

Recently I conducted a wine tasting for the Divas of Atlanta. One question that came up was “why not just slug down the wine and not worry about color, taste or smell?” Good idea (not!). This question speaks to our whole American culture. For so long in America wine has been considered just another way to get high. Slug it down with the vodka, gin or bourbon. The effect is always the same, a buzz.

With a few exceptions food friendly quality wine has been made in any quantity in America since the 70's. Before that we made mostly fortified wine. That's how Gallo got so big (they are the largest wine maker in the World) and one reason why we have such an alcoholic problem in the United States.

However, in Europe wine is considered a food. It's like all the rest of your food with the added benefit of that warm fuzzy feeling that makes us feel so comfortable and smart. So would you serve lamb with fresh grapefruit? No they fight each other in our mouth. So instead we serve potatoes with lamb – what a perfect match. Would they start the evening with a glass of dry red wine by itself without food? We do in America – (for the buzz). They don't in Europe.

Wine was made to enhance our enjoyment of a meal making it a dining experience. That's why we take note of the color and smell and taste. So we don't end up with lemon on our pancakes (try peanut butter on your pancakes it works!).

Now while I was tasting wine with the wine maker recently in Napa, I saw a woman give a very lengthy explanation (like getting a drink out of a fire hose) of how she had tried all these different dishes with the wine makers product. This woman needed to get a life. The wine maker glazed over, I glazed over and the woman kept talking. You don't need to make that big a deal about wine as a food but have some fun with it.

Here's Tom's “7 Habits of Highly Effective Pairings”:

Rule 1. Simple is as Simple Does – Simple food simple wine. For example, baked chicken with an inexpensive Chardonnay or white blend. With Chicken Cordon Bleu bring out the Montrachet.

Rule 2. Consider the Origin of the Dish. For example, French food with French wine (However, this doesn't work with sunflower wine from Kansas and Kansas Beef). Spanish food with Spanish wine (you get the idea).

Rule 3. Seasoning with Seasoning – Spicy food with spicy wine. By the way, a spicy wine is Zinfandel, also Rhone wines with Syrah grapes. Try a Cote Rotie for some pepper flavors. Put chicken soup with a low-end white.

Rule 4. Big Young Wines with Lots of Big Young Fat (not a Chinese name). The younger the wine made in wood, the more tannins it has. My research this summer proves young cabernets go with grilled steak. Further research proved Chardonnays with lobster and butter is a good match.

Rule 5. Experiment in Private – The time to challenge controversial wisdom on wine parings is in private not when you're trying to make an impression. It's fun to try something new but do it in private (this works for more than just wine and food).

Rule 6. If Only One Wine with Dinner - Make it Multi-Dimensional – Some wines are more food friendly than others. Young Cabernet and California Chardonnay are not flexible with food. Pinot Noir and Chianti are flexible reds, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc are more flexible whites. The question is, “what one wine goes best with all I'm eating?”

Rule 7. Drink What You Like - Forget the first six rules and drink what you like, but I'll challenge you to this. You'll like what you drink more if you follow the first six rules along with number seven. Always drink what you like. You are the only critic who counts (unless you're with your boss).

Gerald Asher, famous food and wine critic, said of taking this wine thing too seriously, “I don't find talk of total acid residual sugar and carbonic maceration stimulating to the sensual pleasure. It's almost as if our hostess leaned across just when you were about to taste her hollandaise sauce and started to discuss emulsions with you.”

I couldn't agree more! If you have questions about wine or a comment email me at TomBlack1@Comcast.net.