

THAT LITTLE WINE BAR

James The Sommelier – Chalk and Cheese

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

Chalk and Cheese: Contrasting food and wine pairings and a night to celebrate

The idiom of 'chalk and cheese' implies the clash of two opposite things and their inability to embody one another. Why we don't say 'giraffe and gorilla' or 'pirate and maiden' is a point to remember but this, seemingly, obvious saying certainly gets to the point.

Is that the point though? First published in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* of 1393, the original use was to describe a thrifty shopkeeper's new talent of 'chalk for cheese he changeth with ful littel cost,' relating to the similarity of some English cheeses to chalk and his cunning substitute of one for the other to save money. So in fact, the saying chalk and cheese actually refers to the *synergy* of opposites and their unusual knack of complimenting each other quite well. In reference to my earlier point, 'giraffe and gorilla' really wouldn't do because there is and no need for any cooperation or collaboration between the two. If any synonymic expression were needed I think 'Bush and Bin Laden' would be more accurate... for example.

And how true this all is in the world of wine. When pairing wine with food there is no end to the sub strata of guidelines, hints and tips for completing that magical formula of one plus one equals three; all building and considering yet contradicting and disregarding each other as a unified body competing and yet allied in pursuing gastronomical excellence.

In relation, the idea of contrasting food and wine pairings comes to the fore. Different from regional and complimentary pairings, a contrast pairing is based on the age-old phrase of 'opposites attract', bringing together the differences in a food and a wine.

The regional pairing of foie gras and sauternes is a classic example of a complimentary pairing in that the fattiness and wholesome texture of the duck pate is balanced nicely by the thick, sweet body of the dessert wine making what some would deem as a starter into a full blown meal. Flipping it on its head, however, the 'chalk and cheese' version would be foie gras paired with a champagne wine. Instead of the addition of heavy creaminess, a champagne wine would cut through the fatty texture of foie gras and help break it down on the palate, using its bubbles and dryer nature to do so. This also holds true with some desserts especially when considering the sweet, velvety character of some ingredients such as chocolate, fruit consume and butterscotch.

Another unlikely paring would be a red with crabmeat and walnuts. Crabmeat, seafood with an acquired taste, would normally be associated with crisp whites like a dry Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc and tends to steer clear of reds. But there is a key, a 'bridge,' which can bring these two together in the shape of a confused bit of shrapnel- the walnut. Dry to the mouth and with a slight bitterness in aftertaste, walnuts pair excellently with chilled red wines such as Heuhloz Taurus as, when drunk cold, this wines refreshing quality cleanses the palate while it's enormously fruity mouth pushes back on that encroaching tartness.

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

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The same is true with cod- renowned seafood which is most commonly paired with white- usually something with the potential for a bit more body and a creamier character like an oaked chardonnay or a Semillon. But do not be afraid of going that one step further and raising the stakes by dumping a pinot noir or Beaujolais on the table. The pinot's are out there but choosing the right style will be the difference between success and failure.

While it is true that taste is subjective, there are quantifiable traits in wine that are considered when choosing a style to go with a certain dish. In being able to choose the right pinot noir to go with a sweet soy cod dish, for example, you need to bear in mind the wines acidity, bitterness (tannins), sweetness (fruit value) and alcohol. With cod, a flakey fish with notable salty flavor, a wine with strong tannins and alcohol would cripple the experience by overwhelming the cod because the lack of protein would not stand up to them. Also a pinot with too racy acidity would again cut through the flavors of the dish too harshly leaving a tart sensation in your mouth. There again, with sweet soy, the best contrasting wine would be one with less fruit on the palate and a bit of spice to balance it out. So a hard crowd to please, indeed, but with a New World pinot noir from Oregon or Marlborough things will take a pleasant turn. The favorite choice, however, could possibly be an Austrian Zweigelt as its low alcohol content, light body and slight spice will tick all those pairing boxes.

This April on the 26th That Little Wine Bar hosts their 'Chalk and Cheese and Wine' night. Filled with the pairings mentioned here, Chef Tommes of 'Chalk and Cheese' will be highlighting some of the dishes cooked on the new and highly popular AFC series. While each of the dishes are available on the program with full recipes and step-by-step guides there is nothing like sampling the work from the master himself- if only as a benchmark for your own efforts. Paired by their in-house Sommelier, the wines chosen are some of the best rated by customers (and owners!) alike. Of course, true to form the pairings will be exploring the not-so-safe and daring sides of gastronomic equilibrium in that quest for something exciting and new.

The chalk and cheese of food and wine pairing is being jumped upon by the biggest gastronomical centers of the world as a universal challenge. New York, Sydney, Shanghai are all trying to outdo each other all searching for that next 'three', the next emergence flavor reaching a complexity far greater than its component parts of food and wine. Due to its own prestige Georgetown, Penang, should join the bundle as well, don't you think...

Get to That Little Wine Bar on 26th April, 2012 for a celebrity experience starting from 19:00 onwards.