



**NIKHIL AGARWAL** is the owner of All Things Nice, which organises wine tastings across Mumbai, and a trained sommelier from Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) UK. In his decade-long career in the wine industry, he has liaised with the best hotels and restaurants to train their staff in the nuances of wine and food pairing.

# THE SOMMELIER SPEAKS

Nikhil Agarwal, wine expert and foodie, shares tips on pairing wine with food in a way that gets your tastebuds tingling. By **Anupa Shah**

the wine. So, for example, you could pair something with spice in it with a wine that has spicy undertones or you could contrast it by having it with a wine that has a hint of sweetness or fruitiness. All you need to do is taste. The more you taste, the more you will understand what different wines taste like. The reason you know what various food items taste like is because you tasted them and created a memory bank of food flavours. You've got to get to the same level of comfort with understanding wine flavours and then these secret principles will automatically reveal themselves to you.

## What wines go well with dessert? What is the significance of serving a wine with dessert?

The idea behind serving a dessert wine with a dessert is to complement the flavours, to make the coming together of the dessert and the dessert wine better than what they would taste individually. The wine should be sweeter than the dessert, otherwise the wine will begin to taste tart. You could try a late harvest Chenin Blanc from India or a Sauternes from France, or even a Tokaji or a Muscat. ▶



## What is the secret of food and wine pairing?

It's great to experiment. Some of my favourite pairings have come from experimentation rather than keeping the principles of pairing in mind. For example, it's said you shouldn't have spicy food with tannic red wines but I quite like it. I like it

when the temperatures rise and it's almost like I have a sprinkler attached to my noggin, but that's me. However, getting back to the guidelines, what you should keep in mind is the texture and body of the dish and the wine. One should not overpower the other. Keep in mind the flavour and try and match it or contrast it with



“MATCH OR CONTRAST FOOD FLAVOURS WITH WINE. YOU COULD PAIR SPICY FOOD WITH A WINE THAT HAS SPICY UNDERTONES OR CONTRAST IT WITH A WINE THAT HAS A HINT OF SWEETNESS.”

**Could you suggest a few basic wine and cheese pairings?**

The world of wine and cheese is so large that there is a match for each of them. For the more common wines like a Sauvignon Blanc or wines with similar acidity, I highly recommend chèvre. With Chardonnay, you could try Gouda. With a full-bodied tannic red wine like a Shiraz or Cabernet Sauvignon, I like harder cheeses like Parmigiano Reggiano (long shavings), or even a mature cheddar. With Pinot Noir, Brie or Camembert is fantastic, though these cheeses will go wonderfully with sparkling wine too.

**How does one best store and serve wine?**

If you intend to start a collection of wines, invest in high value wines you can have after many years or on special occasions, and if you simply want to

keep a sizeable stock at home, I suggest you do it right. I would recommend a wine

fridge. They come in different sizes and can range

from economical and functional to expensive and gorgeous. I think an elegant wine fridge in the kitchen is glorious and a must-have.

Your wine glass can make or break a wine and I suggest spending some money on getting quality glasses that allow the wine to taste better. Riedel is the best and is also expensive. Chef & Sommelier have great glasses as well. There are many other companies that make very good glasses and are less expensive as well.

I would also recommend buying a decanter; not only are they a visual treat but they enhance the qualities of some wines. Get yourself a vacuum pump/wine saver with the cork closures to allow you to preserve a wine after opening.

**NIKHIL'S GUIDE TO WINE-FOOD PAIRINGS**

**Oriental cuisine**

Steamed fish and dim sum go wonderfully well with a Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc. Duck goes very well with Sangiovese, Pinot Noir or Merlot. A nice dry Chenin Blanc will complement spicy dishes. Fried food items go well with wines that have a good amount of acidity—a sparkling wine or even a Riesling.



**Indian cuisine**

With kebabs, rogan josh or a chicken makhanwala, try a full bodied wine such as a Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon or Malbec. With palak paneer, a dry Chenin Blanc is best. Curd-rice would be super with Pinot Grigio and biryani with a fruity rose wine. Patrani machhi is great with a German Riesling Spatlese or a Chenin Blanc. A Gujarati undhiyo can be paired with Viognier and dal dhokali with Merlot.



**Continental cuisine**

Combine a tomato-based pasta sauce or pizza with a Chianti Classico, grilled fish or lamb with an oak-aged Cabernet Sauvignon or Shiraz, risotto with oak-aged Chardonnay, grilled veggies with Sauvignon Blanc and grilled chicken with Merlot.



**Lebanese cuisine**

With a traditional Lebanese mezze, which has a mix of items such as hummus, baba ghanoush or stuffed vine leaves, a Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Soave or a dry Riesling are perfect. Grilled meats or shawarma go with a fuller bodied red wine like Cabernet Sauvignon. •



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