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Wisdom from the Wine Lady

BY ANN TRIEGER



IT DOESN'T MATTER IF WENDY KODER is out at the fish market or out on her kayak: wherever she goes, almost everyone recognizes her as Wendy the Wine Lady. It's a moniker that Koder has earned through three decades of educating Cape Codders about wine. The Upper Cape resident has worked in almost every aspect of the wine business, from a sommelier at Cape restaurants to a wine broker to a teacher at Sandwich Community School and other off Cape community colleges. These days, Koder handles marketing for Cotuit Liquors in Marstons Mills and Empire Wine & Spirits in Kingston. She also hosts wine classes and wine dinners through her own business, Wendy Talks Wine (www.wendytalkswine.com).

How did you get started in the wine industry?

After my youngest daughter was born, I started working at a very fine restaurant in South Carver, Mass. The woman who was purchasing the wine for

the restaurant and writing the wine lists left. The owner handed me the wine list and said, "Here, you're going to order the wine." I didn't know anything about wine; I didn't even drink wine. Because I wanted to do the job correctly, I read everything I could and constantly went to trade wine tastings and seminars. I began to find wine very intriguing.

Have you seen wine styles evolve over the years?

Yes, definitely. There's more good wine made in the world than ever before. Now, you can get a wonderful wine for \$10 a bottle. I also see that winemakers are smoothing out tannins and tweaking wines to cater to the American palate.

What wines do you serve in your home if you're having guests?

If I have people over and we're sitting outside with cheese and crackers, I would start off with a sauvignon blanc, a vermentino, or a chenin blanc. If we were having a casual barbecue, I'd offer an un-oaked chardonnay with chicken and a pinot noir with salmon. Then, I'd offer a big-style shiraz or zinfandel with beef tips marinated in a spicy barbecue sauce.

Tell us about some of the wines you've introduced to your customers recently.

People are just starting to embrace Negroamaro, a red wine grape variety from Puglia in Italy. Negroamaro has an earthy, deep fruit flavor with a slight spice. Nero d'Avola from Sic-

ily, another newly introduced wine, tastes plummy with a slight dry finish.

Give us a few tips on how to organize your own wine dinner.

The easiest way is to have a theme, like different wines from the same country. I would encourage people to start out with whites then go to reds—go light to heavy. Try different varietals that your guests may have never had so you can spark conversation and so people won't forget the dinner. The most important thing is to match the weight of the food to the weight of the wine. For example, a light pairing would be baked scrod and fresh lemon with New Zealand sauvignon blanc and a heavy pairing would be beef off the grill with cabernet.

Do you have some advice for people who want to learn more about wine?

I'm constantly telling people to think outside the box, taste outside the box. Don't be afraid to try something from a country you've never had a wine from, a varietals you've never tasted or can't even pronounce. To educate your palate, you have to keep tasting wine. It helps to keep a journal or a list of the wines you really like. Allow yourself a few minutes to swirl the wine, appreciate the aromas and flavors, and recognize there's a story behind every wine. 🍷

Ann Trieger is a freelance writer from the Boston area.