

Simple Guide To Pairing Wine With Nigerian Food

By Chinedu Rita Rosa



In Nigeria, we are blessed with such a wide array of formidable cooking styles and different tastes. So, for a sublime dining experience, that I know the food is not the problem, but you do not want to serve your food with the wrong choice of wine. You do not want wine that will take away from the taste of your food instead of enhancing it. So, let's dive right into sure ways of avoiding such a mistake as I take you through the various food categories and the wine match.

Fatty and Oily food: We are a Nation of the best palm oils and many of the dishes in Nigeria consists of oils in one form or the other. So we need a fail-proof choice, when cooking all the beautiful Afang soup, Egusi soup, Efo-riro etc, with ofcourse all the orisirisi (Mixed meat) that goes with it! The way to go is to have a wine, high in acidity and full-bodied to be able to cut through the fatty taste and cleansing the palette through the meal.

Pinot Noir: Because of its high acidity, medium tannin, and careful use of oak maturation, this wine is perfect for an amazing dinner that will enhance the Nigerian dining experience: It is quite easy to find and all you need to do is decide if you want Old-world Pinot Noir like Bourgogne/Burgundy AOC, or premier Crus like Pommard, Nuits-Saint-Georges etc

New World choices are: Californian (Santa Barbara, Sonoma etc) Chile: Casablanca Valley, Australia (Yarra Vally & Mornington Peninsula) or New Zealand (Martinborough, Marlborough and central Otago. And of course, in South Africa where the beautiful region of Walker Bay produces some amazing Pinot Noir.

Spicy/hot food: Call it whatever you want but this is the heat that puts African food on the map and as my mum would say "that drives our never-ending energy" Because of this burning topic, I have two suggestions.

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Champagne: The bubbles of champagne are important in heightening the taste of the spices, while the high acidity level blends perfectly with the spices finally allowing the cooling effect of the champagne to appease the taste buds! A blanc de Noirs or Vintage champagne will get your dinner off to a good start... Champagne Anyone!!



Riesling: Riesling is one of the best food wines in the world. Its balance of intense acidity, minerality, and fruitiness makes it an especially good match for spicy foods and the mix of ethnic flavors. A cold bottle of Riesling will make your Asûn a perfect meal and balance the spiciness.

The slight sweetness of (Auslese) Riesling or if you are going for a Spatlese (Dry) will enhance the spice in your Asûn but also reduce the heat in your mouth, while the minerality matches perfectly with the smokiness of the roast meat and fruity flavor gives a satisfying finish.

Bordeaux Wines: The choices are endless here just make sure the balance of Carbenent Sauvignon/Merlot/ Cabernet Franc blend has more than 50% of Cabernet Sauvignon eg Haute Medoc, Saint Estephe etc. Chateauf-neuf-du-pape with its full body and high alcohol it can withstand the heat, other wines in this category are Cotes du Rhone (France) and Rioja Crianza or Grande Reserva (Spain).



Highly flavoured & Smokey: With the high use of smoked fish, crayfish and spices in our foods it is no surprise that the food will struggle to be a good match with wine. Let's be clear Europeans did not know what spiciness meant until they ventured out of their lands and made wine according to their own cuisine. But here we are in the 21st century where food has travelled and now wines are made knowing that consumers come with different taste buds. So to get that smoked chicken, Moi-Moi, obè àtá, àkara with some fried peppered snails "on point" you just need to follow this rule: food and wine must match in intensity to avoid one overpowering the other.

Chenin Blanc or Sauvignon Blanc: Vouvray is my top example of a Chenin Blanc, with its ability to make dry to sweet wines, you can find anything you want in this grape variety. With its high acidity, stone fruit, and tropical fruit flavours that are fabulous with a meal of Moi-Moi on its own, with roasted or oven-baked smokey fish or chicken which can be eaten with boiled yams and tomato sauce by the side.

While a Sauvignon Blanc (Sancerre, Pouilly fume, Pessac-Leognan, Graves) will not shy away from a dish of lobsters, shrimps in a fisherman Okro soup, the herbaceous and floral and sometimes Aromatic flavors in this wine enhances the seafood platter which we definitely love in Africa.

Cabernet Sauvignon Single grape or Blend: With a full-bodied Medoc (Bordeaux, Malbec from France & Argentina, Pinotage Western Cape, South Africa

Nebbiolo (Barolo DOCG or Barbaresco DOCG) Sangiovese (Chianti Classico and a Brunello di Montalcino DOCG) Italy. These are wines that will keep your dinner on a high note.

Bitterness: It is the bittersweet taste at the height of African cuisine (Bitterleaf soup) Match bitter foods with white or neutral wines or reds with lower levels of tannin, simple examples are Chardonnay from Chablis AOC in France because it is not matured in oak, Pinot Gris from Italy

Sweet: Nigerians are not typically sweet eating people, but times have changed so to end your dinner on a sweet and delicious note you can make sure that you get a bottle of wine sweeter than your dessert, I personally love a good glass of Porto, which just mixes spice and sweetness to complement whatever dessert you are serving, but for more choices Sauternes France's famous wine is made from overripe, noble rot, and hand-picked grapes. It is a luxury that is worth every kobo spent. Loupiac from France too, Pinot Grigio from Alsace France, Porto Taw from Portugal.

Salty: The interaction of salt in your food is pleasant and it is also the same with Wine. Salt makes the wine seem fruitier and softens the tannins in Red Wine, so in the light of this conjecture, most wines will go with any salty food. Go with your pocket and decide whatever you are in the mood for as long as your salty taste is not mixed in a high degree with any of the above you can drink most wines with foods in this category. The Vineyards is your limit

