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# Comparisons between Australian consumers' and industry experts' perceptions of ideal wine and cheese combinations

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• Australian wineries are beginning to understand the value of the close relationship between wine and regional food, such as local cheeses, and how to turn it into improved brand image and sales. However, there is very little scientific information to draw upon in order to make appropriate decisions about which cheese to match with which wine. The aim of this research was to generate knowledge about wine and cheese pairings to provide wine and food professionals with guidelines about how to select ideal matches.

• The approach the authors used to tackle this difficult subject was to start out by asking cheese and wine industry experts for suggestions on "ideal" cheese/wine combinations. Here is the input they got:

Wine-cheese pairings suggested by experts		
Cheese -	**Wine**	**Rational**
Goat cheese -	Sauvignon Blanc	Light cheese style would match freshness and acidity of wine.
Gruyere -	Gewürztraminer	Nutty, hard-cooked cheese lingering flavors would match rich wine flavors.
Brie de Meaux -	Wooded Chardonnay	Full-bodied, earthy, mushroom cheese flavors would match full bodied wine.
Chaource -	Sparkling white	The wine high acid should cut through the cheese fat and echo its acidity.
Gorgonzola -	Botrytised dessert wine	Sweet, luscious wine does not render the blue mold acrid and intensities match.
English Cheddar -	Syrah	Powerful cheese match powerful wine.
Ossau Iraty -	Cabernet Sauvignon	Robust tannins in wine are softened by creamy, buttery feel and high fat cheese.
Parmiggiano Reggiano -	Sangiovese	High-acid wine should echo acid and salty character of cheese.

Based on the experts recommendations, the authors divided the above 8 wines and 8 cheeses into two groups (white vs. red wines; mild vs. strong cheeses), and asked a panel of consumers to evaluate all possible combinations within each group. To approach that task, researchers used a variation of what is known as the **'just right' scale**. This scale consists of rating whether the wine or the cheese dominated the pair by placing a mark on the right or the left side of the scale, respectively. The closest the mark was to 6, the closest the pair was to an ideal match (neither the wine nor the cheese dominates).

Diagram by authors
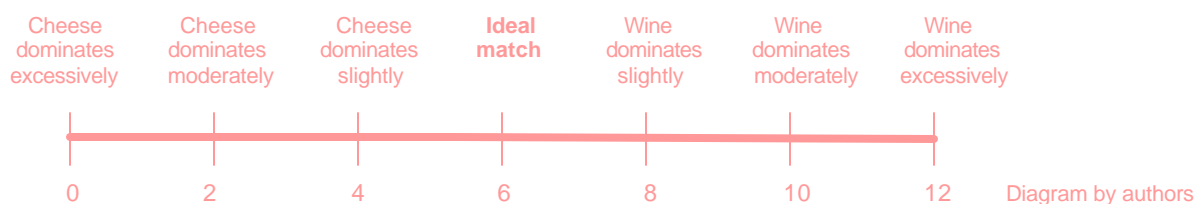
• The authors used a **'mixed tasting method'**, that is, subjects were asked to take a small bit of cheese followed by a sip of wine, and slowly chew both. This method contrasts with the 'sequential tasting method', in which the cheese is tasted first, then the wine. This was the method used by Dr. Heymann and her team, who evaluated the effect of consuming cheese prior to wine. See Summary #62).
[*I wonder how prone to inaccuracies the mixing tasting method is, given the difficulty to control how small of a bite and a sip each subject takes, and how much this is likely to affect which of the two dominates the pair*]. The 46 consumers were recruited from the University of Adelaide's Oenology and Viticulture program based on their familiarity and liking of both wine and cheese.
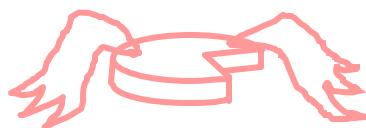
• **Results:**
1) Ideal pairings: In general, the wine/cheese pairs nominated by the experts were also considered the most ideal by the consumers. The exceptions were Sauvignon blanc (consumers proposed Gruyère instead of goat cheese) and Chardonnay (consumers proposed Gruyère or Chaource instead of Brie de Maux).
2) Dominating cheeses and dominating wines: Two wines - Gewürztraminer and the Botrytis dessert wine – dominated all of the cheeses. Syrah also dominated the Ossau Iraty and the Parmigiano cheeses. As for the cheeses, Gorgonzola dominated all of the red wines.
3) Flexible cheeses and flexible wines: By averaging the mean deviations from a score of "6" for each pairing, researchers could find out which wines and which cheeses tended to come closest to providing ideal matches (the lowest the total score, the least deviations from the ideal score). They found that the most versatile wine was Gewürztraminer, followed by the sparkling wine, among the whites. The most versatile red wine was Sangiovese, followed by Syrah. Of the cheeses, the most versatile was English cheddar, followed by Gruyère.

• Some of the many questions this study triggered include (see Discussion for further details):
_ does high residual sugar contribute to wines being more adaptable to cheese?
_ is the fact that the dessert wine dominated all cheeses (but one) a result of its high RS, its flavor intensity, its textural richness, or of its unique flavor profile?
_ are tannins responsible for the fact that red wines in this study paired better with cheese than white Wines did?
_ do lighter-bodied wines (like the Sangiovese in this study) pair better with cheese than fuller-bodied ones?
_ does the degree of consumer familiarity with the cheeses influence their ratings of an 'ideal match'?
_ what are the composition parameters that determine how well a cheese and a wine match?

The goal of this study was to provide some guidance for wine and food service professionals on a topic where none or very few existed. The authors summarized like this their findings:
_ Consumers and experts generally agreed on ideal wine and cheese combinations;
_ Blue cheese dominates red wine;
_ Blue cheese and sweet wines are well matched;
_ Off-dry white wines are readily matched with cheese;
_ Sauvignon blanc was the least versatile wine with cheese;
_ Cheddar was the easiest cheese to match.

GOOD CHEESE   BAD CHEESE