

Step up to the palate

Matching the right wine to each dish is part of the fun, writes **Melinda Ham.**

The owner and chef of the Verandah Restaurant in Pokolbin in the Hunter Valley, Matt Dillow, will roll up his sleeves tomorrow as he cooks and then serves delicious fare from his restaurant to visitors at the Sydney Cellar Door event in Hyde Park South.

Matching the right food with wine enhances the flavour of both. Dillow and 30 other NSW caterers and restaurants will offer a range of tasty dishes and recommend where to get a glass of suitable wine.

"You drink a wine to complement the food's flavour," Dillow says. "If you have the wrong wine, you will kill the taste of the food or the food will wreck the taste of the wine but you must remember that people's taste buds and preferences are different. It's very individual."

At the event, Dillow's Verandah Restaurant will have a choice of cumin and cayenne baby calamari with lime aioli, as well as a vegetarian zucchini frittata accompanied by harissa – a roasted red capsicum chilli.

"I think a nice, crisp, young semillon with citrus overtones would go well with the calamari," Dillow says. "Semillon is good with seafood; and for the vegetarian, a chardonnay with a more robust flavour would be perfect."

Another participant at the event is La Mint, a French and Vietnamese fusion restaurant from Riley Street in East Sydney. George and Leanne Lai are the owners – Leanne takes care of the front of house and George is the French-trained chef, who meticulously matches all the wines to his menu.

"Our cuisine is a bit spicy but quite mild – not as hot as Thai," Leanne says. "It has a refreshing taste with a lot of salad... I think that's why semillon and verdelho are the most popular wines here."

At the Sydney Cellar Door, George will offer his memorable Golden Pave du Porc – slowly cooked and caramelised pork belly with home-made chilli.

"The wine you drink with this dish is cabernet sauvignon, to pop up all your taste buds," Leanne says.

Also on offer will be oxtail a la bourguignonne. "It's like the traditional French beef bourguignon but we use oxtail and some Vietnamese herbs, so it's a bit different," Leanne says.

"It's a rich dish, so a pinot noir that is fruity, easier to taste and a bit light would go well."

And there's a vegetarian option: a banana flower and walnut salad Leanne says would sit nicely with a semillon blanc or a pinot gris – an



Accompaniment ... the Verandah Restaurant's John Heath and Matt Dillow suggest pairing a semillon with their baby calamari (below). Photo: Steven Siewert

Chefs and sommeliers combine to create the perfect partnership

For restaurants such as Buon Ricordo in Paddington, one of Australia's foremost Italian restaurants, matching food with wine is nearly an art form. The owner, chef Armando Percuoco, says the sommelier and the chef must have an intimate understanding of each dish and the ideal wine to complement it.

"The chef and sommelier must work together," he says. "It is not a dictatorship. Of course, there will definitely be arguments but that is democracy."

While there is a long-held tradition of pairing white wines with fish, red with meat and a sweet wine with dessert, there are many exceptions to the rule.



emerging wine available from the Riverina region.

Gourmet providores will also be selling their wares.

Mud Grub, a niche business from Mudgee, brings the best of the region's value-added products – such as chillies, chutneys, tapenades, relish, pesto, extra virgin olive oil, nougat, balsamic vinegar, fudge, pistachios and hazelnuts – to the Sydney market.

"With a population of about 8200 in

"Serious" restaurants assess an individual dish on its own merits before matching it with a suitable wine, Percuoco says.

As an example, he points to his signature fettucine al tartufo; a pasta with a cream sauce and truffle-infused eggs. "You would think you would have a riesling or sauvignon blanc with it," he says. "But no, because of the acidity of the eggs you want a rosé."

A catastrophic culinary sin would be to match a pinot noir with beef, or a white wine with artichoke. "It would destroy the taste completely," Percuoco says.

He recalls dining at the restaurant of his friend, Tetsuya Wakuda, on one occasion, when the renowned Japanese chef suggested a sweet wine with a main course. "When I tried

that particular dish it worked so well that I thought: 'Thank God we have the freedom to do what we want!'" he says.

During NSW Wine Week, Percuoco's establishment is one of four premium restaurants taking part in the Tour of the Regions Dinners.

This Tuesday, if you dine at Buon Ricordo, you can join in the \$160-a-head degustation dinner and meet Percuoco, as well as winemakers from Eden Road, Logan, Glandore and Audrey Wilkinson vineyards. Their wines will be matched with the food.

"It's important in degustation that wine has two purposes," Percuoco says. "While you get the right glass of wine for each course, you also wash your palate for the next dish."

Mudgee, we're not doing badly to have more than 50 local producers," says Julie Watt, who will be cooking and doling out two couscous dishes. "With our higher elevation, we have four defined seasons and therefore a revolving range of seasonal products that we can offer."

Watt's vegetarian option will have roasted Mudgee-grown sweet potato with onion jam and balsamic vinegar, while the other will be a lemon sheep's feta and free-range pork chorizo and rocket, again all locally grown.

"With the vegetarian dish, I would recommend a gewurztraminer, a sweeter, German variety of grape, and for the other I would suggest a semillon or sauvignon blanc."

Other participants include Efendy Restaurant from Balmain offering Turkish cuisine, Japaz from Neutral Bay with Japanese-style tapas, the Bayleaf Brasserie from Crows Nest with Indian dishes and Din Tai Fung from downtown Sydney with its distinctive Taiwanese dumplings.

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