

From James the Sommelier -The Perfect Host

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours'

Inviting people out to dinner is a thing that should be done more often. Bar inviting them to your home, finding an establishment with good food and good wine is a generous way to say 'thank you' to your friends, colleagues and family for being there for you. Wine constitutes a huge part in this scenario, as its up-market image coupled with its intoxicating nature come together to do nothing less than make everyone fall in love with you. It would be a shame then if you went to order for your guests and ended up fumbling, murmuring, stuttering and dashing any confidence your guests had in you.

For this is the point. Can you inspire the confidence in a person that makes them expect their gastronomical experience will be nothing less than awesome? Can you subtly alter the flavors, tastes and textures that will enhance their dopamine levels so that everybody on your table passes the night away with that warm, giddy feeling that only a good night can bring?

This is not a rack of rules to be judged upon. In the famous words of Captain Barbossa in Pirates of the Caribbean 'they be more guidelines.' But take note! Heeding the following remarks could vastly improve your image in front of guests. When executed with charm, charisma and quiet confidence these guidelines will propel you from Dantés to Monte Cristo, a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Be bold. Make sure you surprise your guests. Nothing will stamp your authority at the table more than a selection of wines digressing from the norm. How refreshing that you would choose a Blaufränkisch vom Heideboden as a full-bodied red. How worldly you must be to pick a Retour de Saint Jean d'Acre white shiraz. How impressive that you are so familiar with dessert wines and port.

You may want to start with a light white wine, say an Austrian Reisling or a lightly oaked Chardonnay, if you are starting early or wetting the palate while others arrive. The progression is the key. When everyone has arrived and starters have been ordered make sure to pick something that *allows* progression, so go for a light red, maybe an old world Pinot Noir, to allow for a more full-bodied Merlot, Malbec, Sangiovese or Cabernet Sauvignon afterwards.

Try to base the progression on the weight of the wine matching the weight of your food. Obviously, this does not just mean the meat you are having (the most common variable influencing the choice of wine) but the whole dish including sauce, vegetables and salad. Realize that fish in beurre noisette can go with a Laforet Bourgogne Pinot Noir or an Austrian St. Laurent. Mushroom quiche, can be accompanied with a light Merlot, Corolle for example, and foie gras goes particularly well with dessert wine, or Floc de Gascogne.

What if you are not eating? How do you drink wine without food? Without food, wine should be less tannic side so go for something New World, or a fruity Old World wine. Steer clear of anything Italian, unless you are certain of the wine itself. Shiraz blends from Australia and Argentinian Malbecs make great drinking due to their full bodies and tasty, fleshy mouths. The most important thing is not to change with every bottle and take your unfortunate guests on a sensory rollercoaster. Pick the grape of the wine with the intention of sticking to it.

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road, George Town, Penang

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