

Digging in

Tasty morsels about Chicago's food scene

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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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Wednesday Wines: Hugel call

By [Janet Fuller](#) on October 14, 2009 10:52 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

By guest blogger and New York writer Seanan Forbes

Watching former Chicagoan Belinda Chang taste wine for [the Modern](#) in New York is a little bit like watching a fencing match when you don't know a sword from a shovel - even if you do know a glass from a grape.

Chang processes information and makes decisions while anybody else would still be assimilating the flavor of a wine. It's not a small responsibility. In a major restaurant, we're talking tens of cases: not small change.

This is definitely the Olympics, and not a college fencing team. The houses that court Chang's attention are the top ones in the world. Their wines set the standards for elegance and quality.

To call [Hugel](#) a firm that produces some fine wines is to call Barack Obama a politician who makes some tough decisions. Head to Hugel's Web site and you'll note that the timeline starts in 1639. That's job experience.

Jean Frederic Hugel looks like an undergraduate student and speaks of wine with knowledge and fervor, as if 370 years of winemaking were cellared in his brain.

In the course of fifteen minutes, Hugel pours eight glasses for Chang: Pinot Blanc Cuvée les Amours 2006, Gentil 2007, Riesling 2007, Riesling Jubile 2007, Muscat 2005, Gewürztraminer 2007, Pinot Gris Homage a Jean Hugel 1998 and Gewürztraminer Vendage Tardive 2001. Along with the wine come adjectives, suggestions and an occasional note about history or production.

Pouring Pinot Blanc, Hugel remarks, "The wine is never in contact with the wood. Every ten years, we go into the barrels and clean them."

Those are some big barrels.

The wines vary in mouth feel, complexity, acidity, sweetness ... just about every way they can. None are unbalanced, none too dry, none even veering towards cloying. Jean Frederic quotes his late uncle, Jean Hugel, "Sweetness is the makeup of wine."

Hugel and Chang pause, glasses in hand, remembering Hugel's uncle. "He was a legend," Chang murmurs.

What people remember about him, his nephew says, is that it didn't matter whether you were buying one bottle or 100; you were given the same courtesy, attention and respect.

That old-school grace is something you cannot buy - but you don't have to be a wine director to taste the centuries of tradition, knowledge, passion and dedication that go into every bottle of Hugel wine.

Sadly, it doesn't qualify as a reason to fly to France; you can find it in any good wine store in Chicago. If you have room for storage, though, Hugel is a house you might want to bring home by the case.

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