

Digging in

Tasty morsels about Chicago's food scene

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A new blog for the fattest of days

JANET RAUSA FULLER



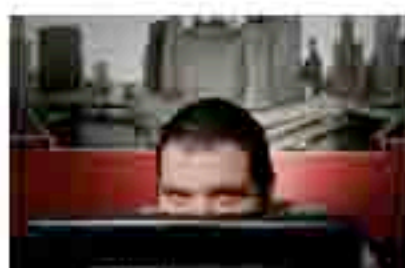
Sun-Times Food editor Janet Rausa Fuller is always thinking about her next meal.

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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Sommelier Belinda Chang on summer sippers and missing Chicago

By Janet Fuller on May 4, 2009 12:10 PM | Permalink | Comments (0)

By guest blogger and New York writer Seanan Forbes

In the bustle of [The Modern](#), the restaurant attached to New York's Museum of Modern Art, Belinda Chang is a sanctuary in comfortable heels, carrying an easy air of smiling calm.

Seeing her in passing, you might think she was someone's guest, about to be spoiled with an elegant meal. You'd never guess that she was the hard-working wine director of the high-end restaurant.



Chang is more than up to the task. She's worked her way around the country, from San Francisco to – now – New York. Chicago is Chang's hometown, and she's served in some of the city's finest. She was a sommelier at Charlie Trotter's, corporate director of wine and spirits at Rick Tramonto's Centinare, and wine and service director for some of Tramonto's other Chicago restaurants, including Osteria Via Stato and Osteria di Tramonto.

If you ask Chang, hers is a fabulous job. "I'm having," she says, "the time of my life. For each point in time, there's a right place to be. Right now, for where I am in my career and in my personal life, New York is the most amazing place I could be."

Chang's been in New York for a year "and a few months". How has her life changed since moving to New York?

Her daily commute is a lot easier. In Chicago, she had a daily drive to the city from Buffalo Grove. Now, she has a five-minute walk to work. In fact, just about everything in her life is within walking distance of home.

The walk to work may be short, but Chang puts in the miles underground – not in the subway, but below the restaurant. The cellars are a trek from the restaurant – and there's a lot of wine. The Modern's current list runs 43 pages, and some of the bottles bear the restaurant's label, Next door, in MoMA, art may hang on the walls. Here, it's in the glass and on the plate.

What are Chang's choice wines of summer? She likes Edelzwicker, although "like" may be too weak a word.

"I'm obsessed with this style of wine," she says. "It's a classic Alsace blend of Gewurtztraminer, Riesling, and Pinot Gris ... This wine can go with almost anything. You know that each dish needs a little something, and you're probably going to find it in this blend."

"I'm really into multivarietal blends. Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, I think, is so cool. Edelzwicker, all of these great blends being made in Italy, where they're using all of the indigenous grapes ... Master blenders from all over the world are making whites that are really exciting."

It isn't only white wine that charms Chang. Rosés, she says, are great for summer. The Modern's rose is made with Alicante Bouchet, a grape that has red flesh and skin. It makes a wine that's "dark and rich and robust pink, verging on fuchsia in the right lighting. I think that's kind of sexy in the glass."

"I love those wines for everything, from seafood to poultry to lighter meat courses." Chang pauses and considers one of everybody's easy summer dishes: an antipasto spread. It's hard to match wine with that, because you have a little bit of everything. For that, Chang says, is rose is perfect. "It's the Terminator pairing."

What does she miss from Chicago? The words are heartfelt: "Oh, so much." There's Chicago's spirit of innovation. "American gastronomy's molecular seat is in Chicago. That's fantastic. I think Chicago can reinvent fine dining, and is doing so."

Chang gets back often (twice in the next month). "I can't stand not having been to the newest restaurant in Chicago."

Does she think she might move back some day?

Chang glances down, as if seeking her future in her wine glass (an apt place, given her career). "You never know. I haven't," she says, smiling, "sold my Chicago condo."

Whatever comes, one thing is certain. For Belinda Chang, the future - like her wine - is only beginning to unfold.

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