



## mission impossible wine pairing

Sassaia with herring roe? Tuna sashimi with Blaufränkisch? For Seju Yang, sommelier at David Bouley's restaurant brushstroke (a *Wine Enthusiast* 100 Best Wine Restaurants of 2012 pick) in Manhattan, matching wine with Japanese kaiseki cuisine is more than a challenge. At times, it can feel like an impossible mission. *Wine Enthusiast* asked Yang for his top wine pairing challenges. The results may surprise you. —ALEXIS KORMAN

### Case 1: Dashi-Soaked Herring Roe paired with La Bianca di Angiolino Maule's 2010 Sassaia from Veneto, Italy

It was a little before the holiday season when herring roe, a traditional winter ingredient in Japan, appeared on the kaiseki menu at brushstroke. "Chef Eiji Ichimura challenged me to try to find a pairing for this famous wine killer," says Yang. "I said, 'Chef, it's impossible.' He chuckled. I tried and tried many different wines...All failed. The wines only enhanced an unpleasant metallic flavor in [the] herring roe." A week later, Yang tried an unsulphured sparkling wine, and was surprised it didn't evoke the same metallic taste. Although not a perfect pairing—the bubbles seemed to clash with the long-lasting, chewy texture of herring roe—the experiment gave Yang a theory. "I went looking for an unsulphured wine. When I came up with [Sassaia] from Veneto, I was convinced [it] was the answer."

### Case 2: Tuna Sashimi paired with Leo Hillinger's 2009 Blaufränkisch from Burgenland, Austria

"I never thought any white wines paired well with tuna sashimi. To my palate, white wine and tuna was always horrible," says Yang. "I instinctively knew that the answer is red wine, but I didn't know which red wine. Through many trials, I realized that the flavor of iron in the tuna presented the pairing challenge." And while Yang acknowl-

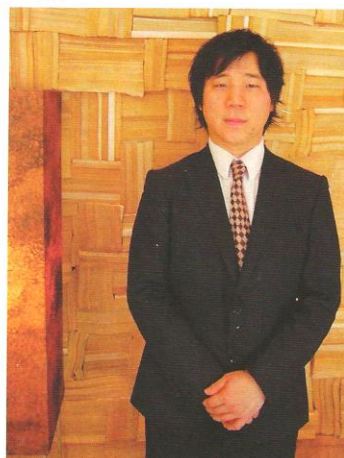


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edges that a good number of red wines have an iron-like quality, he also wanted to consider finding a wine with a delicate balance. "The conclusion, for me, was the young, fresh and unoaked Blaufränkisch."

### Case 3: Marinated Pork Belly, Kurozu (Japanese black vinegar) Sauce paired with Emilio Lustau (Almacenista)'s Vides 1/50 Palo Cortado Sherry from Jerez, Spain

"Pork belly is such a fun ingredient to play with," says Yang. "There are great pork belly wine pairings that have been discovered by many sommeliers." Off-dry whites like kabinett Riesling or demi-sec Vouvray, and spicy reds like Gigondas, are some of those classic examples, according to Yang. "The tricky part of the pork belly dish at brushstroke was the intensely sweet-, sour- and nutty-flavored kurozu sauce." Yang looked to fortified wines for a perfect pairing. "Indeed, there are so many different kinds: Fino, Amontillado, Oloroso, Port, Madeira or Marsala? My answer was an obscure Palo Cortado that paired more than perfectly."

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