

You can't easily pinpoint which wine goes best with each dish

all across the world, and diners that might have once been happy to wash down a murgah makhani with a cold beer or Indian chai are now wanting to find out what wines go with their palak paneer or achari gosht. Wine pairing was never a simple process, and even with European food, finding the right vin for a risotto or a steak usually calls upon the expertise of a sommelier familiar with the textures and flavours of the food and the wine. Finding wine that complements Indian food is no easy task and breaks many rules and conventional understanding about wine and food. The complex, full-bodied flavours of Indian spices and ingredients overpowers most wines and a mutton curry, after the inclusion of cream, butter, cumin, yoghurt and other heavy ingredients, will easily overwhelm even the strongest pinot noir, despite the grape's suitability to a roasted rack of lamb.

White wines tend to be flavoured over red wines, according to Inge Zwick, Assistant Outlet Manager of Grand Hyatt Dubai's Manhattan Grill, after some gruelling taste tests conducted in-house. The different spices of Indian cuisine are complemented by wines with acidity and complexity, and varieties like riesling, pinot gris, pinot blanc, and most other whites from Alsace,

Germany, Austria and Northern Italy in particular possess these characteristics. The freshness and hints of fruit imparted by climate and altitude actually lower the impact of the spices on the palate.

The evolution of wine and Indian food is a recent trend, but it's evident from consumer demand, the popularity of Indian food, and emergence of India as an economic power that the trend will only grow further. The first Indian wine-makers are bearing the first fruits of their labour; though Indian wines are scarcely at an international standard at the moment, it could be possible that the new curiosity about Indian food and wine could steer Indian oenology towards producing distinct wines matching the spices and ingredients of the region.

For now, the chefs and wine advisors at iZ recommend fresh whites like Riesling Kabinett and Gruener Veltliner to accompany savoury tandoor fare. Whether it's seafood kebabs, tandoori vegetables or braised lamb shanks, a glass of riesling generally works its magic in tempering the spiciness and intense flavours.

Riesling Kabinett and Gruener Veltliner "Charming", from Germany and Austria respectively, are available at iZ to sample with some of the best Indian food in Dubai. To help newcomers to Indian food get the most out of the experience, the chefs at iZ have a tailor-made set menu, available in vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, designed to bring out the best flavours of these white wines.

So step right up and try a glass of Riesling Kabinett with a murgah tikka the next time you find yourself in iZ.

Red wine goes with meat, the common saying goes, and white wine with seafood. The rule of thumb generally holds true for most Western forms of cooking, where wine pairing has a long legacy that goes back for centuries with European ingredients, cooking methods and palates. When it comes to other cuisines, especially Asian ones with entirely different approaches to food and wine, the conventions of wine pairing wisdom have little to say about the new tastes and flavours. As diners develop increasingly sophisticated taste buds from the discovery of other cultures and cuisines, so too does the demand for wine.

Sommeliers and restaurateurs are keeping pace with the constant evolution in wining and dining habits, and have to be constantly on the lookout for ways of matching wine to new foods and flavours. Much-loved cuisines like Chinese, Thai and Mexican have had reasonable success with wine, but Indian food has rarely been attempted with wine. Not until now, that is.

Eroy Tulkar, Manager of iZ, Grand Hyatt Dubai's Indian Tandoor restaurant, believes the complexity of Indian cuisine demands a new way of looking at wine. "Take the seafood kebabs at my restaurant for example," he says. "It's all seafood — but each one has a different marination, each one is cooked differently. Then there's chicken, lamb, and vegetarian. And the complex curries and rich gravies with lots of spices; you can't easily pinpoint which wine goes best with each dish, especially if you aren't familiar with Indian cuisine."

Yet Indian food is exploding in popularity

WINE FOCUS

- Riesling Kabinett, Schloss Vollrads, Germany AED 360 per bottle



Strong, spicy Rheingaur riesling with intense fruit aromas of peach, pineapple and green apple. The acidity of the fruit and the minerality build a harmony that deserves to call it a true representative of a typical German riesling.

- Gruener Veltliner "Charming", Laurenz V, Austria AED 320 per bottle



The grapes of this Gruener Veltliner are selected from the best areas of the Kamptal. The grapes are not picked until the end of November so they have the time to ripen. A mix of mirabell, apple and sweet melon meets the typical Veltliner spiciness.

- Riesling Trimbach, Alsace, France AED 370 per bottle



A dry and refreshing French riesling from Alsace, which shows a hint of mineral flavour, in balance with the tart flavours of quince, lemon and white peach. This delicious white wine remains long on the palate and leaves an inviting mineral limestone aftertaste.