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# **Pairing Food & Wine**

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**John Szabo**  
*Master Sommelier*



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# *About the Author*

**John Szabo** is the original Canadian master sommelier, earning the credentials in 2004, and is one of only 200 worldwide today. When not eating and drinking (professionally), he writes and reviews wines for [WineAlign.com](http://WineAlign.com), [NationalPost.com](http://NationalPost.com), [TorontoStandard.com](http://TorontoStandard.com), *Macleans Canadian Wine Guide*, *Wine Access Magazine*, *Grapevine Magazine*, and is wine editor for Toronto's *CityBites Magazine*.

John keeps his sommelier skills sharp as consulting wine director for the Trump Tower Toronto and for Toronto's Pearson International Airport, among other projects. And just to make sure all angles are covered and his experience well rounded, he owns a vineyard in Eger, Hungary, the J&J Eger Wine Co., where he makes small quantities of food friendly Kékfrankos. As a holder of a third degree black belt in Goju-ryu karate, his grapes are well protected, too.

# Dedication

For my wife, Alexandra, and my children Esmail and Julius, who supported long hours of writing, regular absence, and hundreds of bottles of wine on the table each week as I looked for that perfect match.

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# Introduction

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People have been eating and drinking wine together for as long as wine has been around. You don't need any special knowledge to do it. In the very early days, people didn't have much choice either; they ate and drank whatever was at hand — wine wasn't easy to ship and spoiled quickly. Yet over time, as the availability of wine grew and people could make choices, certain combinations of wine and food were clearly more pleasing than others. Early epicureans sought to understand what made those combinations work (so they could be repeated), and the business of food and wine pairing was born.

In the meantime, the standard approach has moved from a handful of rigid rules to complete food and wine anarchy, and back again to a sensible middle ground, where curiosity and creativity have as much a place as any orthodoxy. *Pairing Food & Wine For Dummies* comes at a time when the understanding of how you sense things and experience enjoyment has never been deeper. The scientific and hedonistic sides of food and wine pairing coexist in harmony today and support one another. The way I look at it, you can have a lot more fun today than ever before.

What's more, you're living in a world where the choice of wine and diversity of cuisine has never been greater. There are the classic regional food and wine matches to follow, but they won't help you much when you venture into cuisines not traditionally associated with wine nor in selecting dishes to match wines from new growing regions or unfamiliar grapes.

That's why *Pairing Food & Wine For Dummies* is your handy reference that covers the subject from every possible angle that I could think of, drawing on science, experience, inspiration, and endless inquisitiveness.

## About This Book

This book takes on a big challenge: how to relay practical information about a complex subject to as broad an audience as possible, from first-timers getting their feet wet to seasoned pros looking to fill in some knowledge gaps. Plenty of other books are out there on the subject of food and wine pairing, but what makes *Pairing Food & Wine For Dummies* unique and helpful is its adaptability to different readers. I don't dictate a single strategy for getting it right, but I offer the approaches I know for making food and wine magic. That is, you're free to engage on whatever level you're comfortable with.

If you have a deep cellar but little experience in the kitchen, or you're handy with a knife but shy away from the corkscrew, this book provides some tips to get you started. If you're already a pro and want to delve into the technical details of sensory exploration or the psychology of pleasure, you can find that information in these pages, de-jargoned as far as possible. Or, if all you need is a quick answer on what to drink tonight with your dinner (sometimes people are just hungry and thirsty), I include that information as well.

This book also differs from others in its greater emphasis on cuisines that were once thought unsuitable for wine. It's true that Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American foods, for example, didn't really grow up with wine, and whichever old world, traditional wines that may have been available at the time that such a conclusion was arrived at probably weren't great matches, but the world has changed, and more wines and wine styles are available than ever before. Every dish has its match somewhere in the vast world of modern wine. If your mind is open, you can find something.

Be forewarned that I'm not one of the *demystifiers*, those who think that the subject should be dumbed down to the point of triviality. As you know, *Dummies* readers are no dummies; they're clever people who want straight answers to important questions, presented in an easy-to-read, no-nonsense format. The wine and food world is mystical, and it should be celebrated, not simplified. That's what makes it so fascinating, so I dive headlong into the details and do my best to deliver the answers you want in as clear a manner as possible.

Regretfully, the scope of this book doesn't allow for investigations into beer, spirits, sake, cocktail, or any other beverage pairings. As a sommelier, I'm naturally inclined to be open to (and personally enjoy) any and all beverages. I know that there are brilliant pairings to be had with drinks other than wine, and sometimes wine is *not* the best match. But I'll leave that discussion for another time.

## *Conventions Used in This Book*

For the sake of clarity, I use the following conventions in this book to help you:

- ✓ I use *italics* to point out new terms, but don't worry about not knowing what they mean because I provide basic definitions close by.
- ✓ I use **boldface** to highlight keywords in numbered lists.
- ✓ I use `monofont` to highlight websites. If you want to check out any of the web addresses from this book, just type exactly what you see. I didn't insert any extra characters (like hyphens) when an address went onto a second line.

- ✔ The names of grape varieties, appellations, and geographical names are capitalized.
- ✔ Strictly speaking, flavor and aroma are the same thing, and I use the two interchangeably, or together, throughout the text. The usual distinction is that *aroma* is used to refer to smells that are sensed directly through the nose, while *flavor* refers to what you can smell via the retronasal passage in your mouth. As for taste, when I refer to taste, I refer to the specific sensations of salty, sweet, bitter, sour, and savory (umami) that can be sensed by your taste buds. Taste doesn't refer to flavor.

## *What You're Not to Read*

I know you are busy, juggling all the bottles of life. So feel free to skip the sidebars, which are the shaded boxes of text that contain information that's nonessential to understanding how to pair wine and food. The sidebars are optional, but I think you'll find them too fascinating to miss.

## *Foolish Assumptions*

While writing this book (and conducting all the heavy-duty research and grueling experimentation), here's what I assumed about you, the reader:

- ✔ You care about what you consume.
- ✔ You enjoy food and wine, and engage in their consumption at least occasionally, maybe even frequently.
- ✔ You have an open mind and are keen to experiment with your senses.
- ✔ You enjoy discovering new flavors.
- ✔ You don't think that enjoying food and wine together is pretentious hogwash, or maybe you do, and whoever bought this book for you just wanted to prove to you that taking a little more pleasure in drinking and eating isn't really all that bad an idea — nobody gets hurt.
- ✔ You've heard of at least a few grape varieties like Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, and know that many places around the world make different wines in different styles.
- ✔ The really keen among you have a book dedicated to wine on your bookshelf, maybe even the excellent reference, the latest version of *Wine For Dummies* by Ed McCarthy and Mary Ewing Mulligan (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

## *How This Book Is Organized*

This book is designed to be a reference text that I hope you'll keep somewhere in the kitchen and thumb through regularly, whenever you're wondering what to drink. Eventually, when the training wheels are off, you won't need to read it anymore. The parts are as follows.

### *Part I: Appreciating the Marriage of Food and Wine: The Nose Knows*

Part I of this book starts with an overview of what you can find in the rest of it. It then delves into the senses, how they physically work, and how your mind grasps the concept of pleasure. You can also find some practical experiments that can change the way you think about food and wine, and get you started on the road to enjoying the two of them together more often.

### *Part II: The Nuts and Bolts: Developing Strategies for Food and Wine Pairing*

This meaty part contains five chapters packed with basic information about how food and wine work, or don't work, together. It includes all the basic theories, handy guidelines, and best practices to get you started, including how to serve wine like a pro.

### *Part III: Sorting Out the World of Wine*

This part slices up the world of wine into a few manageable style categories — the basic starting point when considering what to drink with any dish. I use these categories throughout the book in order to avoid endless repetition of multiple grapes and regions that all produce more or less the same style of wine. It's a top-down approach.

### *Part IV: Uncovering the Best Wine Bets with World Cuisine (and Cheese)*

This is where you go to find the best, and alternative, wine style matches for a wide range of worldly familiar and traditional dishes, as well as a variety of

cheeses. I provide classic local wine pairings with dishes from regions where wine is produced — what a local sommelier would likely propose. I also discuss some culinary influences, cooking techniques, and ingredients. I discuss areas from the Mediterranean, North America, northern and central Europe, southern Europe, Asia, Latin America, Middle Eastern, and Northern African cuisine. I also discuss pairing wine with cheese.

## ***Part V: Party Time! Pairing with Friends . . . and Professionals***

This part deals with some important practical matters, such as finding the best places to dine out, reading a wine list, dealing with a sommelier, and hosting a party. This part even includes a chapter on what a sommelier is and how to become one, just in case you're interested.

## ***Part VI: The Part of Tens***

The Part of Tens is popular in all *For Dummies* books. Here you can find two chapters: one with ten wine-friendly foods and one with ten food-friendly wines.

## ***Icons Used in this Book***

Throughout the text, you see icons in the book's margins that alert you to certain types of information. Here's a glossary of those terms and what they mean:



This icon points you to practical suggestions for implementing the recommendations offered on a given subject.



This icon reminds you of important things to think about or do when considering the material being discussed.



When you see this icon, pay attention because you need to avoid something or keep your eyes open for something that could dampen your pairing.

## *Where to Go from Here*

Like all *For Dummies* books, this one is designed to be modular; each chapter stands on its own and doesn't require that you read any of the other chapters to grasp the information. I provide cross references if certain concepts are more deeply explored in another chapter.

If you're an absolute newcomer to food and wine pairing, you may want to start at the beginning. If you've cracked a few corks in your day and want to fine-tune the selection process, you can dive in at any point in the book: starting with the wine, starting with the food, examining some classic regional pairings, and understanding why they work, delving into the world of sensory perception, or perhaps simply looking up a match with an unfamiliar dish. If you're not sure, flip through the index or table of contents and find a topic that interests you.

This book also doesn't contain detailed information about wines and wine-making, nor foods, cooking techniques, or recipes. In order to clarify some aspects of how food and wine work together, I do cover some of the basics. Even if you've never cooked and your knowledge of wine ends at fermented grape juice, you can still find tons of useful information on how to get more enjoyment out of each. Jump in wherever you like; you can take your own journey, stopping at the places relevant to you along the way. You'll likely come back for repeat visits. That's the way it works in the world of food and wine.