



Trend-setting Barkley Chu created a heady mix of tea cocktails - Tea Toddy, Gincha, Bubbly and Tea Fizz. Photos: K Y Cheng

UNUSUAL PAIRINGS

Notes of harmony set the tone

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Expect the unexpected if recent events and promotions are anything to go by. Unusual flavour pairings are a growing trend.

The key to getting any combination right, according to advocates of the unexpected, is balance, and picking up flavour notes that are found in the elements being matched – the aim is to lift them all. Of course, that can involve some trial and error but that is part of the fun of exploring the unknown.

Take whisky, for example. “We have hosted a number of whisky dinners recently where we have successfully paired The Glenlivet with various types of cuisines, including Japanese, French and Thai,” says Darren Hosie, the Asia-Pacific region mentoring manager at Chivas Brothers. He says that pairing cheese and whisky is also appropriate, having matched the 12-, 15- and 18-year-old whiskies with Cantal, Comté and Pont-L’Evêque, respectively.

The company’s most recent adventure into flavour pairings was with the chocolatier Jean-Paul Hévin. “We decided to pair The Glenlivet with Jean-Paul Hévin chocolates because, in addition to

both being high-quality products, whisky is normally matured in a combination of oak casks that have previously held bourbon and sherry. Sherry casks can give dark chocolate notes to whisky as it matures, and with ex-bourbon casks, we tend to get creamy, sweet and vanilla flavours.”

Not all the products worked, but four that did were: Macaron Mandarin (milk chocolate ganache and chestnut purée filling), Gourmet Mendiant (bittersweet dark chocolate with chunks of apricots, grape, and nuts including pistachio), Orly Cake (almond and cocoa biscuit, passion fruit purée and ganache, bitter chocolate mousse) and An Nouveau bonbon (Sichuan chilli and dark chocolate ganache).

Hévin says that each picked up, or complemented, notes found in the 12-year-old The Glenlivet. For example, the macaron’s citrus notes complemented the spicy orange peel zest notes in the whisky, and the spicy taste of Sichuan chilli pepper is balanced by the drink’s notes of vanilla and honeycomb.

While the whisky and food pairing is relatively straightforward, creating one wine that pairs equally well with the five tastes, particularly umami, was a challenge for French winemaker Xavier Vignon. The oenologist was in Hong Kong recently to introduce a wine,

Demon MSG (mourvèdre, syrah, grenache), that he has made exclusively for Bo Innovation that needed to match all five tastes to cope with chef Alvin Leung’s contemporary Chinese menu.

Only 100 bottles of the wine will be available in Hong Kong.

“Umami was the most challenging for two reasons: it is not a taste that many winemakers focus on, and as a flavour, it comes very fast at the beginning and then stays for a long time on the palate. It was clear to me when making the wine for Bo Innovation that more tannins were needed,” Vignon said.

As a result, he added more mourvèdre. However, it was still missing something in terms of intensity on the middle palate. “The solution was to add more syrah.” The blend was paired with an intensely umami amuse bouche, specially created as a test of the wine’s matching abilities. The result had enough balance and was complementary to both the wine and the dish of home-made pasta with powdered prawn, dried crabs and fungi.

Vignon also discovered that his own range of Anonyme red wines works with many Chinese dishes, especially seafood dishes.

Barkley Chu Chun-ho, assistant manager of The Middle Row Bar at The Kowloon Hotel, also had an



unexpected surprise when he was creating the range of tea cocktails currently available. “Chinese teas did not work. I tried many different ones, while jasmine came close. I found that the flavour of the Chinese teas was too strong.”

Success came with English breakfast, chamomile, Earl Grey and Darjeeling, and Chu has developed a cocktail using each. “I was inspired to create tea cocktails because of the trend among mixologists for doing something different and also because there is a big tea drinking culture in Hong Kong.”

Chu’s personal favourite of the four is the Tea Toddy. Taking its inspiration from the classic hot toddy, it is a heady mix of chamomile, cloves, honey, cognac, dark rum and nutmeg.

The cocktail with the most predominant tea taste is the Tea Fizz. Based on a gin fizz, it is a mix of Earl Grey tea, gin, lemon juice, sugar syrup and soda water.

Each of the cocktails can be matched with food available from the bar, says Chu. For example, the Gincha (English breakfast tea, white rum, and freshly made ginger juice) pairs well with a traditional afternoon tea, while the Bubbly (Darjeeling tea, ginger syrup, lemon juice, vodka and sparkling water) is a good match for light dishes, such as smoked salmon.

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BARKLEY CHU, ASSISTANT MANAGER, THE MIDDLE ROW BAR