



Digging in

Tasty morsels about Chicago's food scene

ABOUT THE BLOG

A new blog for the fattest of days

JANET RAUSA FULLER



Sun-Times Food editor Janet Rausa Fuller is always thinking about her next meal.

LISA DONOVAN



For almost 20 years now, reporter Lisa Donovan has been hitting Chicago's neighborhood markets and restaurants not only for the best grub at the best prices but also as a way to understand the city's melting pot.

JAMES SCALZITTI



As Rhoda Morgenstern would say, food is the first thing Sun-Times Wire Service reporter James Scalzitti remembers liking that liked him back..

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Life is a Cabernet

By [Janet Fuller](#) on September 22, 2009 11:07 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

By guest blogger and New York writer Seanan Forbes

For many of us, wine-tasting is an intimidating experience. There's terminology. There are subtle distinctions. It's a big, scary business. Does wine-tasting have to be frightening? Is there a safe place - a safe wine - to start?

This is a question for a wine director.

Belinda Chang doesn't look old enough to have the knowledge and experience that she does - but don't underestimate her. You don't work for people such as Charlie Trotter and Rick Tramonto without knowing more than the names of grape varietals.

Now the wine director of [the Modern](#) in New York City, Chang oversees a staggering variety of wines. She's happy to name Cabernet Franc as a friendly starting point for tasting.

First of all, the people who make Cabernet Franc tend to make it well. "I find that people who love this grape are a little obsessed with it - myself included," Chang confesses with a smile. Obsession is good. It means that when you buy a bottle of Cabernet Franc, you're not likely to buy something that will disappoint.

Could a neophyte taste the difference between one Cabernet Franc and another? "It would be very clear." Chang's tones inspire confidence. "Like Pinot Noir, it expresses the soils that it's been grown in."

She heartily admires Cab Franc's versatile expression of region. "It can go anywhere from lighter and brighter and higher-toned all the way through to richer, fuller-bodied, expressive Carneros in Napa."

As an example of the latter, Chang pours a glass of Cabernet Franc from Robert Siskey's Vandal Vineyard. One scarcely needs to sip it. Even to the eye, it's deep seduction. This is a poster glass for "deep red".

Chang's world tour continues. "It can go all the way on through to Right Bank Bordeaux and St. Emilion, and one of the most venerable wines produced, Château Cheval Blanc, which is one of the greatest wines in the world." (You'll pay a price for that. A bottle of Château Cheval Blanc can easily set you back a thousand dollars.)

What would she recommend for a tasting? "A sparkling Cabernet Franc from the Loire Valley, a rose from Northern Italy, a Cabernet Franc from Chinon or Bourgueil, which are still red wines from the Loire Valley."

Chang's eyes narrow, as if she were reading names in the air. "It would be fun to see a New World interpretation; that could be from Australia, New Zealand, California or Washington State. Quite a bit of it is being used in Chilean blends. You see it in Italians and Super Tuscans. Bordeaux would be considered, for many, a gold standard."

To buy - or to go out for a tasting - Chang recommends [Just Grapes](#), 560 W. Washington. Don Sritong, the owner, is appearing in season two of the PBS show, "[The Winemakers](#)."

"He's been in the wine business forever and" - Chang laughs - "I feel like I've known him just about forever."

Her respect for Sirtong aside, Chang has practical reasons for suggesting Just Grapes to a new wine-taster. The store has a terrific tasting space, classes and "a tasting bar - one of those Italian machines where you put in the credit card and it spits out two ounces of something. It's a great spot, really well edited."

Even more to the point are Chang's final words on the subject: "I'm sure you'll find some great Cabernet Franc there."

A taster-friendly wine and a great place to buy it ... You can stay in Chicago and sample the world in a wine. That isn't scary at all.

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