

Wine and Food: Let's talk Barbecues / grilled foods



I learned to seriously barbecue while living and working in South Africa for some eight years. I used to say to people, for red meat choose a big cabernet sauvignon- or shiraz- based wine that has been aged in oak, dense in flavour concentration and colour and has lots of thick body with spiciness and pepperiness to boot. i.e., all those big California and Australian wines.

The problem was that as much as those wines were great sipping *before* we started eating, *after* we brought the grilled item and wine together the flavour nuances in the wine were actually “trampled” or suppressed and flattened by the barbecued meat. There was no dance here, just domination in the palate, and the wine lost every time. I am grateful to Dr Chris Holmden (University of Saskatchewan) who guided me as to what was happening here. He noted that most New World (i.e., wines from pretty well everywhere except “Old World” Europe) big reds had lots of ripe fruit “sweetness” that actually competed with the natural sweetness in the caramelized meat in the barbecuing process thereby nullifying many wine nuances after eating the meat. Chris noted: “Where the fruit is sweet and the palate is thick with extract, these California Cabs (and other new world reds) are also not often a good match for traditional steak and roast beef.”

That is why French, Portuguese, and Italian red wines generally work so well - beautiful fruit but with slightly more earthy and leathery notes that do not compete with the sweet in the meat like New World wines do. The result: a tango in the palate!

Enjoy.

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