ForeWord Reviews

COOKING

Pairing Wine and Food: A Handbook for All Cuisines
Linda Johnson-Bell
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Daunting, almost. Far broader, studied and wittily annotated than one might ever imagine for the subject. No whimsy here. Nor is there a provincial slant betraying the author as some wine or food industry insider with an eye on promotion. Johnson-Bell, an American residing in London, is ideally suited to this project. Unlike so many New World wine and food writers, her take is evenly cosmopolitan though just slightly (and rightly) partial to the French. She is a former editor-in-chief of Vintage International Magazine, the author of The Wine Collectors Handbook and conveniently, the wife of a top London chef.

Along with sturdy descriptions of thirty commonly known grape varieties, a remarkably extensive chart of the particular grape varieties grown within the top 150 wine regions, Johnson-Bell in Part 1, The Taste of Wine, thoroughly dissects the many variables that influence wine flavor including issues such as soil, climate, yeast type used during fermentation, barrel aging, pruning, age of vines, amongst others. Part 2 of the three part book is titled The Taste of Food and the author utilizes the same discerning methodology. In an introduction to a section titled Cooking and Preparation Methods she writes, ”‘fast, hot and dry’ preserves taste, while ‘slow, moderate and moist’ intensifies flavors. And when it comes to matching wines, a general guideline is that those foods that are prepared with a light method of cooking (poaching or steaming, for example) would usually require a fruity, lightly acidic wine . . .” She immediately continues by discussing the ten most used cooking methods and offers generalizations about how certain wines can successfully be paired to cooking methods.

Part 3 includes sixty pages of Food to Wine / Wine to Food charts that go into alarming detail suggesting, for example, almond biscuits to be paired with the little known Moscatel de Valencia, or salt cod balls with a white Rioja. The

beauty here is in the thoroughness.

Anyone familiar with such matters knows that the circumstance is rare when serious food is unaccompanied by a carefully chosen wine and the superlative precision provided in Pairing Wine and Food should serve to blur the divisiveness often found between foodies and grape nuts. At its best, the palate game (played by both food and wine lovers) requires the most honed tasting skills backed by a prodigious memory. Johnson-Bell has contributed a splendid resource for the novice and expert.

Seth McEvoy