



Perfect wine partners for Shanghai cuisine

(17th May 2012 – by Gao Ceng) Increasing numbers of Chinese wine lovers are pairing western wines with their favorite Chinese food, with light Cantonese cuisine and spicy Sichuan flavors said by many wine critics to go well with crisp whites.

Shanghai cuisine, with its sweet and slightly oily taste, is often ignored when talking about wine pairing.

However, a wine dinner held at Peninsula Shanghai last week by **Jeannie Cho Lee** - the first ethnic Asian to hold the qualification of Master of Wine and contributing editor of "Decanter" magazine - took as its theme "German wine and Shanghainese cuisine."

The gathering proved that Shanghainese food is indeed wine-friendly, especially when served with refreshing and versatile German Riesling.

"The original intention for holding the dinner was not about wine pairing," says Lee. "On the contrary, it was because I had already found that some wines from regions with cool climates complement, even enhance, Shanghai flavors."

However, pairing a wine with Chinese cuisine is not simple, due to the characteristic Chinese dining style of eating from a wide assortment of small dishes.

As each bite of Chinese food contains many more different flavors than a single western dish, it is difficult to pair one wine with one dish in a Chinese restaurant.

Lee summarizes a pairing rule based on the culinary style of Shanghai hongshao dishes - slow cooking with sugar and soy sauce, with river shrimp and eel among the most popular ingredients.

Firstly, choose a wine with good versatility to best complement the complex flavors in each bite. Most German Rieslings - especially those produced in Mosel, known for its rich aromas, fruity flavors and hint of minerals - define versatile wine, says Lee.

Secondly, a wine with firm acidity is better as this brings more refreshment to sometimes over-oily Shanghai food.

At the wine dinner, Lee paired a classical Shanghai noodle congyou banmian - tossed noodles with dried shrimps in spring onion oil - with 2007 Weingut Joh Jos Prum Riesling Wehlener Sonnenuhr, Mosel.

The wine has a nice refreshing taste brought by sufficient acidity, a petrol note and mineral backbone, which to some extent removes the oily taste of the noodles, making them more tasty.

Thirdly, Lee believes that "greater emphasis should be placed on specific characters in wine." It's better for the texture and flavor in the wine to echo those of the food, she says.

On the dinner, 2009 Reislung Feinherb Kloster Eberbach was chosen to pair longjing xiaren - stir-fried river shrimp with Longjing tea leaves.

The wine, light and refreshing, with hint of "sweetness" brought by high residual sugar levels, echoes the natural sweetness of the shrimp meat, yet does not overpower it.

Lee also found that the caramelized character commonly found in some Shanghai dishes cooked in the hongshao style, such as jiangbao huangshan - deep fried river eel with soy sauce - goes well with German Riesling, known for its crystalline flavors.

Lee defines a perfect food and wine pairing as a marriage in which wine plays the role of increasing a diner's appreciation of the food.

She believes that as Chinese wine drinkers broaden their palate, many more wine varieties will be discovered to provide the perfect match for China's diverse regional cuisine.