



## CHOOSING DINNER PARTY WINES

There's no doubt that staying in is the new going out. But there is one golden rule when entertaining says expert *Jane Cuthbertson*, match the weight of the wine to the food

In this fragile economic climate, one of the first things people cut back on is eating out. But that doesn't mean you simply stop enjoying good food and wine, and I've found an increasing number of customers are coming to Barrica for advice on choosing wine for dinner parties or more informal suppers with friends.

Some experts advocate that there are hard and fast rules which must be adhered to come what may, but the most important thing to remember is that every bottle is just six glasses of wine, and your enjoyment of it is very much dependent on whether or not your choice of wine suits your palate. In short, drink the wines you enjoy!

There is no doubt however, that some styles of wine are particularly suited to certain groups of food. General guides

are good starting points - white wine with fish, red with meat. But the main point to remember is to match the weight of the wine with the weight of the dish – heavy game casseroles overpower light and delicate whites.

Don't just take the main component of the dish into account. How is it cooked? Will it be served with a sauce? What are the accompaniments? If you intend to serve salmon for instance, is it fresh or smoked? Is it poached or baked? Will it have a crust or a creamy sauce? All of these things have an influence on your ideal choice of wine. A good tip for dishes with rich sauces is to choose wines made from grapes with good acidity which will cut through the richness of the sauce and prevent it from being too heavy. The same applies to spicy food, the spicier the dish, higher

acidity is required in the wine where the acidity will draw the heat out of the spice. Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Albarino all fit the bill as they are grape varieties which have marked acidity and enough powerful flavours to match full flavoured food.

Tannin is the main consideration when matching red wines. Paired with the right dish, tannin softens and brings out the flavour. Tannin is essentially a preservative which is naturally found in the skins, pips and stalks of the grape, but also is present in oak barrels which red wine is often matured in. Full flavoured meat dishes call for wines which have high levels of tannin, balanced by rich fruit. Lighter meats need wines which are lower in tannin levels. Avoid salty food with tannic wines which will taste metallic and harsh – a packet of ready salted crisps is not good with

a very heavy Cabernet Sauvignon! It's a myth that cheese and wine is a match made in heaven.

Don't try to serve one wine with a board of four or five different cheeses of various styles. Instead, choose two or three similar cheeses and serve with one well chosen wine or port. Better still, serve the cheese course before dessert to avoid the sway of savoury, savoury, sweet and then back to savoury in taste.

If in doubt, ask for advice. It's a minefield out there – but hey – that's my job! ■

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