



A twin indulgence

Here's a marriage of all things fine and delicious, as we discover the soufflé-wine combination. Executive Sous Chef Satbir Bakshi from Fenix at The Oberoi, Mumbai, conjures up pairings made in gourmet heaven!

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The Indian epicure's love affair with most things French and edible has come a distance long enough for The Oberoi to have attempted a daring of sorts—pairing wines and soufflés, and eventually managing to raise this passion ever higher.

France is rightfully the proud custodian of the finest culinary and vinous practices, having educated and handheld the rest of the world through the process of embracing and imbibing it. And, right up there in the epicures firmament is the soufflé and champagne.

Recently, chefs at The Oberoi, Mumbai's fine diner, Fenix, whipped up precisely that combination, pairing a range of sweet and savoury soufflés with champagne and still wines, citing not just the forever rising interest in wines, but so too with the very French and puffed-up delicacy. In the very Oberoi tradition of pushing the boundaries, the chef and the hotel's food and beverage director put

their heads together to attempt a culinary first in the Indian context and came up with a fascinating and indulgent spread of delicious soufflés paired with perfectly complementing wines.

Uncharted territory

It all sounds as smooth as a hot skewer through meat but that was hardly the case. Wine and food pairing in the modern context is a minefield riddled with fluid rules and subjective ideas. Narrowing it down to just wines and soufflés that too keeping the Indian palate in mind makes this pioneering effort even more daunting.

The Oberoi, Mumbai, Executive Sous Chef Satbir Bakshi was however, visibly unworried, saying, "Soufflés are as French a concept as wine and both have been gladly embraced by Indian diners. It only makes sense to put those two together. They have been paired together the world over, and while creating a paired menu in India was treading uncharted territory,

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it was exciting. This is why India is an exciting place for food and beverages; a lot of ideas have yet to be tried and India is now open to absorbing as many as it can get.”

So here's another one—soufflés and wine. The Oberoi's soufflés menu ranges from creamy cheese to delicately spiced braised lamb soufflé with an accompanying, rich sauce to be poured into the tasty mould as soon as the recipient pokes open the beautifully puffed up cake's surface.

Chef Bakshi expounds, “Soufflés have come a long way from being merely small egg-based puffed cakes to becoming an institution in themselves.

Their evolution from being just a dessert to that vital dish that can also double as a savoury starter sent its star rising irreversibly, creating endless possibilities of experimentation. And, most seafood, meats and pastas have worked well as part of the combination. Soufflés, like soups, can incorporate a variety of different ingredients.”

He does point out the most important and inextricable adversary of the soufflé, which is time. “We always encourage our guests to order the soufflé first up because it takes up to 15 minutes to bake, and once served, should be eaten soon because the flavour and texture starts to go downhill once the soufflé begins to depress,” he proffers.

Pour, indulge

When pairing soufflés with wines, the rules aren’t very different, though of all the elements to be considered, weight stands out as key. Soufflés are essentially light, small puffed cakes, and therefore need to be matched with wines that are light to medium-bodied and fruity. Also, since soufflés are egg-based, some of them tend to be on the drier side, which is where sprightly and fruity wines such as champagne uplift and accentuate its flavours. The wines can either complement or contrast the flavours, and this depends on the tasting experience the chef wants to create.

“On our pairing menu, we have put a Pinot Noir from Burgundy (Louis Jadot) which is a light-bodied, elegant red wine, but let’s look at how it pairs with the Scottish salmon, tomato and dill soufflé along with a vermouth cream sauce. Seafood soufflés are rare and I find that curious because it lends itself so well to the dish. It’s got delicate flavours that integrate well with the sweetness of the tomato and on a second taste of the wine, one can notice more pronounced tannins on an otherwise rounded Pinot Noir,” Chef Bakshi adds.

The double cream French brie and chive soufflé along with sun-dried tomato and kalamatta olive sauce, has



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been paired with a Special Cuvee Bollinger champagne. Both brie and camembert are great accompaniments with champagne, either by themselves or in the mould of a soufflé. Champagne has a pleasing acidity that unlocks more flavours in the soft cheese while the chives are conspicuous on the palate given their distinct, contrasting sweetness and the accompanying sauce gives the soufflé a burst of Mediterranean flavour.

Coming to desserts, these soufflés in particular can deflate quite quickly, which is why it should be enjoyed almost as soon as it's on the table. Both the dessert soufflés were paired with the Bollinger Special Cuvee NV and here's a classic instance, according to him, where the soufflé and the wine pair in perfect harmony. The inherent sweetness of the passion fruit and the Sao Thome chocolate soufflé further accentuate the dry character of the champagne, making the wine feel more complex on the palate without compromising its original style while the champagne in turn tempers the underlying sweetness, uplifting the natural flavours of passion fruit and chocolate and the length of time it lingers on the palate.

The Sao Thome chocolate soufflé is perhaps the most indulgent choice on the menu, given the accompanying sauce—double chocolate fudge sauce, which makes this soufflé literally a triple whammy and, it's a tribute to the handiwork of the chef that the champagne still shines through the multiple chocolate layers packed into that lovely small, inflated cake. 🍷



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