



WENDY WATSON DISPLAYS RYE'S WINE OFFERINGS

Wine List Wonder

The difference between a good wine list and a great one STORY BY VANESSA SALVIA • PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

Nearly every restaurant sells some type of wine, but just ordering “red” or “white” and not even glancing at the selections means you could be seriously missing out. Many of Eugene’s restaurants offer interesting and affordable wine lists that showcase both regionals and wine from the corners of the Earth.

“A good wine should be cleansing to the palate and get you excited for the next bite,” says Beppe Macchi, owner of Beppe & Gianni’s Trattoria on 19th Avenue. Macchi hails from the tiny island of Favignana off the northwest tip of Sicily, and serves only Italian wine in his restaurant.

Macchi travels to Italy yearly to try new wines, and he hand-selects wine for the trattoria based on what he believes his clientele will appreciate and the changing palates of diners. “Italian wine is not like California wine,” he says. “They don’t use oak, and it is made with grapes that can be unfamiliar.”

When Macchi is asked to help select a wine for a customer, he inquires about what meal the person is choosing as well as budget. “Everyone has a range they want to spend,” he says. “They should not be embarrassed to give a budget because it helps me to narrow it down. People will also ask if they can drink a red wine with fish. It used to be, no, but now it is OK.”

Beppe & Gianni’s wine list is about 180 labels strong, and all complement the menu as a whole. “There is not a wine that you can go wrong with on my menu,” Macchi says, smiling broadly and sweeping his arms to showcase the variety. “Our wine list is very special to me.”

Wendy Watson, the *maître d’* at Rye on 3rd near downtown, says a great wine list will pair with the menu and offer multiple price points, from good but inexpensive



to a couple of “big guns” that will be both delicious and more costly.

“A great wine list will have some focus that goes with the restaurant rather than a little scattering of everything, and will often have some hidden gems that you might need to ask about but may open a whole new area of wine to you,” she says.

Rye is styled after a European village pub with food similar to what you would find in the small towns of Spain, Italy or France, and Watson’s wine list reflects those countries. However, the restaurant brings those foods to life with fresh Northwest ingredients, which can be enjoyed with our local wines.

“Ninety-five percent of our food comes from within 300 miles, so we also have a large selection of wines grown here,” Watson says. “We feel that Oregon and Washington get hugely overshadowed by California, and we thumb our noses at Cali wines. We also like to make sure that our wines are not the same ones that you can find just anywhere.”

Watson says she is proud to offer the 2014 white pinot noir by Seufert Winery in Dayton (\$53) that represents the new category of Oregon pinots made by crushing the grapes, immediately removing the stems and skins and fermenting the juice.

Rye is adding a category of \$6 whites meant to pair well with food or be sipped solo. “It will be obscure, inexpensive, delightful, whimsical white wines,” she says, perfect for the patio.

At any restaurant with a selection beyond “would you like red or white,” customers can and should order any wine and feel comfortable that it will work with the menu. However, those restaurants will often have something meant to pair with a specific dish, so ask.

“Sometimes we have wines that will go much better with a specific dish, and we welcome questions about them,” Watson says. “I want to tell customers to step outside their comfort zones with us. Try new things, ask about different things, experiment with different wines and with different foods. That is part of why you go out to eat — to try something different!” ❖