

February Farrago

(Definition: from the Latin, for mixed fodder; hence, a confused mixture, a hodgepodge)

Wines for Spicy Food
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Wines for Spicy Food

Most of us eat a lot more spicy food - curries, whether Indian or Thai, Tex Mex, pasta in puttanesca sauce, piri-iri chicken, and so forth - than we used to. We also drink a lot more wine than a decade ago. So while some may still drink cold lager or plain H₂O with peppery-hot food, many (including ourselves) like to drink wine.

So during the winter we have been doing quite a lot of experimenting with spicy food and wine, and we have come up with six wines which meet the bill. These wines are hugely diverse in origin, coming as they do from the northern climes of Alsace to the arid altiplano of Argentina. What they share is vivid flavours, and also an avoidance of oak. (Spicy food and barrel-ageing doesn't mix: somehow spice accentuates any harsh oak flavours, and all too often oaked wines lack the vital quality of refreshment).

So here are our six, with some light-hearted food pairing suggestions (personally, I am maddened by those food-and-wine pairings which appear in the press with absurdly demanding exactitude, often with wildly exotic ingredients and over-specific cooking instructions - e.g. "ideal with ox hearts lightly roasted in a wood-oven, served with wok-fried Antiguan okra and organically grown Syrian new potatoes").

White

2009 Goedverwacht, Crane White, Colombar, Robertson, South Africa, 11.5° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £5.75 Case £65.55 Code GDV309

Colombar(d) is an under-rated grape, but handled right it's delightful. Lively aromas of passionfruit. Cocktail of passionfruit, guava and peardrop, delightfully exotic, but also zippily fresh. This has just a hint of sweetness, making it perfect, lowish alcohol quaffing for a lot of Thai and fruity Indian curries. Now-2011

2008 Domaine de la Guicharde, Côtes du Rhône Blanc, Autour de la Chapelle, 2008, France, 12.5°

Bottle £8.75 Case £99.75 Code GUH608

This deliciously appley white wine, a blend of 50% Viognier, 40% Grenache Blanc and Gris and 10% Marsanne, is made by Arnaud and Isabelle Guichard among the wooded hills of the Massif d'Uchaux, north of Orange. The apricot perfume of the Viognier is to the fore, with a waxy note of the Marsanne. This delivers the pretty flavours of ripe russet apples. Light - note the moderate alcohol - and dry, but so joyous and charming. The floral aromatics combine equally well with South Indian and South east asian fish and seafood dishes or Moroccan cuisine flavoured with harissa. Now-2011

2008 Jean-Luc Meyer, Gewurztraminer, Alsace, France, 13°

Bottle £10.75 Case £122.55 Code MEY308

We recommend this Gewurztraminer with spicy food as it has an appealing off-dry richness. This makes it perfect for Thai food which incorporates a sprinkle of palm sugar. Mid lemon. Bright nose with textbook rose petal notes. Harmonious mouthful of lychees and Turkish delight, honey textured, with a long peppery finish. Now-2012

The Spicebox

£86.50 Code Spicedoz

A mixed case including two bottles of each of the six wines above, with a discount of 7.5%

Rosé

2009 Bon Cap, The Ruins, Rosé, Eilandia, South Africa, 13° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £7.25 Case £82.65 Code BON509

Rosé is so often the best wine accompaniment to curry: it has the refreshing bite of a white but the fuller flavour and body of a red.

This, from the Du Preez's organically farmed vineyards at Bon Cap is dry but vibrantly fruity (if you preferred a slightly more restrained style, then our best selling rosé from La Grave at £6.95 might be an alternative). Bright, almost electric, pink. Ripe raspberry attack, with a perfume of berries and roses. Intensely flavoured, and with good weight, chill it right down and try with a hot Madras curry. Drink this year.

Red

2008 Les Vignerons d'Estézargues, Cuvée des Galets, Côtes du Rhône, France, 14°

Bottle £6.75 Case £76.95 Code ESZ708

This cheerful blend of Grenache, Cinsaut and Syrah, named after the rounded pudding-stones which can be found all over the southern Rhône vineyards, is just the thing for chilli con carne or mittel-European dishes spiked with lots of paprika. Wild scent of cherry liqueur and clove. Really ripe, black cherry and raspberry palate, and showing gorgeous flesh for a wine at this price. A winner. Now-2011

2007 Vicien, Malbec, Catamarca, Argentina, 13.5°

Bottle £7.50 Case £85.50 Code VIB107

Unoaked Malbec, from organically farmed grapes at 5,000 feet of altitude on the shoulders of the Andes in Argentina's north-west, and one of our best-selling wines. Fresh and attractive scent of red fruits. Core of cherry and raspberry, with a pinch of spice. Juicy but intense too, with a pleasant sense of texture. This has so much flesh and fruit that it can handle almost anything spicy - from the obvious match of steak au poivre to pasta in a chilli-hot sauce. Now-2011

Top New World Pinot Noir

We now sell more New World Pinot Noir than we do red Burgundy, although the latter was one of the mainstays of the business when we opened in 2002. It's not surprising. First, the latter has become so much more expensive simply because of the strength of the euro. Secondly, and much more important, New World Pinot has improved so much over the last decade, for numerous reasons:

- Improved plant material has been made available (for example most South African Pinot Noir up to the early 1990s came from poor Swiss clones – now it's Burgundian-sourced cuttings)
- There is more careful matching of the variety to the right sites
- As the vines in recent plantings come of age they deliver better fruit
- New world winemakers (who often look on great Pinot as the vinous holy grail to be sought at all costs!) have gained more experience of handling this notoriously fickle grape

So here is our pick, from five countries (only Australia is absent – those classy Pinots from the Mornington peninsular tend to come with such boutique prices). What becomes clear is how important a part cooling maritime influence plays in the New World, from the coastal vineyards of Chile and South Africa to Marlborough in New Zealand. Fashionable Central Otago and Oregon both share more Burgundian climates, but usually come with comparable prices too sadly. Many of the wines below are from the 2008 vintage: with Burgundy definitely having a less than stellar year, Burgundy lovers really should broaden their Pinot drinking and experiment here, amidst this fascinating selection of splendid examples. Finally – and I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing, just worth noting – New World Pinot tends to evolve faster than red Burgundy, giving those soft, savoury secondary nuances beloved of Pinotphiles.

New World Pinot Introduction

£119.50 Code PN110

2 bottles of each of the first six wines listed, with a discount of 7.5%

2008 Tabalí, Pinot Noir, Reserva Especial, Limarí Valley, Chile, 13.5° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £9.50 Case £108.30 Code TAB708

Crafted in a pure and elegant style. Clear raspberry tone. Very ripe, berried aromas with currant leaf and vanilla. Offering a pure and crisp palate of raspberries and red cherries with a lick of milk chocolate, this would appeal to Burgundy lovers as much as Kiwi Pinot fans. Now-2011

2008 Mudhouse, Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand, 13.5° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £9.95 Case £113.43 Code: MUD608

The lightly oaked Mudhouse Pinot has become a really popular wine here. Soft raspberry tone. Scents of ripe, mildly jammy fruit and toast. Cooked strawberry quality, soft and rounded. Very charming – and perfect for fowl from simple roast chicken to well-hung pheasant. Drink this year

2008 Errázuriz, Wild Ferment Pinot Noir, Casablanca Valley, Chile, 14.5° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £10.50 Case £119.70 Code ERR408

Deep tone. Rich Morello cherry aromas with smokey, coffee scented oak. Silky cocktail of black cherry and strawberry. Very ripe black fruit - distinctly New World - but with fine and fresh acidity for keeping. Impressive at the price. Now-2012

2008 Fryer's Cove, Pinot Noir, Bamboes Bay, South Africa, 12.5°

Bottle £10.95 Case £124.83 Code FRY608

From a remarkable, isolated vineyard a few hundred metres from the cold Atlantic on South Africa's west coast. Soft ruby tone. Strawberry aromas, with just a hint of tobacco leaf development. Lovely texture, all berries and red cherry with coffee aromatics. True acidity. Long. Now-2011

2007 Familia Schroeder, Saurus Pinot Noir, Neuquén, Argentina, 14°

Bottle £10.95 Case £124.83 Code SCH107

From the promising, cool, far southern region of Patagonia, where a small vineyard area lies in the rain-shadow of the Andes. Attractive, ripe strawberry and morello cherry core, with fresh acidity, and offering a true, aromatic Pinot finish. A hint of development in the confit strawberry notes. Drink this year

2008 Delta, Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand, 13°

Bottle £12.95 Case £147.63 Code DEL608

From a mainly Pinot-growing estate, named after the roughly triangular shape of its vineyards on the slopes of the upper Wairau valley. Mid raspberry, pale and slightly smudgy look. Enticing aromas of fresh oak overlaying creamy blueberry and red cherry fruit. Bright, juicy attack. Not sweet, but very fresh, pure and lively, with nice substance in the mid-palate. Could even be served quite cool. Now-2012

Great New World Pinot

£189.50 Code PN310

2 bottles of each of the last six wines listed, with a discount of 10%

2008 Cape Chamonix, Pinot Noir Reserve, Franschhoek, South Africa, 13.5°

Bottle £12.95 Case £147.63 Code CHX308

Young star Gottfried Mocke makes this classy Pinot Noir from fruit grown in the highest vineyards at Chamonix, 500-600m up on the slopes of the mountains surrounding Franschhoek. Soft colour. Perfumed, with red fruit overlaid by coffee oak. Both juicy and velvety, this is a really classy Pinot with (by Cape standards) considerable ageing potential. Only an appealing framboise note gives it away as a New World Pinot. Now-2013

2007 Mudhouse, Swan Pinot Noir, Central Otago, New Zealand, 14° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £15.50 Case: £176.70 Code MUD807

A single vineyard wine from Mudhouse's Bendigo vineyard, this goes into French oak barrels, 25% new. Deep, youthful ruby. Brambly, spicy perfume. Showing rich and moreish ripe red cherries, with more than a touch of Kirsch. Stylish, very supple and long. This would convert anyone to the joys of Kiwi Pinot. Now-2011

2008 Brooks, Runaway Red, Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon, USA, 12.3°

Bottle £16.50 Case £1188.10 Code BRP208

Oregon is almost identical to Burgundy climatically (apart from a dry summer). This is Brook's wine for early drinking, named after a barrel which tumbled away from its rack. Those of a nervous disposition should be warned that the red label sports an image of Trotsky (was he the first Pinot socialist?). Scent of cherries and coffee. This is a very pure Pinot, all lightness and fine aromatics (almost Barolo-like). Satiny mid-palate vibrant with red cherry, redcurrant and cranberry with subtle spice. Long. Could be a lovely match for cold roast chicken, lightly chilled. Now-2014

**2008 Creation Wines, Pinot Noir, Walker Bay, South Africa, 14°
Bottle £16.95 Case £193.23 Code CRT808**

From a brand new estate high in the Hemel-en-Aarde valley (known and admired for Pinot from Hamilton Russell and Bouchard Finlayson) comes this new pretender, aged in French barrels, 30% new. Soft garnet tone. Open scents of toasty oak and jellied black cherry. Youthful, intense, big, but classic style, all bright raspberries and wild strawberries, fine acid, and light tannins. Lovely fruit finish. The oak is integrating well, and this should age well too, becoming savoury and gamey. Now-2012

**2007 Brooks, Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley,
Oregon, USA, 12.4°**

Bottle £19.95 Case £227.43 Code BRP107

Brooks, bio-dynamically farmed, is at the top of the tree in Oregon, the source of the finest Pinots anywhere in the New World. Classic young Pinot scents of black cherries and redcurrants, framed by toasty oak and spiced by notes of game and nutmeg. Lovely cassis heart. Fine acid thread. Ripe tannins. Splendidly lively aromatics. Can be approached with huge pleasure now, but has the balance to age well too. Now-2014

**2008 Felton Road, Pinot Noir, Central Otago,
New Zealand, 14° [Screw-cap]**

Bottle £23.50 Case £267.90 Code FET608

English born Nigel Greening has created the greatest Pinot estate in New Zealand, producing a series of wines (we have some Cornish Point, Calvert and Block 3 in tiny quantities – do ask for details) which are improving every vintage as the vines age. Mid purple. Splendid young Pinot aromas – berried fruit mixed with hints of rubber and sticking plaster. That youth is apparent on the palate too, as this shows like a young Burgundy, with very fresh red fruit and fine acidity. Such a classy example – a Kiwi Chambolle, and with comparable potential too: the 1999 vintage of this was terrific recently. Now-2016

New World Pinot Assembly

£157.25 Code PN210

1 bottle of each of the twelve wines listed, with a discount of 7.5%



The Lenten Restraint Case

£64.00 Code LEN10

A case of three bottles of each of these four wines, with a discount of just over 10%; a mixed dozen intended simply to put decent, fresh, really well-made wines into your home for daily drinking, for a reasonable price.

**2008 Knorhoek, Two Cubs White, Coastal Region, South Africa,
12.5° [Screw-cap]**

Bottle £6.25 Case £71.25 Code KNO108

A refreshing and brightly fruited blend of 50% Sauvignon Blanc, 40% Chenin Blanc and 10% Semillon.

Pale yellow. Lightly honeyed nose, with hints of apricot and lime blossom. Mid-weight, showing ripe lime with exotic hints. Fresh, and a charming aperitif. Drink this year

**2008 Domaine du Tariquet, Classic, Ugni Blanc-Colombard,
VdP des Côtes de Gascogne, 10.5° [Screw-cap]**

Bottle £6.50 Case £74.10 Code TRR108

It's all too easy to forget or ignore tried and trusted favourites. From Ugni Blanc and Colombard (local grapes once used for Cognac), this is a well-known, benchmark wine of the south-west. A mildly tropical palate with hints of passion-fruit and guava. Clean and zippy. Drink this year

**2008 Ca' di Ponti, Nero d'Avola,
IGT Sicily, 13.5° [Screw-cap]**

Bottle £5.25 Case £59.85 Code PON608

Nero d'Avola is probably Sicily's most successful red grape. Vivid youthful purple. Open ripe brambly nose, so typically Mediterranean. Impressive attack, with rich black fruit overlaying a structure of ripe tannin. Simple but satisfying. Now-2011

2008 Honoro Vera, Jumilla, Spain, 14°

Bottle £5.75 Case £65.55 Code HON108

Made at Bodegas Juan Gil from 100% Monastrell (the Spanish name for Mourvèdre) organically grown in the mountains north of the city of Murcia. Deep, youthful purple. Very bright and open dark cherryish nose. The broad palate displays an illusive sweet and sour character so typical of the grape. Juicy, straight forward and great value. Now-2011

Twelve Grapes: an educational guide

A case which is intended to provide some educational amusement: twelve different wines, each wholly made from different grapes, and each chosen carefully to show the individual character of that grape. Apart from all offering excellent mid-priced drinking, the case would make a very nice present for someone - of whatever age - who is becoming increasingly interested in wine. Each mixed case will come with brief notes on the grape variety and the wines.

Twelve Grapes

£84.50 Code Grapedoz

A mixed dozen including one bottle of each of the twelve wines below, with a discount of 5%

White

Chardonnay

2008 Croix des Vents, Chardonnay, Vin de Pays d'Oc, France, 13°

Bottle £6.25 Case £71.25 Code AGW108

Pale lemon. Mild scent - a melon note. Fresh and light attack, with attractive ripe apple fruit, balanced and with some weight. This is a wine which will remind you of the simple pleasures of unoaked Chardonnay. Drink this year

Sauvignon Blanc

2009 Mirror Lake, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand, 13° [Screwcap]

Bottle £7.75 Case £88.35 Code MIR109

The new vintage of a huge success last year, a really typical Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. Bright and clear with a tinge of green. Ripe scents of guava and gooseberry. Attractively green fruited and lively, with gooseberry, lime and quince notes. Crisp finish. Now-2011

Riesling

2007 Bethany, Riesling, Barossa, Australia, 11.5° [Screwcap]

Bottle £7.95 Case £90.63 Code BET607

A dry Riesling which has genuine varietal character at a fair price. The fruit is mainly from the Barossa with additional grapes from Eden Valley. On the nose, so open and enticing with lime and ripe pineapple notes. Crisp citrus fruit on the palate with a steely note and long dry finish. Already delicious, this will age well. Now-2013

Chenin Blanc

2008 Château de Putille, Anjou Blanc Sec, France, 12.5°

Bottle £7.75 Case £88.35 Code PUT708

A grape best known from its home in the Loire, but also planted in quantity in South Africa and California. Ripe pears and a touch of honey on the nose. Bright, pure, clean fruit flavours: a fine example of young Chenin Blanc, and correctly dry on the finish. Now-2011

Viognier

2009 Benvenuto de la Serna, Mil Piedras Viognier, Valle de Uco, Argentina, 13° [Screwcap]

Bottle £7.50 Case £85.50 Code BEN609

A light, gently floral (and not too alcoholic) example of this popular, stone-fruited grape. Pale lemon. Floral scent, with white peach. Fresh peach and apricot palate. Finely textured, cool and balanced, so drinkable either as an aperitif or with any seafood. Now-2011

2008 Mader, Pinot Blanc, Alsace, 12.5°

Bottle £8.95 Case £102.03 Code MAG108

We considered Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio as our last white - but then chose this, a wine with more flavour and texture! Very bright pale lemon. Attractively open with ripe citrus and melon fruit. Finely poised. Perfect with onion tart. Now-2011

Red

Merlot

2008 Domaines Vic, Merlot, Comtesse de Marion, Vin de Pays d'Oc, France, 13° [Screwcap]

Bottle £6.50 Case £74.10 Code VIC308

Aromas of sweet plum with a leafy touch. Supple and lightly creamy, with barely discernible tannins. A ripe example from the plains of the sunny Languedoc, this stands on the fence between a restrained Bordeaux example and a New World fruit-bomb. Now-2011

Cabernet Sauvignon

2007 Terra Andina, Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo, Chile, 13.5°

Bottle £7.50 Case £85.50 Code AND807

A barrel-aged Cabernet Sauvignon from Maipo, the best region in Chile for the grape. So smooth and supple, intensely blackcurranty, and richly satisfying. Decent backing of ripe tannin. Surprisingly fine finish, with smoke and cassis aromatics. Now-2012

Syrah/Shiraz

2008 False Bay, Shiraz, Western Cape, South Africa, 14° [Screw-cap]

Bottle £5.95 Case £67.83 Code FAB608

South African Syrah/Shiraz tends to lie between the northern Rhône and Australia in style: a smooth and juicy mouthful. Fine red-berried fruit with attractive smokey character, just the right bite of acidity, and the merest hint of meaty savouriness. Fantastic with grilled meat, and sure to be a real crowd-pleaser. Now-2011

Tempranillo

2006 Bodegas Torreduero, Quinta el Refugio, Toro, Spain, 14°

Bottle £6.95 Case £79.23 Code QUR106

Tempranillo is the principal Spanish red grape, often (as here) aged in American oak barrels. Deep ruby. Classic Spanish aromas of vanilla, spice and baked fruit. Big, damsony and briary wine, spiked by white pepper. Now-2011

Sangiovese

2006 La Poderina, Virgùlto, IGT Tuscany, Italy, 13.5°

Bottle £8.50 Case £96.90 Code POD106

Virgùlto is 100% Sangiovese from a producer in the prestigious Montalcino region in Tuscany, the grape's spiritual home. Attractive ruby colour with a nose of ripe cherry fruit and a hint of spicy oak. Flavours of damsons and cherries supported by soft, integrated tannins. Superior style at this price, and nicely supple and mature. Now-2011

Malbec

2007 Vicien, Malbec, Catamarca, Argentina, 13.5°

Bottle £7.50 Case £85.50 Code VIB107

Unoaked Malbec - a grape from south west France which thrives in the heat of Argentina - from organically farmed grapes at 5,000 feet of altitude on the shoulders of the Andes in Argentina's north-west, and one of our best-selling wines. Fresh and attractive scent of red fruits. Core of cherry and raspberry, with a pinch of spice. Juicy but intense too, with a pleasant sense of texture. Now-2011

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WINE MERCHANTS

For orders and all enquiries, please contact:

Simon Taylor: simon@stonevine.co.uk Gordon Coates: gordon@stonevine.co.uk Phil Hughes: phil@stonevine.co.uk
Telephone: 01962 712351 Fax: 01962 717545 Email: sales@stonevine.co.uk Website: www.stonevine.co.uk

No. 13 Humphrey Farms, Hazeley Road, Twyford, Winchester, SO21 1QA