

Pairing Raw Food and Wine

By Joe McCanta

I love wine.

Maybe it was all the years of watching laughter and heated conversation flow so freely from my family's dinner table when a nice bottle of red was popped. Or the first time I stepped onto a vineyard to meet face to face with the Delphian fruit that transforms into the "truth" that philosophers refer to-- smelling the musty, earthy fragrance of the ground humming with life and feeling the sun beat down on me with the same intensity it strikes those grapes each afternoon. Perhaps it was slowly meditating down aisle after aisle of bottles hailing from every continent in a New York wine store, feeling the excitement of a hundred cultures and languages encompassing me and inviting me to taste a piece of their land right at my fingertips. No matter when it happened, my love of wine alone was the entrance into the greater world of gastronomy and the aesthetics of one of the world's oldest arts. Later, as I became more familiar with wine heritage and production techniques, I began to realize that a sip by itself—as complex, encompassing and alluring as it can be—transforms into something greater when joined by food. A well-matched dish has the capability of unlocking flavors in wine, the way that a great hall can unlock hidden harmonies in an orchestral piece of music. Magnifying subtle nuances and even creating new aspects of the wine, food is a catalyst for wine to achieve its ultimate depth. Likewise a dish's flavor is brightened by a well-paired wine, taming any rough edges and enhancing the essence of a dish in a way that no other liquid can. It seems not only *in vino veritas*, but *in vino mutatio*.

But wine's transformative powers have only barely been realized within the world of food. There are hundreds of books on pairing wine with cheese, red meat, and fish however (with a few exceptions) all seem to stick to the same rules--big reds go with steak, soft whites with fish, etc.—and a fear of any ingredient that might pose the slightest challenge to these rules. For a world in which gastronomy has become almost as scientific and exploratory as medicine, few chances are being taken with wine pairing, leaving some of the most delicious if not popular culinary categories out of the loop. And no category has been more neglected than vegan and raw food.

The innovations used to create new flavors and mimic the savory tastes of the non-vegetarian world not to mention the emphasis raw food puts on the pure taste of unadulterated vegetables seems to have baffled most sommeliers. Asparagus, artichokes, beets-- indeed all the foods wine lovers have been taught to "avoid" or "be careful with" are proudly featured front and center in raw gastronomy creating a challenge that many don't have the desire (or palate) to meet. But to approach every challenge as an opportunity to grow is wherein innovation lies, and as William Shakespeare once put it, "Good wine is a familiar creature if it be well used." All that is necessary to understand how best food and wine work together is an open mind and a general understanding/awareness of taste. So fear not the norm, throw the rules out the window, and allow your imagination and intuition to guide you to new tastes and new transformations.

Part One. Taste.

To become aware of how food and wine work together, first it is important to single out tastes and textures in wine and understand how they work. Here is a general overview of the factors that make up the taste of a wine:

- **Acidity**—one of the most important factors in a wine. Determining the type of acid present in a sip will immediately tell you what dishes to try the wine with. The 4 types of acid to look for in wine are **tartaric**, **acetic**, **malic**, and **lactic**. Tartaric and malic acids are non-volatile meaning that they don't evaporate when a wine is heated during the fermentation process. These acids give wine a mouthwatering sensation and are essential in balancing out the sugars in wine. Acetic acid (the acid found in vinegar) is volatile and must be controlled to make a wine palatable so it is often burnt off during the fermentation process. Lactic acid is the same acid present in milk and can round harsh corners in wine to create a well-balanced product. All red wines and some white wines undergo a process called **malolactic fermentation**, which transforms the naturally occurring tartaric acid into the softer lactic acid. Hence the reason why many whites are referred to as "buttery" or "creamy."



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- **Body**—this refers to the ‘weight’ of a wine on the palate. I like to compare body of wines with that of milk: *Light body* in wine is similar to fat free—watery and airy. *Medium body* could be compared to skim milk, and *Full body* is unctuous and thick like regular milk or cream. Wines with light bodies can often be overwhelmed by foods with strong textures and flavors whereas full-bodied wines are intense with a texture that can likewise overpower foods. The best-matched wines can balance both the texture and body of the food it goes with.
- **Tannin**—Tannin is another naturally occurring element of wine. The best way to understand tannin is to brew a strong pot of black tea all day. At the end of the day drink a sip of the tea and notice the rough clinging feeling on the roof of your mouth. That sensation is tannin, which gives wine its ‘backbone’ and mouth feel. Tannin is found both in the grape skins and musts used during fermentation as well as in the oak barrels that a wine is aged in and though some tannin can be found in white wine (especially oak-aged whites) it is predominantly present in reds. It is a very important aspect in preventing wines from oxidizing and allows full-bodied wines to age well, often transforming the harsh tannic feel into a velvety smoothness that is extremely decadent. Tannin is an aspect to be especially aware of when considering pairing wine with raw food—it can pair well with heavy textures in food but can often overpower the balance and lightness of most raw dishes.
- **Aroma**—As mentioned before, this is one of the single most important aspects to a wine’s ‘taste’ due to the fact that most of what we think we taste are actually aromas creeping up in the back of our mouth. If you’ve ever been sick or had a stuffy nose you know that even the strongest flavored soups or teas end up tasting like water—a great example of how vital smell is to taste. The most important aspect in smelling wines is to look for which other aromas you are reminded of—and there really is no wrong answer. I’ve heard everything from ‘a rainy night in Brooklyn’ to ‘my Grandfather’s couch’ when leading wine tastings and often the aspect tasters are smelling—wet stone, leather, etc.—is indeed present in a wine. Once an aroma has been singled out, look for food that may complement this aroma (we’ll get to this more later).
- **Sugar Content**—the relative sweetness or dryness of a wine is extremely important when pairing wine and food. This is due to the fact that wine’s sugar combines with whatever food it is paired with, and can be considered another ingredient to the food as the two meet. If a wine has too much sugar for a dish, the dish becomes unbalanced. If a wine has not enough sugar, it can disrupt a recipe’s balance. Sugar content in wine can be broken down into the following categories:
 - *Bone Dry*—a wine having no sweetness to it. Often biting acidic.
 - *Dry*—a wine having little to no sweetness but slightly more subtle than bone dry wines.
 - *Off-Dry*—wines that tend to be on the sweet side but not too overpowering with their sugar content.
 - *Sweet/Dessert*—wines fermented to often have a very high sugar content and sweetness that dominates their flavor.

Part Two. Approaches to Pairing.

Once you are aware of the aspects to look for when tasting wine and deciding what to pair it with, it is important to understand the various approaches you can take when pairing wine with food.

The easiest way to become aware of these approaches is to view food and wine as you do people. Look at what works with the relationships around you and you usually have a pretty good indication of what gastronomic matches will work. Generally speaking people that have similar interests, and many of the same likes/dislikes will work out very well together-- their similarities will attract them to each other. But how many times have we met two people who couldn’t be more different or seemingly incompatible only to find that they somehow have a great relationship, allowing their opposite features to cancel out, combine, or overshadow each other to balance out perfectly? And then there are always the flukes: 2 people that *really shouldn’t* work together but magically do! Wine offers all of these scenarios.

The most common of pairings can be likened to the first relationship group—wine and food that have similarities. If you take a look at the most abundant aspect of a dish and then pair it accordingly with a wine that equally accentuates this factor you usually can’t go wrong. A great example can be found with acidic foods, especially dishes that are light



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and citrus-y like a Rocket Salad with Fresh Herb-Grapefruit Vinaigrette. You want to pair this type of dish with a wine that is equally acidic and citrusy such as a bright Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand or a French Sancerre. The wine, with its mouthwatering acidity and grassy nose will pick up all of the herbaceousness of the greens while balancing the biting acidity present in the grapefruit with its own citrus characteristics making the two taste even better than they do alone.

Then there are the ‘opposites attract’ pairings—wines that have the exact opposite taste of the food it is paired with and in doing so can meet the food at a perfect midway balancing point. It is almost as if the two absorb each other’s audaciousness and create a mild middle place where both can flourish. A good example of this type of pairing is spicy foods with sweeter styles of wines. The fire of a Curried Couscous Stuffed Anaheim Chili Pepper can easily be offset by the sweetness of a rich Californian Petit Sirah or a Late Harvest Zinfandel both high in sugar. Another one of my favorite ‘opposite’ pairings is that of a dry and delicate sparkling wine such as a Spanish Cava with a savory and rich nut cheese such as a Cashew-Herb Bourson. The frothy texture of the sparkling wine washes away and lightens the richness on the palate while cutting through the spiciness with its acidity.

Finally there are the ‘fluke pairings’—and though this is the most rare category, these are usually the most fun! Often there’s nothing to say that they will work...but after a try, they do. Whenever I encounter one of these pairings it is always a great reminder of how vast the world of taste is and how wine truly is a living force. And what works for you may be different than what works for someone else—“In matters of taste there can be no dispute.”

Part Three. Staples in Raw Food.

Once you’ve determined the overall taste of a wine and the approach to pairing a dish, it is always helpful to leap in with a full understanding of the type of food you are working with. As I stated before, one of the most exciting things about pairing raw food and wine is the opportunity to approach matching wine with the featured flavors of base ingredients themselves. Also, raw food offers the opportunity to learn about taste in a new way—without the textures and flavors that arise when an ingredient is cooked. By investigating different dishes and the flavors they consist of you can get a solid base for pairing any dish.

The Basics—Staples and Featured Ingredients Used in Raw Food

- **Zucchini**—Zucchini is used often to imitate starch foods such as pastas, wraps, and breads. Because of its neutral flavors and acidity the main factors to take into account when pairing wine with zucchini are its ever so slight sweetness (made even more noticeable when if it has been processed in a dehydrator) and light texture.
- **Tomatoes**—tomatoes are used prevalently in raw food dishes and to lump all tomatoes together into one group and ignore the many differences in flavors and textures between different varieties would be a travesty. However, to write a long discourse about each group would be a waste of time. So here is a general look at some of the most frequently used tomatoes in the raw world.
 - Vine-ripened (and roma): This is the most basic form of tomato, often used in relishes, puttenescas, and basic salads. These tomatoes have a high acidity, crisp texture and are slightly fleshy. The acidity should be balanced by a wine with an equal amount of acidity and a body that envelops the fleshy texture without washing it away.
 - Heirloom: Heirloom tomatoes are often slightly earthier and a hint less acidic than vine-ripened. They can be much fleshier in texture and more delicate as well. A wine that complements this earthiness and supports the delicacy of the fruit is best.
 - Cherry: The crispest and sweetest variety with the lowest acidity. It is important to choose a wine that will compliment the sweetness and not over-cut the fruit with too much acid. Also Cherry Tomatoes tend to have a very distinct and strong grassy aroma. Look for a wine that brings its own grassy-ness to the table.



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- **Sun-Dried:** Sun-Dried tomatoes have a savory sweetness that usually draws attention to itself as the main taste within a dish. By themselves they can also often overpower many wines, so sticking with a high acid rose or red is usually the way to go.
- **Beets**—beets are one of the sweeter vegetables used in raw foods with an extreme root-earthiness that can be divine. Wines that can meet the sweetness half way while providing a little of their own earthiness usually go best.
- **Carrots**—In general light to medium bodied whites with a medium acidity can cut through carrots slight sweetness while balancing their rougher texture. Carrots that have been dehydrated can be very sweet and are often used in tart crusts and desserts for this reason. They pair well with sweet whites like a Sauternes or Ice Wine.
- **Avocados**—Avocados are frequently used as a fat in raw cuisine. Its rich oils can add depth to raw dishes and provide a filler to tie other ingredients together. By itself, avocado is very difficult to pair because it contains all the makings for pairing with a full-bodied wine (usually fatty meats call for lots of tannin to cut through the richness) but is deceptively soft and can easily be swept away by too large of a wine.
- **Mushrooms**—Like tomatoes, mushrooms offer many different flavors for each variety and each can offer different pairing possibilities.
 - **Button.** Very basic and used mostly as an absorbent ingredient, taking in flavors of whatever you cook it with and providing either filler or separation within a dish.
 - **Truffles.** The *umami* utilized in raw food. Truffles have remarkably rich, satisfying, and vegetative flavors--like the floor of a forest--and are strangely sweet. They can be amazing pairs with earthier wines—especially Pinot Noirs from Burgundy and Sicilian Cerasuolo.
 - **Shitake.** If truffles provide richness in raw food, shitakes provide the savor. Used raw and alone, dehydrated or soaked in sauces, reductions, or broths, shitakes provide a depth of flavor that can tie together an entire dish. Usually shitakes can stand up to wines with higher body, but tend not to match well with high acid wines. Their savory character calls for wines with rich berry notes that are not too carries away by tannin, such as reds from Monsant, Spain or the Languedoc, France.
 - **Wild Mushrooms.** A very broad category that can encompass everything from chanterelles to black trumpets to what your aunt found growing behind her house. It depends on the individual flavor of each to really know how to pair best, however usually mildly earthy and light bodied wines work well—especially French Mercurey, Chilean Pinot Noir, and Northern Italian Merlot.
 - **Parsnips and Cauliflower**—Like mushrooms parsnips and cauliflower are very versatile ingredients in raw food and can be seen as chameleons—often used as rice, potato, and pasta substitutes. They are also very adept at absorbing the flavors of whatever is introduced around them in a dish, making them hard to pair alone. However the main difference to take into account when approaching pairing is that they have a much crunchier texture than rice/pasta/etc. and often a slightly bitter aftertaste.

The above is definitely a broad overview of tastes that can be pulled out of the featured ingredient of a dish. In general, the purpose of gastronomy is to reinvent tastes and coax something from an ingredient that has never been tasted before. Raw food can do this in a number of ways, modifying dishes with ingredients such as nut cheeses, dressings, sauces, tapenades and a host of other taste combinations limited only to the imagination of an inspired chef. After understanding how the staple ingredients can be used, the modifying agents are endless and it is here that the magic of gastronomic innovation and culinary expertise shine through. Likewise it is these modifiers that determine more so than any other factor what wine will harmonize perfectly with a dish. The best way to learn is to jump in and try, take chances, keep a record of what works and what doesn't. But most importantly look at examples from all over the culinary world of perfect food and wine matches to guide you. Chances are, if a wine works well with a particular dish, it will probably work well with a raw food mock of that dish. Finally the best way to learn is to explore ingredients, aromas and tastes in both wine and food. By developing your palate and an awareness of gastronomic harmony both



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within a dish and within the progression of a meal, you can develop a keen sense of how to pair—after all, pairing is all about tasting...and tasting all about being aware.

Part Four. Pair Away.

Not surprisingly, the most fruitful time I have ever spent developing my palate has been working in a kitchen with an innovative chef. Not only is it challenging to find wine marriages for constantly developing menus, but it is often enlightening to see how my tastes differ from someone else who is trained to appreciate the same principles of aromas, textures, balance, etc. As I bring to the table what I have found through my experiences, travels, and preferences and combine them with someone from a completely different background I can grow at a faster pace than going at it alone. With that in mind the two most important factors to developing a sense of food and wine pairing is to always be searching for interesting and challenging flavors and dishes—be it by pairing up with someone who loves food, playing with new ingredients yourself, or researching the food and wine matches of great sommeliers or top restaurants—and to be as well versed in the many styles and labels of wine as possible.

Knowing You Wines.

Developing a ‘wine arsenal’ to pair with any dish is an ongoing process. I am constantly trying to stay on top of the newest trends, labels, and vintage reports so as to have enough information as possible to use when pairing a wine. By reading major wine magazines (please see below for helpful wine literature and web links), researching new regions, and keeping a journal of the wines you try you begin to build up a slew of wines that can meet almost any gastronomic challenge that gets thrown your way. The journal can be as informal as a small notebook in which you write the name of the wine, region or country, vintage, grape (or date the grapes were harvested), and your overall thoughts. This is a process I have been at for several years and I am always surprised how handy the journal can come in when I am looking for a match to a particularly baffling dish. You can also keep notes on any foods that you try with these wines and what worked (or didn’t)—especially if the wine was tried with a base ingredient.

Here’s a sample from one of my journal entries:

Wine: Rotllan Torra ‘Amadis’ Priorat,

Vintage: 2003

Region: Priorat, Spain

Grape(s): Grenache, Carignan, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon

Notes: inky black color. Too young—would drink better in a couple years. Deep blackberry and currant notes with a hint of smoke and dried black tea leaves. Dry and medium bodied with rounded tannin and a lingering acidity.

Tried with Green Olive and Jalapeno tapenade. Too dry to balance the heat from the pepper—would work better with a milder dish and could stand up to some smoke—Gouda maybe?

As you can see these journal entries can be as detailed or as sparse as you want—the main idea is to start keeping a record of the wines that you have tasted so that you can compare them and contrast them to others and all the while build both your palate and the possibilities you have to work with.

Helpful wine links:

Here is a broad overview of the easiest to find publications to keep track of new labels, new vintages, and trends in the wine world:



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- Decanter Magazine—based out of London, Decanter has some of the best wine writing out there today. Not only are there great vintage reports from all over the world and wonderful tasting notes in each issue, but also there are wonderfully in-depth and intriguing articles on production techniques and the wine business.
- Wine Spectator-- although I don't always agree with their rating and often question whether or not advertising money affects their reports, they are the reference point for the wine world.
- Robert Parker's The Wine Advocate—If you've seen Jonathan Nossiter's controversial film *Mondovino* you might be a tad distrustful of Parker, although no matter what light he is painted in no one can disagree that he and his ratings are among the single most influential powers for any wine. His descriptions are also great for learning the language of describing wine and flavors to look for certain grapes or regions.
- Wine Enthusiast, Wine & Spirits, and Food & Wine all offer interesting articles and some useful information. They also break things down in a much less complicated way and so are perfect starting points for someone newly interested in learning wine appreciation.

Websites:

Apart from the websites of all the above listed publications, here are some great sites to learn from and stay in touch with trends:

- <http://www.wineatlas.net/en/> ---great site to learn about regions with a little detail.
- <http://www.winebusiness.com/> --I check it every morning (like the rest of those in the field). Very insightful writing about legal issues, business trends, mergers, famous winemakers, and a slew of other fun stuff. It even includes a link to a whole list of wine regions!
- <http://www.wineanorak.com/> --A phenomenal site with very easy to understand and interesting articles. One of the fastest sites to learn from.
- <http://www.theorganicwinecompany.com/> --a great site that has extremely accurate and straightforward articles on organic and biodynamic wine production.
- <http://www.organicwinejournal.com/> --a little out-dated and slow-to-catching trends, but helpful.

Dissecting Interesting Dishes to Find a Great Match.

Once you've gotten to know a few wines and kept record of your likes and dislikes, you can start scouring the food world for challenges and great pairs to then apply the same principles with the wines and food you know. With raw food it is especially helpful to look at dishes in the non-raw world to use as a starting point but then adapt for the different flavors and textures. With a solid understanding of the staple ingredients of raw food, an open and always-exploring gastronomic mind, and an 'arsenal' of wines you have tried and kept record of, you can start to have a solid foundation to pair anything thrown at you.

Here are some of the favorite pairings I've done with Chef Chad Sarno at our restaurant Saf in Istanbul, Turkey. Chef Sarno's dishes are by far the most innovative and complex of any I have tried in the raw food world and he is constantly pushing the envelope with a menu that ingeniously straddles tastes from across the globe while using techniques and ingredients seldom seen in today's gastronomy. All the while his main focus is taste and presentation, which makes for dishes that do not sacrifice any of the decadence found in fine cuisine for the sake of being raw. Since the food is made from the purest seasonal and organic produce I also limited myself to using only pesticide-free wines. All and all they make for very interesting/challenging pairs and by looking at what works and why we get a much clearer look at how best to approach pairing raw food and wine.

CASHEW HUMMUS

Fresh harissa, mint oil, flax-lavash and crudité



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Montsant, Capacanes Cellars Mas Donis “Barrica” 2004

Montsant is a region in Spain neighboring the much more famous Priorat. The wines, made primarily from the Grenache grape, tend to be slightly peppery and smoky with a medium body and bright acidity. This acidity is essential in balancing out the rich flavors of a hummus—especially so with a hummus made only from nuts. For this same reason (the need for acidity) hummus is often served with lemon so as to add as little or as much acid to the overall balance of the dish as you like. The pepper and dried tea notes of the wine compliment well the spicy harissa while its bright acidity and body cut through the overall smoky richness of the dish—balancing flavor where it should and rounding out the mint oil and herbaceous lavash.

Similar reds with bright acidity, smoke and pepper notes that would also pair well:
Californian Mourvedre, Sicilian Nero d’Avola, French Languedoc Grenache, and Cotes-du-Rhones.

SEMI DRIED TOMATO

Slow roasted with fresh olive tapenade, frisee, herb oil

Pinotage, Southern Right Western Cape, South Africa, 2002

Pinotage is a hybrid grape that is a cross between the light and somewhat fruit Pinot Noir and the earthy and fuller bodied Cinsault grapes. Wines made from this hybrid have an interesting structure: with a nose of deep plum, olive and white pepper from the Cinsault but an earthiness and blueberry-cordial flavors from the Pinot Noir. The wines also tend to be aged in oak, giving them some tannin and strengthening their body. This dish uses a very innovative technique of slowly dehydrating a whole vine-ripened tomato, which sweetens the fruit and dulls its acid levels. The dried tomato is then served with a black olive tapenade with herb oil adding salt and spiciness to the overall flavors. Southern Right’s Pinotage meets the sweetness and acidity of the tomato brilliantly while combining its own olive-herbaceousness with the tapenade. The body is full but does not out weigh the food making for a perfect combination.

Similar reds with earthiness, rounded tannin, and deep fruit that would also pair well: Chilean Pinot Noir, Spanish Ribera del Duero, French Corbieres.

VEGETABLE MAKI ROLL

White ‘rice’, cucumber, shitake, sesame, wasabi aioli

Champagne, Pierre Brigandat Brut Reserve, France NV

I have been in love with Champagne for quite some time and am always surprised that it isn’t ordered more in restaurants. I think there is a stigma that champagne is only for special occasions or maybe that people just don’t know what foods it works best with. This Champagne in particular has a delicious toasty-ness and dry hints of lemon, raspberry and apricot. It is also what is called a *Blanc De Noirs* Champagne meaning that it is made mainly from the red grape Pinot Noir. *Blanc de Noirs* tend to be fuller in flavor and a little less citrusy than *Blanc de Blancs* which are made mainly from Chardonnay. As for the dish, the rice is made entirely from uncooked cauliflower and has a lighter texture and a little bit less moisture than an actual rice. The seaweed and wasabi aioli beg for a frothy wine that can wash away some of their salt and spice while the toasted sesame seed and savory shitake flavors of the roll really bring out the Champagne’s toast and tropical fruit flavors.

Similar sparkling wines with a nice texture, toast, and berry-fruit notes:



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Californian *Methode Champenoise* Blanc de Noirs, Spanish Cava, French Clairette de Die Jaillance.

THAI SUMMER ROLLS

Wrapped in rice paper, with wild mushroom, herbs, avocado, red pepper, tamarind sauce

Gewürztraminer, Hugel & Fils, Alsace, France, 2003

Gewürztraminer is a great wine to get acquainted with if you haven't already. Found in California, parts of Oregon, Canada, and even New Zealand, it flourishes primarily in France (Alsace), Germany and Austria. The grape makes one of the spiciest of white wines ('Gewurtz' literally means "spice" or "perfume") that is usually enveloped by tropical fruits such as mango and pineapple. It is these 'marmalade' flavors that make this wine pair so perfectly with Asian flavors, especially Thai food. The honeyed nose of this Gewurtz is deceptive as it is fairly dry on the palate creating a nice sweet-and-tart balance that cuts through the herb flavors and richness of the avocado. The old-spice-cabinet Gewurtz nose mingles well with the tamarind sauce while its medium body does not over power the delicate but vibrant raw pepper and mushrooms.

Similar perfumed medium bodied whites that go well with Asian flavors:

Californian and French Viognier, German Muller-Thurgau, French Marsanne and Roussanne

ENCHILADA FRESCA

Walnut ancho purée, red parsnip rice, salsa fresca, avocado, cashew sour cream and jalapeno vinaigrette

Zinfandel, Coturri 'Freiburg Vineyards' Sonoma, California 2003

Zinfandel can be a dangerous wine to pair with raw food due to the fact that many (especially Californian) Zins tend to be very big wines. That being said the grape can also do wonders to heavily spiced dishes, providing the depth and slight sweetness needed to balance any peppery heat. Coturri's is an exceptionally well-balanced Zin with a full body and a slight dried-fruit sweetness that envelops these Mexican flavors wonderfully. This wine has plush berry fruit, mushroom notes and a lingering body that stands up to the salsa and jalapeno flavors while brightening the ancho puree with its velvety backbone.

Similar plush reds that pair well with Mexican food:

Californian Petit Sirah, Italian Primitivo, Italian Valpolicella, French Carignan

PINEAPPLE CANNOLI

Candied sesame canola, curried pineapple compote, vanilla foam, passion fruit juice

Icewine, Selaks Vineyards Marlborough, New Zealand, 2004

This is a great example of a dish that is as complex as it is delicious. There are so many various flavors at play with this dessert: sesame, curry, pineapple, vanilla and then the tangy passion fruit. To pair this dish I first had to focus on sugar—a wine with any amount of dryness would conflict with the lingering sweet pineapple. But the wine couldn't just be sweet but rather needed to have a spice and tang that plays off all the balanced flavors of the other ingredients. I chose an ice wine—which is a wine made from grapes that have been partially frozen, eliminating water from the grape itself so that only the sweet fruit juice can be extracted and fermented. Ice wine is a great dessert wine to pair with fruity sweets because it has plenty of its own sweetness but also a decadent tang that is noticed only on the finish. Selak's blend of Gewürztraminer and Riesling is a veritable drinking version of the dessert: with curry-spice notes from the



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Gewurtz, some vanilla from the oak used to age it, and a rich natural pineapple fruitiness that brings together all the other flavors and aromas.

Similar sweet and tangy dessert wines:

Austrian Trockenbeereenauslese, Fingerlakes Late Harvest Rieslings, French Monbazilliac

Play!

As you can see from some of these examples, there are many options or routes that can be taken when pairing a dish and the only limits are your knowledge, likes and dislikes, budget, and inventiveness. There will never be only one right pairing—although the more you experiment the clearer it will be that some wines can really hurt food if paired wrong. It only takes a few times trying a sweet dessert with a bone dry white or a delicate appetizer with a bold and powerful red for you to see what doesn't work and why. As you explore the fascinating world of gastronomy and learn more and more about wine regions and tastes you will start to enjoy the alchemy and luck involved with making great pairings and become more aware of everything you taste, be it wine, food or the combination of the two. Most of all, constantly searching for that transformation that occurs when a wine meets its perfect food match is an endlessly rewarding endeavor—so play away!!



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