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A Chinese Consumer's Guide to Becoming a Certified Wine Geek (Part II)

I now continue with my suggestions for all aspiring Chinese wine geeks. If you successfully digested Part I (All three Steps from October & November 2007 and January 2008) and Part II Step One (March 2008), you're ready for Part II Step Two. By now you are well on your way to certification, so soon your efforts will be rewarded and wherever you go, the world will be in awe of the depth of your wine knowledge.

Step Two: Pairing Wine & Food

Okay, so you know the difference between beverages that are described as wine (but are something else) and the real stuff. You know the basic types of wine; you know the basics of tasting wine; and you know how to start your personal wine cellar on any budget. Now you need to understand the basics of pairing the wines you like with the foods you like. This will take some serious practice homework, so pay attention to what I tell you and then practice it.

In Part I Step Two I advised you that Sparkling wines and "blush" or rose wines go with everything (except foods that are just too spicy for any wine). Now you need to know more. One of the easiest rules to remember is "sweet with

sweet". If you are having dessert (which is usually sweet), a sweet or "dessert" wine will be the best compliment: These types of wines have what is described as "residual sugar", meaning that some of the sugar in the wine was not converted to alcohol during fermentation (production) and remains in the wine to insure it's sweetness.

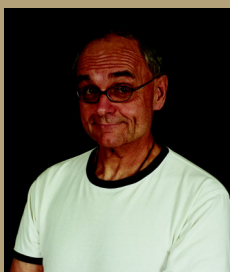
Italian Moscatos or California Muscats are ideal, affordable examples of these wines; also any wine with residual sugar (It tells you the amount of residual sugar on the bottle). Some of the best

dessert wines on the planet are the Quady wines from Madera, California, made from the orange and black Muscat grapes. Of course, Italy and California do not have an exclusive on good value with respect to dessert wines: Other origins for excellent dessert wines are the Auslese from Germany; Tokaji Aszu from Hungary; Constantia from South Africa and of course France, be it Sauternes, Alsace, Juranon in the southwest or not to be forgotten, the Rhone and Loire Valleys. If you do not recognize the dessert wines at a restaurant or bar, just ask the server for their selection of dessert wines; they are certain to have at least one. And the Muscatos and the California Muscats are great with chocolate.

If you are watching your figure and you do not want to consume too much sugar, try having a glass of dessert wine instead of dessert: But beware, you may be tempted to order a second glass, because they are so concentrated and sweet that the typical portion is about half of a still wine. Of course, certain types of sparkling wines are a great alternative for desserts and they include anything "demi-sec"; Italian Asti Spumantes and Prosecco's; Cremants from almost anywhere and many cavas from Spain, just to name but a few.

Of course not all foods are sweet desserts, so you have more to learn. The best wine with Salmon is Pinot Noir (the red grape of Burgundy, France; the pride of Oregon and one of the most popular wine types from California and New Zealand); the best wine with hamburger or steak is Cabernet Sauvignon. If you have a rich cream sauce or Hollandaise sauce, go for a Chardonnay with oak aging to match the complexity on your palate of the food and the wine. But the surest way to learn what pairs best for you with the foods you eat is to experiment every time you have wine with food; keep a simple journal in your hand held or mobile phone (if you are over 50 years of age, just keep written notes in a notebook or binder) of what pairs well and what to avoid the next time if a result is disappointing. Just as everyone's wine palate is different, the same goes for your food palate. What works for one, may not work for another. Live from China, I am **Red Fred**. Red as the love that is the love of my life.

To be Continued... ★



Fred Tibitts Jr. is a global wine consultant based in New York. He assists some of the top hotel and restaurant chains in the U.S. and Asia Pacific developing their wine by the glass programs, leading educational trips to wine producing countries and hosting VIP industry dinners at New York and across Asia.