

## BRACING REDS TO ENJOY WITH FISH

Victoria Moore

**T**he prospect of “red wine with fish” was once considered so preposterous in some parts that the American food writer David Rosen- garten used the phrase as the title for a book. But “the local people here have always drunk red wine with fish,” says Stefano Girelli as we sit outside on a warm evening in Ragusa. He’s organised a dinner consisting of several fish courses, which we’ll eat with red wines from his Santa Tresa winery in the south-east of Sicily.

This is no prissily painstaking food and wine matching exercise. Though it’s not a great plan to drink red with, say, smoked salmon (the tannin makes it taste metallic) or a delicate dover sole (too readily overwhelmed), there are so many ways to enjoy it with other kinds of fish, I sometimes wonder how the silly rule was ever invented. The Cucchiaio d’Argento – Italy’s most popular cookbook – contains no fewer than three recipes that mix the two: carp in red wine, monkfish in red wine, and Cacciucco, the Livorno fish soup that’s really more of a stew, containing mussels as well as other fish and flavoured with parsley, garlic, chilli and tomatoes. It certainly helps if the flavours are robust – and in Sicily, capers, black olives and tomatoes often ensure they are. Or if the fish is meaty – a pink tuna steak cries out for a bracing, medium-bodied red. As for the wine, low tannin (gamay; cabernet franc from the Loire, for example, Domaine de la Cotellaraie St Nicolas de Bourgeuil 2005, France, at £8.25 from Stone, Vine & Sun), dryness and brisk acidity make a good start.

Predictably, our favourite combination was Santa Tresa’s Cerasuolo di Vittoria with a beautiful piece of tuna in a red wine reduction with onions and almonds. The table held different opinions on the other courses, thereby proving the only truly constant rule of wine: “It’s always like this; except when it’s not.” The following wines are best served cool; 20 minutes in the fridge will take the heat off; an hour gives a slight chill.

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	<b>Beaujolais Cuvee des Vignerons 2006, Cave des Vignerons de Bully, France</b>	<b>Nerello Mascalese 2006, Sicily</b>	<b>Santa Tresa Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2004, Italy</b>	<b>La Luna e i Falò Barbera d’Asti 2004, Italy</b>
<b>Stockists</b>	£4.99, Waitrose	£4.49, M&S	£7.39, D Byrne & Co, Clitheroe (01200 423152)	£8.99, Booths
<b>Description</b>	Much beaujolais is spoiled by having only the summer pudding fruit smell, with none of the keening edginess or back-straightening tingle for which I always hope. This has all three. Don’t expect the structure of a more expensive wine; do expect that it will smell and taste of what it is.	Much nerello mascalese is grown on the slopes of Mount Etna. This is from the province of Agrigento. Think of it as an Italian beaujolais, light in body, redolent of sour cherries, pale to look at, and with a tensile snap.	This blend of nero d’avola and frappato is less muscular than many Sicilian reds, with enough finesse to take a slight chilling. It’s approachable without feeling dumbed down; invigorating and refreshing but with a bit of texture and a taste hinting at mulberries and hedgerows.	There’s oak on this wine and it shows, imparting a spicy nutmeg overtone to the fruit and transforming it into a surprisingly hearty drink. You do need to eat with it as the flavour is quite strong.
<b>Drink it with</b>	Salade nicoise	Tuna cooked to stained-glass-window pink	Pasta con sarde	Cod wrapped in prosciutto cooked with Puy lentils with plenty of rosemary
<b>Score</b>	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆