

Wine and ramen: pairing flavors at Agu

Master Sommelier Patrick Okubo took us through perfect pairings at Agu Ramen

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When you go to a ramen restaurant, you usually have one or two alcoholic choices: usually it's beer, or beer. But what about non-beer drinkers like me? Wines are probably not on the menu because ramen — and the variety of broths — tends to be difficult to pair perfectly. Until now. Agu Ramen, the new ramen place on Isenberg St., challenged Master Sommelier Patrick Okubo to find wines that would go well with their unique broths and appetizers. (To be fair, it was Lighthouse Magazine's Sean Morris who came up with the idea for them.) Agu has rich, pork-based tonkotsu broth; the spicy kotteri, and the lighter shio and shoyu. They also use jidori chicken for their ramen and appetizers, which has its own distinct flavor (as you will hear in the video, below). Most people will say that wine is subjective, but I have never had a Japanese meal like this so perfectly paired with wines. And the wines were from all over the world, which was an unexpected twist that made the harmony of flavors even more special. If only our governments could get along as well as these international pairings, world peace would be easy. Here's a photo gallery of what we ate and drank, but for a better explanation of the wines chosen and why they go with the different foods we had, you should watch the video. Wines are not yet available at Agu, but will be shortly. To see all my photos, [click here](#).

Wine pairing at Agu



Master Sommelier Patrick Okubo of Youngs Market, who was challenged to find appropriate pairings for the food and ramen at Agu.



On to the ramen! I had the shoyu jidori chicken ramen (note that both the shoyu and shio jidori ramens have light broths), so Patrick recommended it be paired with this Sicilian white. I was blown away at how perfect it was. The entire ramen/wine experience was light, refreshing, and harmonious.

Here are the wines we had, with a description of the characteristics and what foods were paired with them. Patrick included the retail price for the wines in case you want to buy them yourself.

Buglioni, Il Vigliaco, Brut Rose, Veneto 2011 ~ \$27 Made of 100 percent Molinara grapes which were used for the top wine of the region, Amarone. This paired best with the Piri Kara Menma because of the slight spice to it was offset by the slightest amount of sugar (1.2% sugar). It also paired with the edamame because of the refreshing acid tones. This also went with the Fried Mimiga because of the slightly spicy volcano sauce.

Lincourt, "Lindsey's" Pinot Noir, Sta. Rita Hills 2011 ~ \$22.50- Made from their estate vineyards in the cool climate Sta. Rita Hills in Santa Barbara, the cool climate and long growing season made for a plump and lush pinot noir without the heaviness of tannin. The richness and sweetness was a good match for the Chicken Liver Pate. This was also the pairing for the Char Siu pork because of the richness without the tannin. Pork doesn't require the tannin that you'd find in darker skinned grapes such as cabernet so the pinot will not overpower the pork.

Secateurs, Chenin Blanc, Coastal Region, S. Africa 2012 ~ \$15.27 Chenin blanc is a grape which naturally has a lot of acid to it which make it the backbone for pairing other high acid things. South Africa is a large grower of it especially on the cool western coast. The high acid played off of the gyoza because of the vinegar sauce and the Jidori Kawa because of the tart ponzu sauce. The high acid sensations cancelled out each other so you could taste the sweet flavors in the food and the fruit in the wine.

Bernabeleva, Camino de Navaherreros, Madrid, Spain 2010 ~ \$11.63 This is garnacha (Grenache) planted in the 1930s which never got used for wine until this century. The garnacha grape with that age has a lot of fatness but very little tannin. The ramen with the Tonkatsu broth which was thick and viscous needed the fatness of this red wine and was perfect with it.

Donnafugata, Anthilia, Sicily 2012 ~ \$15.50. This is made from Cataratto and Ansonica, two of the most predominate grapes only found in Sicily. They are light and crisp with a fruitiness. This paired best with the ramen with shoyu based broths because of its lightness.

Schiopetto, Blanc des Rosis, Friuli Venezia-Giulia, Italy 2010 ~ \$25 This is a blend of Friulano, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon, Ribolla, and a small amount of oak aged Malvasia which gave it wonderful aromatic and round mouthfeel. The Friulano which is the main grape is tart and refreshing to balance out the tartar sauce which was a top the Jidori Nanban.