

Last month after we opened a bottle of Champagne to celebrate Franck's success we began discussing champagne. We discussed it so passionately and at such length it seemed natural for us to share of thoughts with you in this month's edition.

The world of Champagne is synonymous with celebrations, quality, prestige and of course France. Rather than discussing these accurate reflections I would like to move the topic forward a couple of notches by discussing the different styles of Champagne and how it can successfully be matched to food rather than just being seen as an aperitif.

Champagne is regularly served as an aperitif or as a toast at the end of a meal, so it is often overlooked when it comes to food. However, because Champagne is naturally acidic, it makes a really good food match - and not just for oysters and caviar as you might expect, but for a number of different foods.

Non-Vintage Champagne is the cheapest and probably most common type of Champagne available. It is blended from wines from several years, ensuring that a consistent style is achieved. Non-Vintage Champagne is younger and, generally, fruitier than other Champagnes, so is a perfect match for slightly lighter foods, such as egg or mushroom based dishes, hard cheeses, pasta or risotto (particularly with a cream or mushroom sauces), vegetables, fish and seafood. Although I haven't tried it, the combination of fish and chips I promise you, by cutting through the oiliness Non-Vintage Champagne goes really well with this British classic.

Vintage Champagne is made from a blend of wines from a particular year, when the quality of the wine is good enough to declare a vintage. Because it has been aged for a few years, it has a slightly more complex structure than a non-vintage Champagne, so can stand up to stronger, fuller flavours. For example, all types of fish and seafood, especially when accompanied with a creamy sauce are a perfect match for vintage Champagne, as are lightly smoked foods, cheese, duck, caviar and poultry with a rich sauce.

Most of the time Champagne is made from Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, which are red grapes, along with Chardonnay, which is a white grape. Blanc de Blancs, however, is Champagne which is made exclusively from the Chardonnay grape. This is a rare style of Champagne and goes well with lighter style foods and, in particular, sushi, oysters, goat's cheese, gently flavoured white fish and vegetables.

Demi Sec style Champagne is sweeter than traditional brut champagne and is a good match for foie gras or foods that have a slight edge of sweetness to them. It also goes well with desserts (even our famous sticky toffee) as well as red berries - particularly strawberries.

Rosé based Champagne goes very well with Cumbrian salmon, seafood including prawns and lobster, sushi or slightly pinker style meats including lamb, ham and game.

Hopefully this column has challenged the pre-conception that Champagne is not only an aperitif. However understandably Champagne may also be used as an aperitif because of its price therefore do bear this in mind before you hit the shops!

Bon Appétit

Nico

