

What to drink with Asian food?

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It has long been gospel in Australia that you need an Alsace Riesling or Gewürztraminer to match to Asian food.

There are two problems with this idea. The first is that it depends on what type of Asian food you are eating and the second is that there are many other alternatives.

If you are eating the mild, elegant food from Canton with seafood and vegetarian dumplings or steamed seafood then a wine from Alsace is a pretty good match. However, once you venture north or west from that region or down into Thailand or Laos and start to encounter chilli and spices then the game changes. Chilli can destroy a delicate Alsace white wine.

We recently had a meal in a Hunan restaurant called Chairman Mao in a Kensington, a suburb of Sydney, with a group of sommeliers and chefs. The food was fiery and there was lots of chilli and lots of spice.

We brought along some of our oxidative white wines from various regions to see how they would stand up to the food. The results were very interesting – even a mild oxidative touch to the wine was sufficient for the wine to pair nicely with the food.

We started with Hervé Villemade's delicious Cour-Cheverny which is made from the Romorantin grape. This has become a very popular wine for food matching and it certainly didn't let us down at Chairman Mao – in fact it was even better than with less challenging food. One of the guests also provided another delicious Cour-Cheverny made by Olivier Lemasson which also was perfect with the food.

But the real star was a Michel Gahier Savagnin from Arbois in the Jura. This wine has been 'under the veil' for over three years and has taken on many of the characteristics of a Vin Jaune. It has a delicious nutty flavour and sherry-like aromas. It cut through the food and the combined flavours soared. It was a revelation.

And it is not only Asian restaurants, but restaurants that sometimes present dishes with bold, assertive flavours such as those at momofuku seiōbo. Here chef Ben Greeno's produces food such as a stunning dish of potato, quandong, mustard cress and grated mullet roe that perfectly matches the oxidative wines we mention above.

But the big lesson of our Chairman Mao meal was next time you go to a Hunan or Sichuan or Shanghai or Beijing or Thai or Laos restaurant take a bottle of oxidative wine with you and you will certainly have a satisfying dining experience.