

Finding the Sweet Spot: Rhône Varietals & Chocolate

Presented by

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Goals for this class

- Brief overview of tasting theory and its influence on wine and food pairing
- Explore how to taste chocolate
- Review selected Rhône varietals
- Discuss basic guidelines for wine and chocolate tasting
- Taste wine and chocolate to identify your individual pairing preferences

What do you taste when matching wine & food?

- Acidity
- Bitterness
- Saltiness
- Sweetness
- Umami
- Other Tastes or Flavors?

How to Taste Chocolate: Ideal Preparation

- Chocolate should be room temperature before tasting
- Taste chocolate in a distraction-free environment away from noise or strong aromas
- Palate should be clean or free of preexisting tastes

How to Taste Chocolate: Using the 5 Senses

- I. Sight:** Visual inspection of the chocolate for faults and to note color
- II. Sound:** Listening to detect faults
- III. Smell:** Discover Chocolate Aromas Types: Primary, Hot and Final
- IV-V. Taste & Touch:** Note tastes, textures and evolving aromas and flavors

Tasting Exercise 1: Valrhona Chocolate Samples

1. Blonde Dulcey – 32% Cocoa
2. Tanariva Milk – 33% Cocoa
3. Jivara Milk – 40% Cocoa
4. Bahibe Milk – 46% Cocoa
5. Equatoriale Noire – 55% Cocoa
6. Guanaja – 70% Cocoa
7. Abinao – 85% Cocoa

Valrhona Blonde Dulcey



- **Origin of chocolate:** Gourmet Creations Blend, origin not available
- **Chocolate content:** 32% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Blond color
- **Tasting Note:** First notes are buttery, toasty and not too sweet, gradually giving way to the flavors of shortbread, caramel with a pinch of salt. Smooth and creamy, velvety texture.
- **Shelf Life:** 12 months

Valrhona Tanariva Milk



- **Origin of chocolate:** Single Origin Grand Cru from Madagascar
- **Chocolate content:** 33% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Light brown color with reddish hues
- **Tasting Note:** Balanced acidity softened by distinctive milk and caramel notes.
- **Shelf Life:** 12 months

Valrhona Jivara Milk



- **Origin of chocolate:** Grand Cru Blend, origin not available
- **Chocolate content:** 40% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Light brown with pink and orange hues
- **Tasting Note:** creamy, milk chocolate with pronounced cocoa taste, which reveals notes of malt and vanilla on the finish.
- **Shelf Life:** 12 months

Valrhona Bahibe Milk



- **Origin of chocolate:** Single Origin Grand Cru from Dominican Republic
- **Chocolate content:** 46% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Light brown with reddish hues
- **Tasting Note:** Sweet milk and intense notes of cocoa later revealing, a hint of nuts, fruity acidity and slight bitterness; sweet fruits (banana, pineapple, mandarin/orange, pear), nuts, pralinés, spices (vanilla, pepper), fleur de sel, coffee, caramel, honey, cookies/cereals, or toasted sesame
- **Shelf Life:** 12 months

Valrhona Equatoriale Noire



- **Origin of chocolate:** Professional Signature Blend, origin not available
- **Composition:** 55% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Dark brown with orange hues
- **Tasting Note:** Balanced taste of cocoa, dark fruits, sweet spice, nuttiness.
- **Shelf Life:** 14 months

Valrhona Guanaja



- **Origin of chocolate:** Grand Cru Blend of Criollo and Trinitario beans, most likely from South America, Africa and/or Southeast Asia
- **Composition:** 70% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Dark brown with reddish hues
- **Tasting Note:** Aromatic and complex range of fruit, coffee, molasses and floral notes with chalky tannins and bitterness evolving on the finish.
- **Shelf Life:** 14 months

Valrhona Abinao



- **Origin of chocolate:** Grand Cru Blend of Forastero beans from Africa
- **Composition:** 85% cocoa minimum
- **Appearance:** Dark brown with orange and red hues
- **Tasting Note:** Blackcurrants, banana, cinnamon with a finish of very dry tannins and notes of mocha and roasted nuts.
- **Shelf Life:** 14 months

Grape Profile: Selected Rhône Varietals

- Muscat à Petits Grains
- Grenache
- Syrah
- Mourvèdre

Grape Profile: Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains - Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise

- **Appearance:** Medium gold or straw hues
- **Sweetness:** Sweet, Vin Doux Naturel (VDN), 110 g/L residual sugar minimum
- **Acidity:** Medium
- **Alcohol:** High (fortified), 15% abv minimum
- **Body:** Full
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Floral (orange blossom, white flowers), musk, honey, ripe stone fruit (peach, apricot), table grapes, etc.

Grape Profile: Grenache – GSM Blend or Rasteau

- **Appearance:** medium to deep ruby with orange hues
- **Sweetness:** GSM - Dry; VDN – Sweet; 110 g/L residual sugar minimum
- **Acidity:** Medium
- **Tannin:** Low to Medium
- **Alcohol:** GSM - Medium Plus to High; High (fortified), 15% abv minimum
- **Body:** Medium to Full
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Ripe red fruits (strawberry, cranberry, sour cherry), red flowers, black pepper

Grape Profile: Syrah

- **Appearance:** Medium ruby to deep purple
- **Sweetness:** Dry
- **Acidity:** Medium to High
- **Tannin:** Medium Plus to High
- **Alcohol:** Medium Plus to High
- **Body:** Medium Plus to Full
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Blackberry, tar, leather, black pepper, forest floor, dried fruits, smoked meats

Grape Profile: Mourvèdre – GSM Blend

- **Appearance:** Deep Ruby or Purple
- **Sweetness:** Dry
- **Acidity:** Medium Plus
- **Tannin:** High
- **Alcohol:** Medium Plus to High
- **Body:** Full
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Purple flowers, ripe red and black fruits, wild herbs, cured meats, leather, mocha.

Basic Guidelines for Pairing Wine & Chocolate

1. Select a wine that is sweeter than the chocolate. The percentage of chocolate can give you a general idea of its sweetness—a higher percentage of cacao in the chocolate will have a lower percentage of sugar.
2. Lighter bodied wines can be paired more easily with light, creamy and smooth chocolate (milk).
3. Fuller-bodied wines (especially ones with higher sweetness and fruit concentration) can be paired more easily with dark, rich and strong chocolate.
4. Chocolate can also have tannins, so to avoid too much bitterness, pair it with a sweet, white wine or lighter-bodied, fruity, less tannic red.
5. Everyone varies in their sensitivities and preferences for wine and chocolate, so use these suggestions above as a guide and enjoy exploring these pairings.

Tasting Exercise 2: Wine & Chocolate

Wines

- NV Depréville Clairette de Die Tradition
- 2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné “La Paradou”
Beaumes de Venise Rouge
- 2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné “Domaine de
Terre Ferme” Chateauneuf du Pape
- 2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné “Domaine de
Thalabert” Crozes-Hermitage
- 2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné “Le Chant des
Griolles” Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise
- 2009 Cave de Rasteau “Signature” Vin
Doux Naturel

Valrhona Chocolates

- Blonde Dulcey – 32% Cacao
- Tanariva – 33% Cacao
- Jivara – 40% Cacao
- Bahibe – 46% Cacao
- Equatoriale Noire – 55% Cacao
- Guanaja – 70% Cacao
- Abinao – 85% Cacao

NV Depréville Clairette de Die Tradition Méthode Dioise Ancestrale



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- **Grapes:** Not stated, but AOC requires 75% Muscat Blanc À Petits Grains minimum, 10-25% Clairette
- **Terroir:** Located in mountainous terrain at altitude above 700m on both sides of Drôme Valley, east of the Rhone river and between Valence and Montélimar.
- **Vinification:** Méthode Dioise Ancestrale is a two-thousand year old natural sparkling wine method, characterized by its incomplete fermentation in vat which continues in bottle from the sweetness of the grapes.
- **Appearance:** Pale lemon color, small bubbles with medium persistency
- **Sweetness:** Semi-sweet or medium sweet
- **Acidity:** Medium
- **Alcohol:** Low – 7.5% abv
- **Body:** Medium
- **Aromas/Flavors:** White flowers (jasmine), ripe yellow fruits (apricot, peach, pear), honey, hint of almond nuttiness on finish.
- **Suggested Chocolate Pairing:** Valrhona Guanaja 70% - wine brings out notes of black cherry, mocha, smokiness and bitter almond in the chocolate.

2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné 'La Paradou' Beaumes de Venise Rouge



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- **Grapes:** 85% Grenache, 15% Syrah
- **Terroir:** The village of Beaumes de Venise lies in the southern Rhone valley east of the Cotes du Ventoux, west of Chateauneuf du Pape and adjacent to Gigondas and Vacqueyras. The village was awarded AOC status in 2005. The terrain here is rugged with soils made up of granite and limestone gravel.
- **Vinification:** The wine undergoes a long, cool maceration designed to extract color and flavor and is then aged entirely in stainless steel for 9 months.
- **Appearance:** Deep ruby color
- **Sweetness:** Dry
- **Acidity:** Medium plus
- **Tannin:** Soft and Medium
- **Alcohol:** High – 14% abv
- **Body:** Medium
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Ripe red fruits, floral (violet, red roses), leather, minerality, hint of black pepper on finish.
- **Suggested Pairing:** Valrhona Bahibe Milk 46% - wine's acidity enhances fruity, floral, nutty, and spice notes of chocolate and makes it creamier in texture.

2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné 'Domaine de Terre Ferme' Chateauneuf du Pape



- **Grapes:** 80% Grenache, 20% Mourvèdre
- **Terroir:** The domaine's vineyards sit primarily on terraced hillsides in Terre Ferme, Fangueiron and Font de Michelle. Exposure is to the south maximizing daytime sun. Soils in Terre Ferme and Fangueiron are made up of dry, loose sandy-clay earth riddled with small rounded pebbles and gravel while the vineyards in Font de Michelle contain less gravel and higher amounts of sand. Vines in both locations average 45 years old.
- **Vinification:** Following harvest in mid-September the grapes are transported to Tain l'Hermitage in refrigerated containers. The grapes are crushed and fermented on their skins for 3 weeks prior to 12 months aging in barrel.
- **Appearance:** Deep ruby color
- **Sweetness:** Dry
- **Acidity:** Medium
- **Tannin:** Medium
- **Alcohol:** High - 14% abv
- **Body:** Medium
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Ripe red and black fruits, floral (violets, red roses), licorice, cocoa, bacon
- **Suggested Pairing:** Valrhona Equatoriale Noire 55% - wine brings out sweet spices, cocoa, and fruit high notes in chocolate along with coconut and nuttiness on the finish. Harmonious.

2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné 'Domaine de Thalabert' Crozes-Hermitage



- **Grapes:** 100% Syrah
- **Terroir:** Situated on the plain in the shadows of Hermitage the Domaine de Thalabert has belonged to Jaboulet since 1834 and is the oldest vineyard in the appellation. The Domaine de Thalabert is a large estate of close to 100 acres located on the plains in the heart of the appellation. Soils is made primarily of small round pebbles that soak up the warmth of the days sun and release it at night leading to ideal maturity of the old vine Syrah.
- **Vinification:** The grapes are sorted, destemmed and vinified in neutral casks. The wines are aged in the cellars for 12 months prior to bottling.
- **Appearance:** Deep purple color
- **Sweetness:** Dry
- **Acidity:** Medium
- **Tannin:** Supple and medium
- **Alcohol:** High – 14% abv
- **Body:** Full
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Ripe red fruits (currant, cherry), earth, leather, oak (smoke, cedar), spices (cinnamon, black pepper)
- **Suggested Pairing:** Valrhona Tanariva Milk 33% - combination of wine and chocolate highlights oaky, earthy and spicy notes along with creamy texture.

2010 Paul Jaboulet Aîné 'Le Chant des Griolles' Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise



- **Grapes:** 100% Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains
- **Terroir:** The Jaboulet Muscat de Beaumes de Venise is sourced from vines averaging 35 years old planted to multiple vineyards throughout the appellation.
- **Vinification:** Grapes are harvested with a minimum sugar content of 252g/land cold fermented in stainless steel tanks until 11% residual sugar remains, at which point the fermentation is stopped by the addition of neutral alcohol.
- **Appearance:** Pale gold color
- **Sweetness:** Sweet (fortified), 252g/L minimum residual sugar
- **Acidity:** Medium
- **Alcohol:** High (fortified) – 15% abv
- **Body:** Full
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Floral (orange blossom, jasmine), lemon, peach, minerality
- **Suggested Pairing:** Valrhona Tanariva Milk 33% - combination of wine and chocolate highlights fruity and creamy notes.

2009 Cave de Rasteau 'Signature' Vin Doux Naturel



- **Grapes:** 100% Grenache
- **Terroir:** The vineyard extends across Rasteau (mainly), Cairanne, and Sablet, and is planted in just over 20 plots. The soils of Rasteau contain brown limestone soils, thin soil atop marl, and red soils on sandstone. The predominantly south-facing hillsides, and the heat stored during the day and radiated at night, mean that the grapes are can reach full maturity.
- **Vinification:** Appellation requires 90% Grenache (noir, gris, blanc) minimum; other varieties of grapes are chosen from amongst those authorized in Côtes du Rhône. In 1944, Rasteau Vin Doux Naturel was officially awarded AOC status. The production regulations are in line with legislation for other fortified wines. Mutage is compulsory and the alcohol must be at least 96% proof, and constitute between 5% and 10% of the wine. The minimum alcohol content (actual alcohol and potential alcohol) must be 21.5% by volume, with at least 15% by volume actual content. The must's minimum natural sugar content must be at least 252g/L.
- **Appearance:** Deep ruby
- **Sweetness:** Sweet (fortified); 252g/L. minimum residual sugar
- **Acidity:** Medium plus
- **Tannin:** Medium and soft
- **Alcohol:** High (fortified) – 17% abv
- **Body:** Medium plus
- **Aromas/Flavors:** Ripe red fruits (plum, cherry, raspberry), dried red flowers, sweet spices (cinnamon, clove), mocha, cocoa
- **Suggested Pairing:** Valrhona Equatoriale Noir 55% - wine's acidity and flavors complements the chocolate's dark fruit, sweet spices and cocoa notes.

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- Frederick Wildman & Sons, Ltd.
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- Inter Rhône
- My Cookshelf.com
- Society of Wine Educators

Further Reading

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