, you can also match similar flavours. “A nice white wine with citrus notes, such as a Sauvignon, works with fish dishes that have lemon or other citrus tastes. A full-bodied red wine, like Amarone della Valpolicella, pairs with braised meats and sauces. A glass of Chianti Classico, with its elegant tannins, complements rich steak,” says Michele, making the process sound simple.

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INFO

Set in a boutique Georgian townhouse, The Wine House Hotel 1821 promises an immersive experience for all wine enthusiasts, from novice to expert. The venue is comprised of an exclusive private dining and function facility, a wine bar, the Wine Library, a chic cocktail bar and four opulent, individually designed guest rooms. www.winehousehotel1821.co.uk

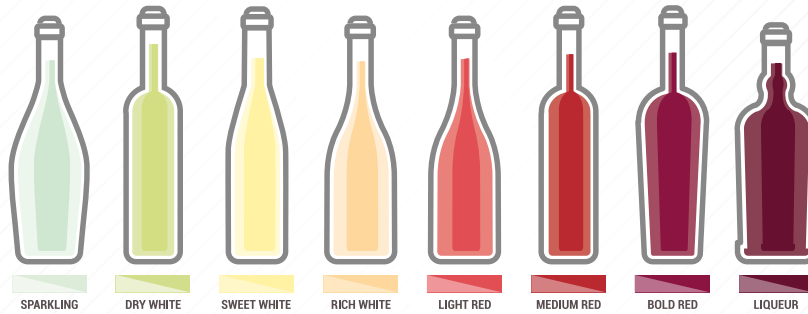
In fact, once you have the art of flavour identification mastered, it's not so complicated. That's when you can break more rules, and play around with pairing options, working on the more subtle flavours. If, however, you're left scratching your head, plan a visit to the Zonin family's newly opened Wine House Hotel 1821 in Edinburgh. The Wine Library designed by renowned architect Claudio Silvestrin, within the hotel's intimate wine bar, is the ideal place to sip a glass of Zonin 1821's Cru wine while you deliberate on what's for dinner. ■

A FEW BASIC TIPS:

- Sauvignon Blanc is light-bodied, but has higher acidity.
- Chardonnay has more body, but is not usually too acidic.
- Pinot Noir is lighter bodied for a red wine, and it doesn't have much bitterness.
- Cabernet Sauvignon is more full-bodied and has high tannin, so more bitterness.

WINE TASTING GUIDE

WINE CATEGORIES



- PROSECCO, CHAMPAGNE
- CHARDONNAY, RIESLING
- MOSCATO
- GEWÜRTZTRAMINER
- BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU
- MERLOT, SYRAH
- BORDEAUX, MALBEC
- PORT, SHERRY

FOOD & WINE PAIRING



- VEGETABLES
- ROASTED VEGETABLES
- STARCHES
- FISH
- RICH SEAFOOD
- WHITE MEAT
- RED MEAT
- CURED MEAT
- SOFT CHEESE
- SEASONED CHEESE
- SWEETS

GLASS TYPES



SERVING TEMPERATURE

