



Why Spanish wines are best for Chinese palates

Red wines from Spain and the Languedoc region of France are best suited to Chinese palates. — shutterstock.com pic

BEIJING, Aug 4 — Red wines from Spain and the Languedoc region of France are the best suited for Chinese palates, says a powerful wine figure in the Asian market. In an interview with trade publication *The Drinks Business*, international wine buying director and Master of Wine Alun Griffiths identified the softer, sweeter reds from Spain and the south of France as having the most appeal for the Chinese market, where wine appreciation and knowledge remains immature.

Griffiths is the new international director for VATS Liquor in Beijing.

“They like soft red wines, they don’t like high acid wines, with a bit of richness on the palate,” he told the publication.

Meanwhile, the most important wine for Chinese consumers is French wines, which account for nearly half — 49 per cent — of the country’s imported wine market. The Chinese mainland is likewise the largest importer of Bordeaux by volume.

And despite their enthusiasm and seemingly insatiable thirst for wine (consumption soared 142 per cent between 2007 and 2011), overall wine knowledge is still underdeveloped in China, says Griffiths.

As an example, the expert recalls a tasting in which testers declared an oxidized white Burgundy the best of the samples because it was the softest on

the palate.

“Beijing is very much baijiu country,” he said.

Baijiu, the white spirit distilled from sorghum, wheat or rice, accounts for more than one-third of all spirits consumed around the globe.

Though fruity reds have dominated the Chinese wine market, white wine has also been projected to grow 69 per cent between 2011 to 2015 compared to 53 per cent for reds -- a growth driven largely by female drinkers looking for more refreshing options.

Meanwhile, unlike Western meals which are served in multiple courses, the challenge of pairing wines with Asian meals is that food comes all at once, mixing seafoods with beef and chicken, and running the gamut from salty, sweet, sour and spicy on the same table.

Singapore-based Decanter columnist Poh Tiong and author of "108 Great Chinese Dishes Paired," suggests dry to off-dry Rieslings, dry to demi-sec Chenin blancs, or Hunger Valley Semillons for dishes that are heavy on aromatics like chili pepper, lemongrass, cilantro and garlic.

For dim sum, French sommelier Cedric Maupoint of Michelin-starred Shang Palace in Paris recommends dry white Rieslings or Chablis.

And Jeannie Cho Lee, author of "Mastering Wine for the Asian Palate," recommends pairing salty dishes dominated by soy, oyster or bean paste with wines that are soft on tannins, while dishes made with fermented beans, mushrooms, or dried cured meats full of umami go best with mature wines with “well-knit” tannins, and restrained fruit character. — AFP-Relaxnews