

## Alsace wines well made for Asia

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CONTRARY to popular belief, there are some wines that are tailor-made for Asian cuisine.

While some may argue that there is an over-emphasis on the whole matching-food-with-wine issue, Old World drops are often made to be taken with meals. Depending on what flavor receptors in your mouth and tongue are triggered, each sip takes on a totally different character.

Ergo, some wines are made to go with certain dishes.

While these recommendations are not the be-all and end-all, trying them out can prove to be a rewarding experience. At a recent dinner, a casual wine enthusiast expressed his surprise over what difference a single bite of duck breast made to his enjoyment of a very fine brunello.

This is all fine and well when dealing with European cuisines, but Asian fare can be a bit trickier. For starters, food in these parts is often nothing like what it is further to the west. Emphasis is placed more on methods of preparation rather than the actual ingredients.

Secondly, the sheer size of Asia means that cuisine can be extremely varied. The taste of food from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is different from how it is in Anhui Province; northern Indian curries are not the same as those made in the south.

With wine, most diners tend to go with regular reds, enjoying the drink without bothering too much about the clash of styles. True, some rouges can be quite enjoyable with the considerably lighter Cantonese dishes, but most will agree, however, that a vintage bordeaux is not necessarily the best match for lamb vindaloo.

The best bet is actually an often overlooked one. White wines from the Alsace region of northeastern France are dry, light and fruity - perfect for Asian food.

Etienne Hugel of Hugel and Fils, one of the oldest wine producers in France, is in perfect agreement. "The last meal I had with my family before (embarking on his Asian tour) was dim sum. We eat Asian food every other day, be it Chinese, Thai or Vietnamese."

The 48-year-old was in town in December as part of a monthlong Asian tour. The 12th generation of a wine-producing family dating back to 1639, the humorous Hugel was clearly passionate about his heritage while excited about marketing the label in a new day and age.

He animatedly waxed lyrical about being one of the first producers to jump on the Internet bandwagon. His company's Website, [www.hugel.com](http://www.hugel.com), is choc-a-bloc with multimedia features such as a Weblog and a video diary, among others, to give people an inside feel of the goings on at the estate.

The site, which was established in 1996, features content in English, Dutch, French, German, Japanese and Spanish. "Chinese will be next," the Alsatian promised.

Part of the Hugel and Fils' (distributed locally by Summergate Fine Wines and Spirits) marketing strategy involves a pamphlet written by Singaporean wine guru N.K. Yong and his wife Melina. The renowned cardiologist and ex-president of the International Wine and Food Society has compiled a booklet extolling the virtues of pairing Hugel wines with various cuisines from across Asia.

Pinot gris and gewurztraminer are two particular varietals that go well with spicy food, such as Szechuan dishes or Indian, Malay and Thai curries. Both grapes produce wines that are well-rounded and full-bodied - perfect for standing up to heavy spicier flavors. They also cope well with the oily and sweeter Shanghainese dishes.

Food that is spicier still calls for the Vendange Tardive, or late-harvest range of wines. These are luscious wines made from grapes that have been left on the vines longer in order to concentrate their full potential. They become riper - in some cases even over-ripe - and produce a rich, full-bodied and powerful drop.

Some harvests enjoy the freak of nature known as botrytis cinerea. More commonly referred to as noble rot, this is a beneficial mold that cause the over-ripe grapes to shrivel and concentrate even further. These grapes give rich, sweet wines of incomparable depth and flavor, and finish a meal beautifully.

Instead of ordering a bottle of red with your next Asian meal, why not try matching it with something that goes well with the style of food on the table. Any doubters will be bound to eat their words.