



Photo by Amy Johnston

Purveyors of FINE WINE

Ever wonder which wine goes best with the Peruvian tilapia on the menu? Or perhaps you'd fancy the braised lamb shank and wonder if a red or white is a better complement to bring out the flavor. A properly trained server should be familiar enough with the wines on the list to help you make the right choice. But who chooses which wines to include on the list in the first place?

By Jonathan E. Himlin

Behind every good wine list you can be assured there is a dedicated professional who likely has years of education, training, experience and, most importantly, a passion for wine. They go by different names—wine director, certified sommelier, advanced sommelier, and rarely, master sommelier. These are the people who put thought into providing a pleasing selection of bottles with the value and quality to enhance your dining experience to the utmost.

We'd like you to meet four such purveyors of fine wine who have authored the list at a fine dining establishment near you.

MADELINE TRIFFON

*Director of Wine, Matt Prentice Restaurant Group
Coach Insignia, Northern Lakes Seafood Co., No. VI Chophouse, Shiraz
www.mattprenticerg.com*

Madeline Triffon is director of wine for the Matt Prentice Restaurant Group, a Detroit-based independent restaurant company. She is responsible for the development of the beverage programs in the company's four fine-dining rooms, which include Coach Insignia (located atop the Renaissance Center),



Northern Lakes Seafood Company (Bloomfield Hills), the No.VI Chophouse (Novi) and Shiraz (Bingham Farms). Triffon is one of only 105 professionals who have earned the title Master Sommelier in North America. She was the first of 15 American women, and the second woman in the world, to have passed the M.S. exam.

As one might imagine with credentials such as hers, Triffon has earned much recognition and has been honored with several awards. Santé magazine named Triffon Wine and Spirits Professional of the Year for 1999, Restaurant Hospitality awarded Triffon their Vanguard Award in 2002 for industry leadership and vision, and in 2008, WCR (Women Chefs and Restaurateurs) awarded Triffon their Golden Goblet Award for "Women Who Inspire."

Triffon leads a talented and experienced team of sommeliers who head up the efforts at the MPRG restaurants. Under her tutelage, the Wine Spectator has awarded its Award of Excellence to three MPRG wine lists: No.VI Chophouse, Northern Lakes and Shiraz. Coach Insignia has received the coveted Best of Award of Excellence.

ASM: What are the most important factors in developing your wine list? How often do you change it?

MT: Keeping the lists fresh and up-to-date is super important. We re-print as needed—all our lists are printed in-house and are controlled by the wine buyers at each restaurant. Most importantly, every list serves the restaurant's particular clientele and reflects the buyer's style and discrimination.

ASM: Do you feature any local wines? If so, which ones have impressed you?

MT: If each fine-dining list doesn't feature several Michigan wines, something's wrong! We've long celebrated Michigan as a fine wine producing state; it would be an oversight not to do so. Wineries we've had an easy time supporting include Chateau Grand Traverse, Left Foot Charley, L. Mawby, Black Star Farms, Bel Lago, Tabor Hill, Wyncroft, Shady Lane, Two Lads, Gill's Pier, the list swells! So many good Michigan wines to choose from these days.

ASM: What is it about wine that you are most passionate about?

MT: I'm most passionate about sharing great wines with consumers. Our team tastes dozens of wines, actively looking for wines that over-deliver in their price points. We're actually debuting a wine club in November, 'Mad Crush', with this very intent: to deliver 2 or 4 bottles on a monthly basis, the type of wines that are interesting, great examples of type; the same philosophy by which we select wines for the restaurant lists. The Mad Crush website will go live the first week in November.



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CULINARY ARTS

KENNETH FROST

Wine Director, Paesano Ristorante (Ann Arbor)
www.paesanosannarbor.com



Photo by Amy Johnston

Kenneth Frost, a product of Dexter schools and a graduate of Concordia University in Ann Arbor, has held about every position the service industry has to offer. In 2005, he was hired as a part-time server at Paesano Ristorante in Ann Arbor where he learned about Italian wine under then Wine Director Chaad Thomas. The next year Frost was promoted to trainer and joined the staff full-time.

Eventually Frost was approached to do wine ordering and handle inventory. Since then, Frost has completely taken over the wine list, hosted every weekly wine tasting and emceed every dinner, attended every wine trade show possible, priced, described, and selected the weekly wine specials and expanded the restaurant's retail program. Under his stewardship, Paesano has garnered wine honors from Hour Detroit, Detroit Business, Wine Spectator, and Wine Enthusiast. "I fully admit I am standing on the shoulders of giants, but have happily found myself equal to the task," Frost says.

ASM: What varietals do you enjoy most?

KF: I have been on a personal mission to bring Soave back. Soave is a region near Verona, in the Veneto region of Italy (where Romeo and Juliet is set, of course) and is made primarily from Garganega, a grape that few know. I also

make no apologies for my love of Nebbiolo, the grape that brings us Barolo and Barbaresco in Piemonte in the north. Some of the reads in a well-made, well-aged Barolo—the rose water, tar, tobacco—they are among the most haunting and ethereal in wine.

ASM: What bottle(s) are currently your personal favorites?

KF: Well, I just sold the last bottle of Paolo Bea Sagrantino di Montefalco 2003. That was a beauty... I sighed as I presented it to a table. I have been enjoying the Lunadoro Vino Nobile 2005 as well... one of the best bangs for the buck a Tuscan wine can deliver. I also got a chance to sample the Castello della Sala Cervaro Chardonnay/Grechetto blend that they make every year for the first time last week... absolutely stunning. The nose alone was one of the most beautiful expressions ever coaxed from a grape that I have experienced.

ASM: What advice would you give someone interested in a career in wine?

KF: Taste, taste, taste. Taste everything you can get your hands on. Don't be shy to say what you experience, no matter how silly it sounds. I have also learned that there are a lot of hidden, humble talents and passions in some of the most surprising people, and they can teach you a lot. I am surrounded by people who know more than me, so if you are wise, you will remain humble and ask a lot of questions. The best way to learn how wine changes from vintage to vintage or parcel to parcel is to attend a horizontal or vertical tasting.

KRISTIN JONNA

Founding Owner/Partner
Vinology (Ann Arbor) & Vinoteca (Royal Oak)
www.vinovinebars.net

Kristin Jonna is one of the leading wine educators in Metropolitan Detroit. After graduating from Michigan State University, Kristin moved to Sonoma Valley to spend a year working at Benziger Winery. Working closely with the winemaker and the winery's hospitality team, she toured throughout California, tasting thousands of wines and analyzing the winemaking process. In 1994 Kristin returned to Michigan to help run the family business, Merchants Fine Wine (founded originally by the Jonna family as Merchant of Vino). Her newest wine venture is Vinoteca, a unique wine bar, restaurant and retail store. Vinology, her second wine bar opened in Ann Arbor in April 2006.

Kristin travels the world to taste new wines and specialty food products to bring back to metropolitan Detroit. She continues the family traditions of excellence in customer service, product education, and innovative research to advance her wine bars as a leader in the wine, cuisine, and entertainment field. Her goal is to demystify the often intimidating subject of wine tasting and education. She has served as a board member on the Dearborn Chamber of Commerce, Associated Food Dealers, Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council, and was president of metro Detroit's largest wine enthusiast group, the Detroit Wine Organization.

ASM: What grapes are you most partial to?

KJ: It seems that I am always up for a good glass of Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Noir. These varietals, which are produced in many regions throughout the world, express their terroir with purity and fortitude. Oregon and New Zealand are making some formidable Pinots that can rival the classics of Burgundy, and I look to Bordeaux and South Africa for Sauvignon Blanc.

ASM: What are your thoughts about wines from Michigan?

KJ: I am big believer in Michigan as a region and like to prove to our



Photo by Amy Johnston

customers that we make wines that can stand up on the world stage of wine. Wineries like Blackstar Farms, Mawby, and Peninsula Cellars have been fixtures on my list, but I am always looking to hot new wineries like Brys, J Trees and Left Foot Charlie as well.

ASM: What wine will you be serving on your holiday table at home this year, and with which food does it pair well?

KJ: Actually, it's going to be Bernard Girardin Champagne from France, because champagne goes with everything! Also because we spend our holidays with our extended family in Florida and our latest tradition has been shucking our own oysters. Nothing beats sitting seaside with a cool glass of grower champagne and a plate of fresh oysters on the half shell.

STEVE GOLDBERG

Wine Director, The Earle (Ann Arbor)
www.theearle.com

Steve Goldberg has tasted a lot of wine over the years. He's been wine director at the Earle, one of Ann Arbor's most highly regarded restaurants, since Jimmy Carter was president! "This is the only wine position I've ever held," Goldberg says. "I essentially created my position by having a passion for wine and being in the right place at the right time." Under his guidance, the Earle consistently offers one of the top wine lists in the area, which is

quite an accomplishment in itself. And the fact that Goldberg has had no accredited wine certification adds to its impressiveness. "My experience in the industry doesn't really mean that I know a lot," says Goldberg. "It just means that I really love wine." Next time you're in downtown Ann Arbor, visit the Earle and take a look at the wine list. We suspect you'll agree with us that Steve knows more than a little about wine.

ASM: What are your favorite varietals, and what regions are doing them well?

SG: I enjoy syrah and viognier when produced in Northern Rhone. Outside of that region, it becomes a bit dicey.

ASM: What is one of your favorite characteristics of wine?

SG: When good young wines—all acid and/or fruit—develop and show their balance, nuance and character. In other words, when young wines fulfill their potential and become the wine they're supposed to be.

ASM: What advice would you give someone interested in a career in wine?

SG: If you're getting into the wine business because of a passion, be wary of the business. If you're doing it because of the business side of things, hope to develop a passion for it. Wine's got soul, so should you.



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