

FAVORITE WINES FOR ASIAN FLAVORS

Weighty white wines for dishes with sweet overtones

Savory Asian dishes can have a predominant sweet taste. Choose dry wines with some weight and relatively higher alcohol such as Chardonnay, Fumé Blanc and Viognier for dishes from Shanghai, Indonesian, Sudanese, South Vietnamese and Thai and Malaysian “lemak” or coconut-based curries. Hermitage Blanc (Marsanne-Roussanne blend) is another wine with weight and a gorgeous texture. With gindara teriyaki or grilled/baked silver cod with teriyaki sauce the wine simply glides over the tongue to make its union with the dish.

Lightly sweet Vouvray demi-sec for sour dishes

Savory and sour dishes feature prominently in Asian cuisine. Examples include Thai salads and Malaysian tamarind-based curries. Mulligatawny is an Anglo-Indian soup meaning pepper water. It is reminiscent of the South Indian rasam, and was created by the servants for the British Raj. Although it has a savory taste of garlic, onions, curry

powder, and vegetables, it's predominantly tangy due to a healthy dose of tamarind or lemon juice, tempered by a dash of yogurt or cream. Vouvray demi-sec—a lightly sweet wine with bubbles makes the match in many ways. The cold wine with bubbles makes a temperature and textural contrast to the hot soup. The wine's sweetness and fruit contrast the soup's sourness and spice. Opposites attract here.

Champagne and sparkling wines for salty dishes

Dry wines are right in sync with salty Asian flavors. Their penetrating acidity and clean fruit flavors sit well with soy and fish sauce. If the wine has bubbles, there is the additional cleansing action for any chili piquancy. Bubbles also add textural interest and contrast for crispy fried foods. It's no wonder dry sparkling wines and Champagnes are the ideal wines for dishes ranging from crispy bee hoon and crab soup, spicy Thai steamed muskels and sambal ikan masin (spicy sour salted fish).

Tempranillo with low tannin for strong flavored and spicy dishes

What do Nonya dishes like Too Huwait Char Kuchai (chives with black pudding), Gulai Pak Lai (giblet curry), Perut Ikan (pickled fish stomach curry) and the Thai dish of Sai Krok Isan (Thai issan sour fermented pork balls) have in common? All these dishes have unusually pungent tastes. Spanish red wines made from Tempranillo, with fine tannins, and flavors reminiscent of cranberries and cherries, and a touch of vanilla-toast - are the answer.

Moscato, lightly sweet for piquant chili

The more heat a dish packs, the lower the alcohol level should be in the wine. This is so that a balance can be achieved between the fiery chili element of the dish and the alcohol level of the accompanying wine. Pla Ra Bong is a north-eastern Thai dish made from fermented fish and ground roasted rice. Essentially a nam prik or chili paste dip of the Northeast. The extreme fire demands

not only a low alcohol sweet wine but one that is sweet. So, Moscato is the wine of choice here.

Grüner Veltliner for vegetables

Few wines are friendly to vegetables. Austria's Grüner Veltliner is one such wine that fits the bill here. Its zippy acidity, lowish alcohol, clarity of flavors—white pepper, vegetables, citrus, pear, quince and apple, spicy green peppers—deem it a wine for vegetarian dishes, especially umami-rich dried salty vegetables and other preserved Asian vegetables. Moreover, Grüner Veltliner is known to be good with “difficult” vegetables such as artichokes and asparagus. Some excellent matches of this wine are to be had with zaru soba (chilled soba), stir fried vegetables in oyster sauce, and sesame-flavored salads.

Rosé wine and multi-textured dishes

Rosé wine is one of those flexible wines that take up with various food types and flavors. It's at home with white meats and seafood and doesn't complain when asked

to accompany red meats. It handles spices incredibly well, as well as herbs and aromatics. Consider banh mi, the Vietnamese sandwich. It has complex flavors and textures—there's vinegar, radish, sugar, onions, pork, liver pate, cucumber, chili, mayonnaise, and more. Wash it all down with a slurp of pink wine!

Off-dry Riesling for complex flavors

Poh piah is the Singapore version of the Fujian spring roll, that features diverse ingredients including yam-bean, shallots, bean sprouts and lettuce—topped with peanuts, chili, and sweet dark sauce. Rieslings come in various versions – trocken (dry), spätlese (lightly sweet), ‘vendange tardive’ (sweet), and ‘selections grains nobles’ / auslese / beerenauslese / ice wine (syrupy sweet). Choose your wine according to how much sweet sauce you add to the Poh Piah. The sweeter the dish, the sweeter the wine should be.

Red Burgundy for meaty and sweet spicy flavors

The mahogany-gold colored,

Hong Kong roast squab is salty, sweet, gamey, five spice-scented, spicy with a hint of ginger and with vinegar-soy glazed crisp skin. It calls for a wine with seductive stone fruit aromas and earthy overtones but with ripe acids and fine tannins and a lingering finish—hence a Burgundy.

Oloroso Sherry for nutty flavors

With flavors of roasted nuts, vanilla, and warm caramel, with a slight sweetness, but with a creamy texture and hint of tangy fruit on the finish, Oloroso Sherry is the perfect mate for satay beef stir-fry. The wine mirrors the peanut and coconut-milk gravy of the stir-fry, without being over come by the garlic, ginger, shrimp paste, and curry spices used.

Pinot Grigio or Pinot Gris for delicate seafood and stronger sauces

This wine has two faces depending on its alcohol content. One version is zippy, vibrant, with pleasant lemon freshness and crisp mineral acidity—the perfect foil for fried seafoods, tempura, sushi, sashimi and Chinese steamed

Mind these tips



A common mistake when matching wine with food is that of resemblance. That a Gewürztraminer, because of its spicy characteristics, should accompany curry is a misunderstanding of flavor matching. The pungency of both may be equal in intensity but the opposing spice elements aggravate the incompatibility. Red wines such as Merlot, Nero d'Avola, or Zinfandel, with strong berry flavors, are unexpected matches as the bold fruit in the wines play up to the curry spices.



German wine labels indicate the ripeness level when the grapes were picked and/or the residual sugar of the wine. ‘Spätlese’ refers to wine made from grapes picked ripe / harvested late. Wines are correspondingly sweet. ‘Spätlese’ wines can be designated ‘trocken’ that means that wine has been fermented until little residual sugar remains, implying a dry wine.

fish. Choose from unoaked or mildly oak-influenced Pinot Gris or Pinot Grigio from Italy, California, Oregon, New Zealand (lower alcohol ones) and the German Rulander or Grauburgunder.

The other style is Pinot Gris from Alsace (until recently called Tokay Pinot Gris) and includes some fuller-bodied higher alcohol versions from New Zealand and Australia.

These wines are totally adept in handling the strong flavors of- sweet and sour; meat with hoisin sauce; Thai lemongrass dishes; Indian spiced dishes featuring coriander, cumin and ginger; and the sweet-soy-vinegar or the sesame-oil and rice wine seasonings in Shanghai dishes.