



Fizz frame: Champagne educator Jayne Powell (left) and chef Christine Manfield (right) prove that champagne and food do make a winning dinner table combination. Clockwise from left: Pol Roger 1998, matched with pickled coconut prawns; Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Brut, matched with raspberry ripple; Lanson Noble Cuvée (NC) Blanc de Blancs 1996, matched with smoked trout, roe and pomelo betel leaves; Bollinger Grand Année 1997, matched with steamed chicken, rice noodles and ginger garlic relish.



Perfect match

So you think champagne is only for before's?
 Chef Christine Manfield and "Champagne Jayne" Powell prove otherwise ...

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 PHOTOGRAPHY HELEN WHITE **BY ANNA GIBSON**

"There comes a time in every woman's life when the only thing that helps is a glass of champagne."
 Bette Davis in *Old Acquaintance*

In most of our lives, a glass of champagne is synonymous with savouring life's triumphs – consumed at moments of celebration. But in France, and particularly in the region of Champagne, the wine is often served throughout a meal. The differences in grape variety and vineyard location, age and winemaker complement the different dishes in the same way we match white and red still wines.

Chef Christine Manfield and wine educator Jayne Powell, founder and director of Wineworks International, joined forces earlier this year in a food and wine-matching dinner that proved just what is possible when you mix culinary art with exquisite champagnes.

Manfield and Powell devised a tasting menu for *Vive* that is designed to bring out the best in the wines and the food.

Those who have dined in Manfield's restaurants – *Paramount* in Sydney and *East@West* in London – will be familiar with her ability to combine flavours and textures in the culinary equivalent of alchemy. But the process doesn't stop at the food. "Whenever I create a new dish I am automatically thinking about what to serve with it," Manfield says. Her tasting menus are not restricted to food and wine combinations; also appearing are sherry, whisky and even sake, as the dish dictates.

CHAMPAGNE JAYNE

Manfield appreciates and enjoys European cuisine, but believes champagne combines particularly well with Asian cuisines. "I love European food but the freshness and texture and cleanliness of Asian flavours is just so beautiful. I love vibrant food, and my style is probably to adopt and adapt everything. I like to take diners out of the square and get people to appreciate champagne exactly like other wines, across a spectrum of flavours and varieties." Occasionally, this requires a firm hand, which is a quality the former schoolteacher has in spades. "It is helpful as a restaurant to be prescriptive. I get frustrated with people who want to know all about a menu – where is the element of surprise, the sense of mystery? You need to trust and surrender to a chef – and have a bit of faith. That is why we work so hard to make the food and wine matches dynamic; to show people the possibilities."

Manfield has worked with a number of champagne houses, creating the menu for Veuve Clicquot's Businesswoman of the Year Awards event in 2005. As guest chef in the house of Dom Perignon in Champagne, she and the cellarmaster worked together to match dishes to particular vintages and styles almost from mouthful to mouthful. "Working with champagne houses has helped expand my knowledge of the wine enormously and I love working with people with the same passion for their product as we have for our food," Manfield says.

However, when it comes to following traditional rules about food and wine matching, Manfield is blunt. "I could give you 200 exceptions to the established 'rules' where one particular variety will work with a dish. It comes down to specific flavour notes."

For the *Vive* menu, Powell and Manfield worked on the principle of a progression from lighter wines and food to heavier, more complex combinations. "We begin with a prestige blanc de blancs champagne, then move to a current release classic blend, to a full bodied pinot noir style with an oak treatment and then finish with a rosé champagne," Powell says.

Manfield eschews the classic "entrée, main, dessert" progression for a more fluid approach to dining – a series of smaller shared tasting dishes, each combining a range of textures and flavours. "The secret to a good menu is to bring a symphony of flavours, each one continually upping the ante,

"Champagne Jayne" Powell, founder of Wineworks International, began her love affair with wine as a teenager. Fifteen years old, on a student exchange to France, she had the enormous good fortune to be staying with an hotelier, who took it upon himself to educate her in the ways of fine French food and wine. "I came back from France with three habits – one was wine, second was a taste for French food and the other was cigarettes. I've quit smoking but still can't say no to good food and fine champagne."

Subsequent jobs lead her into marketing roles in travel and publishing in the UK and Europe, but running through them all was a sparkling golden thread. From the VIP guests she shepherded around Club Med in Greece, to the informal "champagne appreciation club" she established with colleagues in London, Powell lost few opportunities to sip on French fizz. "We didn't know about drinking champagnes in any particular order back then – it was always just about enjoying them," she says.

When she relocated to Australia in 2000, it was time for a career change. "Moving to the other side of the world, without the advantages of an established network to help me, I figured I would have to do something I was so passionate about that it wouldn't matter how hard I had to work," Powell observes. Wine was the obvious choice, but it was a while before she found a job in the sector, as corporate services manager for The Wine Society. In the meantime, she set about familiarising herself with Australian wines through as many courses as she could find. In the process, she identified a shortage of non-vocational wine courses that deal with premium wines and began to see a niche for herself. Powell's first wine and food-matching classes – aimed at individuals and corporate incentive groups – dealt with premium still wines, working with chefs Mark Best (of *Marque* in Sydney) and boutique hotel *The Establishment's* Peter Doyle, but it wasn't long before she began planning a champagne master class – held with Christine Manfield, in February 2006.

"Australians bought 2.2 million bottles of champagne in 2005 – an increase of 36 percent on 2004, but they tend to buy brands they are familiar with, without too much thought about what they taste like. And because it is expensive, people don't often get the chance to try different champagnes side by side. Even when it comes to prestige wines, if you think about it, there is nowhere for anyone to go after you have done your initial wine course. That's where WineWorks International comes in."

Unaffiliated with any particular winemakers or distributors, Powell is not financially underpinned by anyone but herself. The upside is independence. "We're not a wine club and we don't actually sell wine. Being able to take the focus off the brand means that we can focus more on the styles of wine, age, grower champagnes and matching them with gorgeous food."

For more information go to www.wineworksinternational.com

without repeating flavours or ingredients. Generally speaking it is good to serve raw or light-textured foods early and build in the depth and complexity of flavours."

Manfield left the London culinary stage in 2005 because the landlord for East@West sold the property. She doesn't bother to disguise her irritation at this. "We had so much more to achieve," she sighs. "I'd dip my toe back in [to the restaurant business] but exactly where that would be is another question."

For now, however, she is enjoying a somewhat peripatetic lifestyle, travelling both for pleasure and for profit. She hosts regular "Gastronomic travel adventures" to exotic destinations such as Morocco and India. She is toying with the idea of writing another cookbook to add to the existing portfolio – *Paramount Cooking*, *Paramount Desserts*, *Spice* and *Stir*. These days her culinary interests are piqued by the flavours of Latin America, a taste spectrum she believes we have largely ignored in Australia, as well as the tastes of the Balkans, Turkey and Spain.

Raspberry ripple



Ingredients

2 punnets raspberries
1 tbsp caster sugar
2 tsp lemon juice
1 punnet red currants, stems removed

Meringue dots

50g egg whites
50g caster sugar
50g icing sugar
8g cornflour

Vanilla yoghurt cream

420ml cream
140g caster sugar
2 vanilla beans, split
5g gelatine leaf, softened in cold water
225g thick plain yoghurt
20ml Frangelico liqueur

Method

To make vanilla yoghurt cream, gently heat the cream with sugar and vanilla beans in saucepan to simmering point. Remove from heat and stir in softened gelatine. Pass through fine mesh sieve and discard solids.

Allow to cool for five minutes then whisk in yoghurt and Frangelico until smooth. Pour into plastic container, cover and refrigerate for three to four hours until set. To make the meringue dots, whip egg whites until soft peaks form then, while still beating, gradually add the caster sugar and beat until stiff peaks form. Sift the icing sugar and cornflour and gently fold into stiff meringue. Spoon meringue into piping bag fitted with small nozzle and pipe little dots onto baking tray lined with baking paper. Cook in a slow 70°C oven for 20 minutes or until set then open oven door and leave to cool, about 30 minutes. Store in airtight container until ready to serve.

To make sauce, process half the raspberries with sugar and lemon juice until smooth then pass through fine mesh sieve. Discard seeds.

To serve, swirl some of the raspberry sauce through vanilla yoghurt cream and spoon into serving glasses with red currants, raspberries and meringue dots.

Serves four.

Perfect match:

Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Brut

"I love rosé – the spectrum of flavours it allows is probably the most enormous. The zing of the yoghurt means I've avoided using too much cream, which can deaden your mid-palate, and the meringue dots add texture and interest, without too much sweetness."

Christine Manfield