

Best Wine for Thai Food*

ไวน์ที่ดีที่สุดสำหรับอาหารไทย

(Puthapong Purushahansa) พุทธพงศ์ บุรุชหงส์**

Abstract

The classic rule of thumb with regard to wine pairing is that the wine should match the color of the meat or sauce that is served with the dish. The classic combinations, for example, are Chablis and Oysters or Bordeaux and Lamb. But when asked about which wine combinations goes well with Thai Cuisines? Straightaway we see answers like sweet wine or off-dry white like Riesling and we have often been told to stay away from red wines with high tannins and high level of alcohol. Is all Thai cuisines spicy? This paper will looked into different regions of Thailand to determine key flavors and ingredients that representing the food from each region. Then we will use the six flavor profile to gain deeper understanding of the flavor combinations.

Keywords: Flavor Profile, Wine Pairing, Food Pairing, Thai Cuisines

Introduction:

Having you ever question why certain combinations of ingredients sometimes unexpectedly married to one another? Steak and red wine, burgers and soda are the classics. They just work. But combinations such as dark chocolate and parmesan cheese or balsamic and strawberries has all recently found a place in our Platte of reservoir. Culinary world has emerged and evolve over the past decade from prehistoric period when human starting to discover which food were safe to eat? to 10,000BC when agriculture begins to 900-1400 European Medieval foods to 1773 the famous Boston tea party to 1832 when coffee replaced

* To understand which flavor profile for wine matches best with Thai food by using the Six Flavors Profile Model?

เพื่อให้เข้าใจถึงรสชาติของไวน์ที่เข้ากับอาหารไทยได้อย่างเหมาะสม

** Faculty of Management Sciences, Panyapiwat Institute of Management, Telephone 02-837-1082, Email: puthapongpur@pim.ac.th

คณะวิทยาการจัดการ สถาบันการจัดการปัญญาภิวัฒน์ โทรศัพท์ 02-837-1082, อีเมล: puthapongpur@pim.ac.th MA,

rum to 1840 the birth of an Afternoon tea to 1888 when vending machines come to America to 1946 in US the introduction of All you can eat buffet to 1967 when the first Thai restaurant opens in London to 2014 when color, fusion, small plates, farm-to-table and table-to-farm are the buzzwords in today's foodie.

In Thailand, have many kind of Thai cuisines and nowadays, tourists are come to visit the country. Moreover, the government policy helped to reach 7.2 % growth in the tourism industry during 2000-2010 (Tassanee Taraporn ,2014,pp 205-212) Therefore, authors focus on wine with Thai cuisine as cultural value and it is also ranked as the most popular foods in the top five in the world. (Anucha Pangkesor,2013,pp 31-55)

Yet the perception of a fine wine when pairing with food, let says a mature Margaux, would only be consider adequate in a high French dining restaurant pairing it with menu such as a roasted leg of lamb or a fine cut of a medium rare filet mignon would be a match in heaven. Paring it with a Thai cuisine would consider being an unthinkable subject; some will go as far as that you will burn in hell. Is that so? Is there a place for red wines in Thai cuisines or simply we just shout Riesling and Gewürztraminer whenever we encounter Thai cuisines? Do Thai cuisines only have spices and acidity flavor? There is a great deal more complexity and flavor in Thai cooking than many other Asian cuisines and, contrary to perception, it can be paired successfully with wine. History has shown that rules are to be broken and tastes are like fashions, it simply changes over time.

This paper will look into different region of Thai cuisines and determine which characteristic of wine pair best with each cuisines core flavor by using theory of different grape variety, color, texture and weight of the dishes.

Thai Food at a glance:

As time changes and with the age of globalization has come and goes we are now living in a time when the world is at her smallest. Thai restaurants and takeaways can now be found in almost every block in New York City or most of the corners in London. There is now a real danger that the authenticity of Thai cuisines, particularly in this western world, has a negative impact upon them.

Thailand is located on the South East Asian where their ancestors originally immigrated from south of China, today's Yunnan province, almost 1,400 hundred years ago. Hence the Chinese cooking techniques continued to be heavily influence in the cooking process of the Thai cuisines. Although, never been colonized by any western country, the kingdom in the past has been ruled by Mon, Khmer and Malay kingdom. We can see some of

the influences and similarity among the neighbor kingdom such as in the Northeastern Thailand where Khmer and Laos has strong influence in Thai people's way of living and vice versa.

To simplify the characteristic and differences in Thai cuisines, we have to look into five regions in order to understand their core flavors. The Northern parts of the kingdom know as "Lanna Kingdom" was influenced by the Burmese and Chinese (Anna, 2014) The Northeast part was influenced by Khmer and Laos. The Southern part was influenced by Malay people (Malaysia) and the central region which was influenced by the "Royal Cuisine" of the Ayutthaya kingdom. The last regions is Thai cuisines that are cooked outside the Kingdom mainly in Europeans country, in the United State and in Australian where the "Royal Cuisines" has been adapt with local ingredients.

(i). The Northern cuisine or "Lanna cuisines" still have a strong influence with the Burmese as well as Chinese due to geographical and historical reasons over the years. Lanna history dated back to 13th century when the kingdom covered today the Northern Thailand and stretched into neighboring parts of Myanmar, China and Laos, hence the similarities in the dietaries and the use for ingredients.

Notable characteristic flavors from this region are that it is not spicy and even somewhat bland or sweet in flavor.



Picture 1 Khao-soi & A selection of Northern Thai dishes

Source: <http://anomadsdream.com/our-top-5-favorite-thai-foods/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thai_cuisine

Dish includes: Khao-Soi, noodle and curry soup, originated from Burmese and Chinese Muslim Yunnan or Nam Prik Noom, blended pork with tomatoes and chilies dip.

(ii). The Northeast part of the kingdom also known as the "Issan" provinces has its borders connected to both Laos and Cambodia (Thai foodie, 2013). These provinces are some of the poorest in the kingdom and many immigrates to central provinces mainly to Bangkok in

order to find job and seek better quality of living. Their cuisines include pretty much anything that eatable such as insects, lizards, various animal parts and plants. Traditional cooking techniques are charcoal grilling and boiling.

Notable characteristic flavors from this region are flavors from fresh herbs with spicy acidic and saltiness from fermented fish (Pla-ra). Another flavor frequently found in this region is smoky and oily flavor texture from the charcoal grilling.



Picture 2 Som-tam and Kai-yang

Source: <http://aziatischerecepten.com/som-tam-papaya-salade/>
<https://www.pinterest.com/tuktukat/entrées-at-tuk-tuk/>

Dish includes: Khao-niao (sticky rice) served with Som-tam (papaya salad) and Kai-yang (grilled chicken) are typical modern Issan meal with Pla-ra (fermented fish is often used to seasons salad and soup.

(iii). The Southern provinces of Thailand consist of well know islands and beautiful beaches such as Phuket, Samui island and Krabi. They all have strong influence from Malaysia with Muslim presence. The uses of spices and herbs that are found in many Muslim countries can be found in some of the curries in this part of the kingdom.

Notable characteristic flavors from this region are deeply spicy which stays in your palate. The flavors of rich spice such as turmeric, galangal and lemongrass can often be found in many of the dish.



Picture 4 Gang Leung

Source: <http://www.siamsizzles.com/sour-thai-yellow-curry-fish-recipe/>

Dish includes: Gang Leung (Sour curry) made from a liquid fish base combined with curry paste and turmeric.

(iv). The Central provinces includes areas such as Bangkok and Ayutthaya cuisines are known as “Royal Cuisine” which is consider to be more refine and delicate compared to other provinces within the kingdom. It is wildly accepted that Thai restaurants which are opened in Europe and North America will serve this type of cuisines and is what the West associate Thai cuisine with.

Notable characteristic flavors from this region are sweet and creamy with the use of coconut milk in the preparations.



Picture 3...Tom-Yum-Goong and Green Chicken Curry

Source: <http://www.abalonethai.co.nz/?PAGE=M&menu=takeaway>
http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/thaigreencurry_67788

Dish includes: Tom-Yum-Goong (Spicy Prawn Soup) and curries like Green Chicken Curry.

(v). Regions that are not in the kingdom, in particular in the Western countries and Australian where Thais immigrates and open a Thai restaurant using whatever ingredients that may have over there for example, “salmon red curry” or “Royal Phad Thai”, (Leela Punyaratabandhu, 2012) will never be found here in Thailand but it is very common over in London. This is the birth of so called, “Fusion Thai Cuisines”.

Notable characteristic flavors from this region are very similar to the “Royal Cuisine” but mild with sweet and sour dominate the overall flavor.



Picture 5 Phad-thai and Sweet & Sour Pork

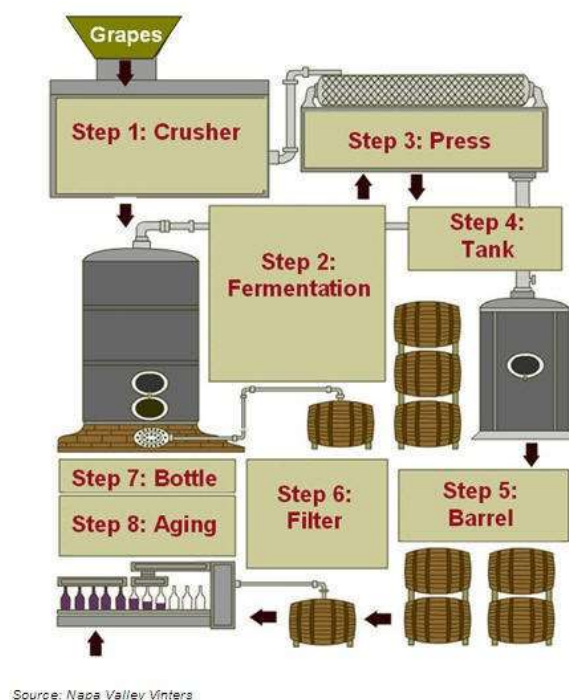
Source: <http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/29587/chicken+pad+thai>
<http://www.khiewchanta.com/mobile/main-courses/pork-recipes/sweet-and-sour-pork-inbatter-1.html>

Dish includes: Phad-thai (fried noodle with shrimp) and Sweet & Sour Pork.

Basic wine making process:

Wine has been with us for more than 5,000 years and they are much more than just a flavorful beverage that complements our dinner or our weekend night out. Wine also has proven health benefit (Health Benefits and Health Risks, Christian Nordqvist, 2015) and has religious meaning (Christian Symbols Illustrated Glossary, Mary Fairchild, 2014).

Wine production can date back to many centuries and different region has different wine making style. In order to understand wine we need to first understand how it's made.



Picture 6The Wine Making Process

Source: <https://www.softchalk.com/lessonchallenge09/lesson/wineTutorial/wineTutorial4.html>

Step 1: CRUSH - Grapes are transfer into a de-stemmer machine where the stems and leaves are removed and then crushed.

Step 2: FERMENTATION - Most red grapes go to through Fermentation Vat (tank) process for primary fermentation (red wine) while white grapes are press and then send to be fermented. Yeast is then added to start the process.

Step 3: PRESS- Post fermentation (red wine and rose), wines go to separate the wine from the skins.

Step 4: TANK- Wines are verified in either a oak tanks or stainless steel (modern).

Step 5: BARREL- After verifying, red wines and fuller bodied white wines (Chardonnay) are put into oak barrels for barrel aging.

Step 6: FILTER- Some wines are filtered to help clarify them after barrel aging prior to bottling.

Step 7: BOTTLE- End of wine making process where wines are bottle to be aging (optional) and ready to sell.

The importance of grape variety-

Flavors and characteristics of each wine are determine by variety of grape being use. Grapes are essential ingredient and prime source of flavor when come to wine making. Each grape holds its own personality and character which determine flavor, perfume and strength. Picture 7 shows different colors of wines both white and red. White wine such as Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris with their lighter color means that during the wine making process there is minimal or no contact with the skins of the grapes and typical tastes are normally very crisp and refreshing. Amber color such as Chardonnay resulted from aging process in oak barrels which gave the wine a unique creamy and fuller bodied texture. Lighter color in red wine such as Pinot Noir represents fresh berries aromas where darker red color such as Cabernet Sauvignon are more rich, bold with spicy aromas.

Let's see some of the classic grape variety below.



Picture7. The Color Of Wine

Source: <http://shop.winefolly.com/products/color-of-wine-poster>

Classic white grape variety –

Chardonnay: Possibly the most famous grape in the world, maybe because they can and are grown everywhere in the world where there are wine production.



Picture 8 Chardonnay key flavors

Key flavors are apple, pear, citrus fruits, spice, wet wool and wax.

Sémillon: A full body, like Chardonnay, but with flavors closer to Pinot Gris or Sauvignon Blanc. It's an important blending component in Bordeaux and is also planted throughout Australia.



Picture 9 Sémillon key flavors

Key flavors are lime, pear, apple and papaya.

Viognier is traditionally grown in France's northern Rhone valley but also can grow equally good in the New World region namely in California. An alternative to Chardonnay but with light texture and should generally be drunk young (before 18 months or so) and well-chilled.



Picture 10 Viognier key flavors

Key flavors are almond, orange, pineapple and white pepper.

Chenin Blanc A light-bodied versatile white-wine grape that has been cultivated in France for nearly 1300 years. It is most commonly associated with France's Loire Valley, and its high acidity levels mean it can be adjust and made into a number of different styles



Picture 11 Chenin Blanc key flavors

Key flavors are passion fruit, apple, pear and peach.

Sauvignon Blanc: Often an alternative to full-bodied and oaky white wine. Sauvignon Blanc processes refreshing, crisp, acidic verdant flavors. Original grown in France at the upper Loire region (Sancerre and Pouilly-Fume) and the Marlborough region of New Zealand.



Picture 12 Sauvignon Blanc key flavors

Key flavors are freshly cut grass, gooseberries, flowers, asparagus, and green beans.

Riesling: The true Riesling has to be from German origin. Riesling has strong personality and high acidity similar to Sauvignon Blanc and that they are better off without oak influence. However, Riesling is more adaptable and it can thrive in cooler climate (Germany) or warmer climate (Australia).



Picture 13 Riesling key flavors

Key flavors are crunchy green apple, spiced baked apples, quince, orange, lime (Australia), passion fruit (Australia), honey (sweet wine) and toast.

Gewurztraminer: Producing less in quantity and are lesser known in relative to the classic white grapes. It has high aroma with exotic spicy perfume and many believe that the region of Alsace produce the best dry or sweet Gewurztraminer.



Picture 14 Gewurztraminer key flavors

Key flavors are lychees, spices, ginger, cinnamon, Nivea cream and roses.

Classic red grape variety –

Cabernet Sauvignon: Is regards to be the most popular red wine grape in the world. It has deep colored, thick skins which produces dark flavors such as blackcurrant, cigar box and lead pencil (Bordeaux). Thick skins meaning that the wine is more likely to have higher tannins and also potential to age a long time in oak barrel. Not surprising that some of the great Bordeaux wine are Cabernet Sauvignon dominated.



Picture 15 Cabernet Sauvignon key flavors

Key flavors are blackcurrant, cedar, cigar boxes, lead pencils, green pepper, mint, dark chocolate, tobacco and olives.

Merlot: Very similar to Cabernet Sauvignon but has less incisively in blackcurrant and less tannic. Merlot has a softer and sweeter characteristic. Merlot dominated wines in France are from Pomerol and St-Emilion region in Bordeaux.



Picture 16 Merlot key flavors

Key flavors are plums, roses, cigar boxes, lead pencils, dark chocolate, tobacco, and redcurrant.

Pinot Noir: If Chardonnay is the queen of Burgundy than Pinot Noir is her king. But unlike its compatriot, Pinot Noir is extremely difficult about its climate and places to grow. It is a relatively low in tannin and acidity with medium color and medium life span.



Picture 17 Pinot Noir key flavors

Key flavors are raspberries, strawberries, cherries, cranberries, violets, roses, games and truffles.

Syrah or Shiraz: Is the new comer in the twenty-first century. Very similar to Cabernet Sauvignon only its mature quicker and has addition of smoked spices, leather and fresh pepper to it. Classic Syrah from France are produced in Rhone Valley.



Picture 18 Syrah key flavors

Key flavors are blackberries, blackcurrants, raspberries, ground pepper, smoke spice, leather, game and tar.

Sangiovese: A balance between Pinot Noir and Syrah Sangiovese offers a wide range of taste from earthy and rustic to round and fruity forward with cherry flower on the nose. Mostly found in Italy in the regions of Toscana, Umbria and Campania



Picture 19 Sangiovese key flavors

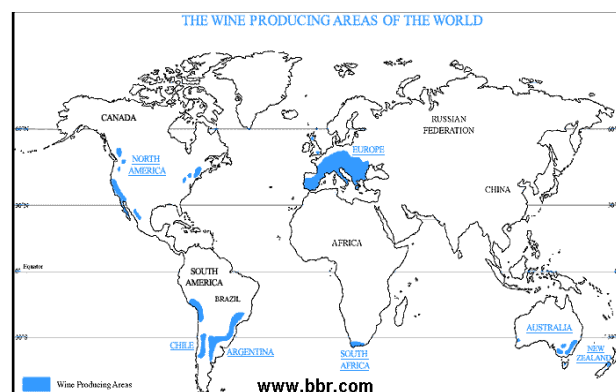
Key flavors are fig, strawberry, cherry and plum

If you grown the same grape in a different part of the world where climate are different (Environment). The taste of the wine will have a completely different characters and flavors (นริศรา ไตรบุตตร. (2553). For example a Chardonnay grown in France (Burgundy) where the climate are general cooler than South Africa (Stellenbosch) will have a lesser alcohol, lighter body and more acidity. The aroma or flavor will also be different.

Environment

- Hot climate: more alcohol, fuller body, more tannin, less acidity
- Cool climate: less alcohol, lighter body, less tannin, more acidity

Wines are grown best in the temperate zone between 30 and 50 from the equator.



Picture 20 The Wine Producing Area Of The World

Source: <http://www.hw0001.com/en/news/detail.asp?ListId=1603&Infold=6481>

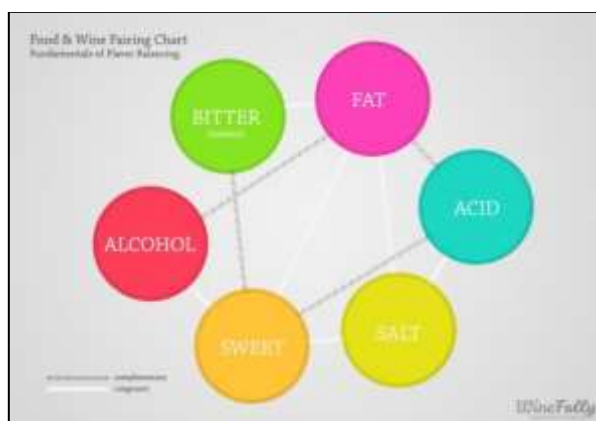
What is food pairing?

Food pairing is the process and method in matching which ingredients well with other and has been done throughout the history through trial and error or accidental discovery by chef and all. Some classic combinations are egg and bacon, prosciutto and cantaloupe, Pla-tu (mackerel) and Nam-prik (Thai chili paste) and many more.

Wine pairing is the process of matching food and wine together in order to maximize flavor and experience of the dinner (Fiona Beckett. 2011). Wine pairing is a delicate and serious matter, serious enough to have a profession dedicating to its subject known as Sommelier. All 3 stars Michelins are required to process one in order to make recommendation and serve fine wine pairing it with fine food their restaurants and hotels.

Flavor Profiles

There are six basics profile to food and wine pairing (Madeline Puckette, 2012).



Picture 20 Food and Wine Pairing Chart

Source: winefolly.com

How salt and sugar (sweet) affect the taste of wine?

It is absolute true that what we drink (wine) change the taste of our food and what we eat can change the taste of our wine too. Let's examine two basic fundamental components found in our cooking, salt and sugar, can change the personality of the wine we are drinking. If you take a pinch of salt and put it on your tongue then take a sip of dry white wine. The result will be that the wine will taste less acidic with more perfume aroma. This is because salt block acidic thus, many sommelier when pairing wine with food often choose wine that taste more acidic on its own before be pairing with salty food. In other hand if you

take a small tea spoon of sugar or honey, put it on your tongue and take sip of an off-dry white. The result will be that the wine will taste dryer and less sweet. This is because the sweetness in the honey blocks the sweetness in the white (sweet block sweet).

How does fat (fatty) affect the taste of wine?

If you take a sip of oaky full-bodied Chardonnay (high in alcohol) after putting a small lop of butter on your tongue. The result will be that the taste of the Chardonnay will be lighter and more refreshing because the fat content in the butter overpower the oaky flavor of the Chardonnay. That why if you pair Chardonnay (oaky and buttery flavor) with grilled chicken wrapped in bacon will be a match in heaven as both food and wine will complement each other making chardonnay more aroma and lighter. However, if you pair the same Chardonnay with light green salad with vinegar dressing. The Chardonnay will taste thicker and richer.

There is not a right or wrong answer when come to wine pairing it's purely depends on individual taste and preferences. The above are the food chemistry between food and wine and what each flavor components react with being pair with one another.

Simple rules –

Weight and texture of both food and wine must match. Failing to do so resulting in imbalance meal either your wine will taste like water or the food you are eaten taste bland.

Similar in flavors with the food you are having. Especially work well with acidity wine and acidity but food just makes sure that the acidic levels are at similar not overpowering each other but rather complementing one another.

Pairing Wine with Thai Food –

After studying six different flavor profiles trying to understand which profile match well with one another and understand the different flavors for different grape variety. We can now try to match which wine is best pairing with Thai cuisines.

Like wine each region offer different taste and yes we cannot make assumption that all northern cuisine are bland and sweet or food from the southern provinces are red hot in spice. I found that many expert who write about pairing wine with Thai cuisines tend to all agreed that red wine are generally not suited for Thai food and we should avoid pairing spicy with tannin at all cost. "Pairing red wine with hot and spicy foods can be extremely daunting,

not least because of the many layers of flavors and ingredients involved, but also because most of us have had a least one bad experience where the wine paired completely overpowered or detracted from the dish” (Mary Gorman-McAdams, 2013). This is because prominent flavor of Thai food is spicy, hot and sour which are against tannic wine with high alcohol. True if all Thai cuisines are all spicy, hot and sour as high level of alcohol will escalate the burning effect from the hot spicy chili in your mouth. However, if you look carefully you can find a Thai dish that does not process the above characteristic. For example, an ox tongue stew (it is a Thai dish found in the central province) which can date back for more than 100 years old. Both texture and beefy flavor is perfect match with high tannin wine like the Cabernet Sauvignon or Syrah (Ray Isle. 2009) because tannin cut through fat very well. Being a full-bodied wine (high alcohol), according to the six basics profile to food and wine pairing (Madeline Puckette, 2012) alcohol are the perfect match with fatty food found in the ox tongue stew (see below).



Picture 21 ox tongue stew

Source: <http://i.ytimg.com/vi/L0t-iJE-9Cs/hqdefault.jpg>

So we discovered that not all Thai cuisines are hot and spicy and that there are room for all type of wine whether it a full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon to aromatic Pinot Noir or buttery Chardonnay to crispy Sauvignon Blanc (Joanna Simon, 1994). Challenging but not impossible if each dish is serve individually similar to the western cuisine but as we all know Thais traditionally share their food and food is consume in family style. This is when the entire dishes are put out together on the table and dinners takes and try each dish at the same time. The flavor profile are now being mix and match thus, in one single meal (course) Thais dinner can experience from high acidic dish like Som-Tum (papaya salad) to oily chard grilled pork neck and follow by saltiness in stirred fried vegetables. For me the theory of six flavor profile cannot be applied to Thai cuisines. However, one region of Thai cuisines which can be apply to is the regions that are “not in the kingdom”, so called fusion and Thai restaurant opening abroad. Often you will see the similarity of Western culture (course by course) in the way Thai food are served over there. Flavor profile theory can then be applied.

At the end of the day, what is best wine for Thai food? Will depend upon your taste and experience of both Thai cuisine and different wine variety (Chez Pim. 2006). Like wine and food there can never be a definite solution because there are many factors involving our senses and mood beyond the six flavor profile and grape variety such as personal preferences, where you grow up, your personal knowledge of the wine, your value and beliefs are all to play and important elements when determine whether the wine is a good pair.

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