

THAT LITTLE WINE BAR

James The Sommelier – Wine and Malaysian Food

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

Malaysia: a melting pot with a kick

Malaysia is commonly referred to as a melting pot of cultures. And rightly so. With huge influence obvious in the food, architecture, festivals, holidays and people- from the ethnic Malay, Chinese and south Indian- I begin to wonder why 'melting cauldron' or 'very large reservoir' are not descriptions used instead. Be that as it may, these varying influences have developed a cuisine that allows you to eat from anywhere in the world and in great quality. Foodies based in Penang are probably the most acute tasters and have an equally selective palate. Get a meal past a Penangite who finishes with a smile and sits for five minutes savouring their experience and you're onto a winner.

It is nothing other than exciting, then, when we are asked to pair a morsel from this eclectic cuisine with a wine. The acidity and spiciness of the food deters any rational thought and creates a barrier that most of the local people will approach, survey and then cordially back away from. Wine is left on the other side all alone and very much forgotten in replacement of a safe bet; swie cam peng, kopi ais?

But, this hot pot broth of a culture should probably be topped off with a measure of wine to get the overall taste perfect, as you would do with a spaghetti Bolognese or an alcoholic beef stew for example. The addition of wine to Malaysian cuisine is something that is not at all unreasonable



Malaysian laksa goes well with a fruity Pinot Grigio or gewurtzemeiner.

and, in fact, has already been experimented with in great cities such as New York, London and Sydney. The enticing aspect of a challenge mixed with the exotic has made Malaysian food and wine pairing highly coveted. And, again, rightly so.

So how can we combine these two bastions of East and West- the spicy, rich, flavourful tastes of Malaysian food with the epitome of Western drink? The secret to pairing is to choose wines that are relatively low in alcohol or are off-dry and possess a certain sweetness, whether from residual sugar or fruit. With some of the heavier Nyonya curries like chicken rendang choosing a

low-alcohol zweigelt would be a good choice. Or, if the zweigelt becomes tart then try and pick a burgunderrebe (Pinot Noir) from south Germany. This would most likely have a dominant fruity character and would allow you serve it slightly chilled to balance out the spice.

Beyond this, serving a well-chilled white is a sure-fire way to refresh palates fatigued by the spicy, rich food. A reasonably oaked Chardonnay would balance out the salty, spicy tastes in your local char kway teow for example. If you want to take it to extremes, however, why don't you try your mum's laksa with a gewurztraminer or a fruity pinot grigio. Lastly, the ubiquitous

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

Email info@thatlittlewinebar.com for details

THAT LITTLE WINE BAR

chicken rice dish with a healthy portion of sambal would go well with Spanish or new world rose. Its refreshing quality cuts into the spicy sambal sauce as well as heightening the rose's aromatic value.

So, Malaysian cuisine is certainly a simmering concoction of kaleidoscopic proportions. However, the locals should embrace wine as a perfect accompaniment to the array of dishes on offer. Sooner rather than later, this melting pot of cultural cuisine will take on a slightly stronger kick. And, obviously, rightly so.

TIPS: Join That Little Wine Bar's Malaysian food and pairing night on the 22nd September to taste some truly remarkable pairings.