

The interaction between wine and chocolate is more delicate than you might expect. Key considerations to bear in mind are the levels of acidity, sugar and tannin, not just of the wine but also of the chocolate. High acidity in the wine can render a chocolate 'darker' and more viscous in texture. A high percentage of cacao can undercut the fruit flavours in a wine and intensify the perception of tannin. In all cases, balance is essential.

To hold your own wine and chocolate tasting, you'll need a third of a glass of each wine and at least two squares of each chocolate per person. Start with the wine, proceeding from lightest and driest to fullest and sweetest. Acidity is perceived at the back and sides of your mouth, sugar towards the front. Tannins are perceived in the middle of the tongue, and alcohol as warmth in your throat. Note the flavours of fruit, perhaps spices, and other associations such as coffee, nuts and floral tones. Is the wine full-bodied? Wines with slightly higher levels of alcohol match better with chocolate.

Next, take a nibble of chocolate and allow it to melt on your tongue, noting the flavours and sensations that are revealed. The colour and the smell are also important. Finally, take another sip of wine and observe the interplay of flavours. □



TWICE AS NICE

Wine and chocolate are two of life's greatest indulgences, as well as notoriously awkward bedfellows. Nancy Gilchrist reveals some sublime pairings for a home tasting with friends

PERFECT PAIRINGS



Kir royale made with any Crémant de Bourgogne and Briottet Crème de Framboise (The Haslemere Cellar, £15), with **L'Artisan du Chocolat Origin Jamaica 72% Dark** (£2.75 for 45g).



The key link here is the framboise. The fresh raspberry notes of the kir royale marry with the lovely rich, dark associations of sour plum and floral notes in this lively chocolate.



Fonseca Bin 27, NV, Douro (Morrisons, £9.99) with **Domori Puertofino, single origin 70%, Venezuela** (chocolatetradingco.com, £2.50 for 25g).



The high alcohol content of a fortified wine (port is usually around 20 per cent) can sometimes make a combination with any chocolate a rather two-toned affair and milk chocolate tends to come off the worst. The caramel, tobacco and walnut notes of this chocolate pair well with the full, rich dark fruits of this port.



Campbell's NV Show Reserve Liqueur Muscat, Rutherglen, Australia (Oddbins, £9.99 for 37.5cl) with **Pralus Ghana, single origin 75%** (chocolatetradingco.com, £4.45 for 100g). This liqueur muscat is a meal in a glass – just think 'liquid Christmas cake' – and the broad, sweet raisin and fig flavours of the Pralus Ghana bar are its perfect partner. The Forastero bean produces the classic, most easily recognisable 'chocolate' style and Pralus presents it in its superior form.



Poggio Bonelli Chianti Classico Riserva 2006 (Lea & Sandeman, £22.50) with **Michel Cluizel 1er Cru de Plantation, Mangaro 65%, Madagascar** (Fortnum & Mason, £5 for 100g). This International Wine Competition gold medal winner is a classic chianti. Lovely sweet-sour black cherry flavours, with some still-youthful tannins, mean you have to be selective in choosing a combination. Try it with Michel Cluizel's prize-winning 'Mangaro' with its tropical fruit flavours.



d'Arenberg Old Vine Shiraz The Footbolt, McLaren Vale 2008 (Oddbins, £14.99) with **Amedei Chuao, Single Estate 70%, Venezuela** (kingsfinefoods.co.uk, £5.60 for 50g). Named after a famous racehorse, The Footbolt is concentrated and ripe, with a mix of blackberry, blueberry and black-pepper flavours. Pair it with the Chuao, one of the world's more intense chocolates; it echoes the blueberries of the wine but picks up plums and other dark-flavoured fruits such as sloes; even a hint of molasses.



Trinacria Rosso 2009, Sicily (Waitrose, £3.99) with **Lindt Excellence 70%** (£1.78 for 100g). This yielding wine (of amazing value) blends Frappato, Nerello and Nero d'Avola grape varieties. The result is a more-ish combination of rich dark plums and cherries which partners well the slightly bitter-flavoured Lindt, with its own intriguing mix of black liquorice and bright, red fruit.

