

Wine and Indian Cuisine: Curing the pairing panic

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The great depression is upon us and that means resurrection for the cheap Indian restaurants. Of course, downmarket economy or not, I need my weekly Indian food fix.

(I'm a writer, it's always down market for me. That's a little like being born in mercury in retrograde, it's my normal life. It feels natural)

From the moment I spooned a vindaloo into my mouth (Indian Sweet house, the 1970s in Inman Square) I was smitten. I was high. I couldn't believe this party could go on in my mouth. The sweat ran down my cheeks, my eyeglasses fogged up, I could have be undergoing a shaman ritual. I love taking hold of the flavor toboggan and riding down the mountain. Take lime pickle and bitter melon. The first time I tasted either I thought they were evil. The second time, I found them compelling and addictive. All along from north to south, from Dosa to Korma, wine, not beer, has always been my beverage. Who ever said that wine and Indian food don't go together, doesn't know what they're talking about.

Oh, I wouldn't bring out the heavy guns, or the older burgundy. And what a surprise! Really new oaky wines don't work. What a shock.

The biggest disappointment? Muscadet doesn't work all that well. It just doesn't have enough body. So save that beauty for oysters or guacamole. And what about those wine clichés? Gewurtztraminer or riesling? Get over it. Oh, sure, they can be okay, but they are not on my personal stand-by list.

Dry Loire Valley Chenin Blanc. Savennieres? Anjou or Chinon Blanc? Try J.M. Raffault or Baudry Chinon Blanc.

The Domaine du Closel Jalousie Savennieres? Great.

Romoratin from Cour Cheverny. Look for Cazin. Brilliant acidity

Domaine St. Nicolas Les Clous Blanc (chard and chenin mix. On the list at Pranna)

Really great trebbianos (if you'd like, Emidio Pepe for one)

Bressan Carat (the 2003, Tocai Friulano, Malvasia and Ribolla Gialla, is sensational and would have what it takes for mattar paneer)

Sparklers of all sorts, but please don't waste the vintage champers. On the other hand, I am partial to blanc de blancs.

For reds:-- like them rich and spicy.

Southern Rhone grenaches. My standby is the Eric Texier Cotes du Rhone. Cheap, cheerful, just enough pepper.

Lebanon's Chateau Musar: A classic. Love the cinnamon with the riot of Indian spices. Fool proof.

Languedoc reds: La Croix Belle 2004 is under \$15 --garriguey.skunk, what can be bad?

Loire Valley Cabernet Franc --don't get too fancy but if you can find Bonaventure, works like a charm with lime pickle and kerala (bitter melon). In fact, it can take whatever you want to throw at it.

â€œThis is not extensive or all inclusive. But standby wine. But when in doubt, Get the Rhone and call it day. You really can't go wrong.

What are your favorite inexpensive Indians? My favorite cheapies on Indian Row on 6th street?

Havelli on 2nd avenue and 6th, (just south of the woman who sells sensitive and beautiful flowers) and Banjara on 1st and 6th. If you ask them for a corkage fee they should accommodate you. But ask nicely.

Further study: [Jon BonnÃ© at the SF Chron did a very detailed and thoughtful piece last May](#)