



A Few Pairing Tips by Jeannie Cho Lee

At Vinexpo 2012, I attended a seated tasting on the topic of “German Wines and Asian Flavours,” conducted by Jeannie Cho Lee, Master of Wine for the German Wine Institute in which she explored the creative aspects and intricacies of pairing German wines with Asian flavors. The tasting featured a second launch of Jeannie and the Institute’s creative collaboration entitled Perfect Pairings: German Wines and Asian Flavours.



About Jeannie

“Jeannie Cho Lee (MW), was born in Korea, but has lived in Hong Kong since early 1994. She is Contributing Editor for Decanter UK and a weekly columnist for Hong Kong’s South China Morning Post as well as mainland China’s China Business News. She also writes monthly columns for Noblesse China, Noblesse Korea and Decanter Taiwan. In addition, she is a Wine Consultant for Singapore Airlines as well as for Galaxy Macau.

Jeannie is the author of the award-winning book, Asian Palate, and founded www.AsianPalate.com, a website dedicated to Asian food and wine. In 2009, Jeannie won the Vinitaly Award for her contributions to the wine industry and in 2010, became the face person for a new product launched by Estee Lauder in Hong Kong and China.

Jeannie loves all things related to food. She has a Certificat de Cuisine from Cordon Bleu and has written about food and reviewed restaurants since 1995. She firmly believes that the future of wine in Asia depends on the frequency of wine being a part of the every day dining table." [Source]

The Tasting

At the tasting, Jeannie discussed the importance of remembering to pair wines to flavors instead of to ingredients. She also encouraged her audience to look past traditional pairings, such as fish with white wine, and get creative instead.

"We had this [Spätburgunder] paired in Oslo with miso cod, and it was very interesting, because whenever we did a pairing, I always allowed people to choose, so.... One was a Spätburgunder of this aromatic, wonderful high quality. And another was a dry, with a little bit of residual sugar, about 20-30 grams, Riesling. So people could choose what they preferred.

And I went back to my notes and more than half chose the Pinot Noir. When you think of codfish, you think, "Oh fish....with white wine!" But with the miso glaze and with the touch of sweetness, that sort of combination, and there was a little bit of spring onions on top as a garnish. It worked better with Pinot Noir than it did with Riesling.

So, I think very much, especially with Asian cuisine, we all know this as reality – It's not the ingredient that we pair with the wine. It's always the seasoning, the condiment, the method of cooking, whether you steam something or you fry it, how much oil you use. You know, all of these combinations is what actually makes the conclusion with how that wine pairs with a certain dish.

So forget ingredients and wine pairing, and forget fish with white wine!"

She discussed the "fine balance" between the personality of the food and that of the wine within a pairing, and compares this balance to a dance of two people, where sometimes one leads and sometimes the other does. She noted the importance of getting to understand and respect the cuisine just as well as the wine before a tasting, so that one goes into it with an open mind, searching for the balance between the food and the wine, instead of looking for a wine which suppresses the food.

"I have been on many panels where people are great wine tasters, they're wonderful, top-notch wine commentators, and they know their wines inside out, but really don't know the cuisine. And when they have something like sea cucumber, or jellyfish for the first time, and they don't like it, they'll always choose a wine that tries to take that taste away from their mouth, whereas we're looking for a wine that makes that fish, that jellyfish flavor stay longer in our mouths.

So the purpose becomes different. As soon as you realize that and you come from the perspective of respecting and loving those flavors and that dish, I'm sure you'll make the right decision. Because you'll know either that wine helps the flavor of that dish that you love so much linger and stay in the mouth, or it doesn't, or it kills it.

It's a fine balance and it's always kind of like a dance between two people, because sometimes, there's going to be times when the wine is going to lead, because of its personality, because of its style. And there's many other times when the food is going to lead because it has a stronger personality and stronger elements, and the wine becomes just the supporter and the food takes over. And as always they respect each other at the end of the day – I think pairing can work very well.

So with the Auslese, Sichuan dishes can go well, spicy food, yes, but tone down the level of spiciness."