



Pleasing the Singaporean palate

Oenophiles had a field day when MW Jeannie Cho Lee came to town to share her secrets on the tricky task of pairing local food with wines at the LUCARIS Master of Wine Seminar.

It's not everyday that one can attend a wine seminar conducted by a Master of Wine, much less by the only Asian who holds that the title. MW Jeannie Cho Lee, a wine consultant known for her expertise in Asian food and wine pairing, shared her valuable insights with 116 oenophiles at the LUCARIS Master of Wine Seminar held at Grand Hyatt Singapore's The Gallery on 11 July.

The event—organised by crystal glassware company LUCARIS (who also sponsored their range of Hong Kong Hip glasses), Treasury Wine Estates, and *epicure* magazine—drew the who's who of the wine trade like Cheong Hai Poh, president of the Food and Beverage Managers Association, and Stephane Soret, wine director of Raffles Singapore. Grand Hyatt Singapore's culinary team rustled up local favourites like Crab Meat with Black Pepper, Char Kway Teow and Beef Rendang, to match the seminar's theme of 'The Perfect Encounter' Asian Palate and Wines of the World, where Singaporean dishes were paired with wines.

Lee, who is based in Hong Kong, is no stranger to Singaporean food, having worked as an editor for a newspaper in Kuala Lumpur in the mid-90s, where she frequently visited the city-state. She also returns to Singapore every five months to keep tabs on the wine scene. "It's always difficult to say what Singaporean food is," she admitted. "It is a *mélange* of cultural influences with hundreds of seasonings and flavours. That makes wine pairing a challenge."

At the seminar, Lee emphasised a few tricks on marrying wines with local food. First, it's to understand the Asian palate's proclivity for umami. She noted that in Singapore it is common for a chef to enhance his food not by adding salt but with umami-rich condiments like dark soya sauce and fish sauce. Thus, when pairing wines with Singaporean food, diners should choose those with higher umami content—for example, wines that were aged in an extended time



in barrels, and those that had spent a longer time in contact with lees. “When you have a steamed fish with black bean sauce, it’s not so much the fish you are pairing with but the sauce because the condiment makes a big difference,” she said. The pairing of Penfolds Bin 138 Shiraz Mouvedre Grenache 2010 with BBQ Honey Pork exemplified Lee’s theory and turned out to be one of the crowd favourites: the wine, aged for a year in old American barrels, bore a rich vanilla accent that melded seamlessly

with the pork’s sweet notes.

The dishes for the seminar unfolded in a course by course fashion, but Lee reminded her audience that the reality of the “roving chopsticks” style of Asian dining, where diners pick back and forth from a shared array of dishes, makes individual wine and dish pairing difficult. “You should then pick a versatile wine,” she said, “one that will go well with five out of the eight dishes on your table.”

Participants like Natalie Tan, a luxury watch marketing executive, appreciated Lee’s advice on experimenting with various pairings to suit her own tastes. She discovered that she preferred her own pairing of Beef Rendang with Penfolds Bin 138 Shiraz Mouvedre Grenache 2010 than Lee’s suggested wine of a Wynns Coonawarra Estate Cabernet Shiraz Merlot 2010. “This event is unique as most other [seminars] focus on pairing wines with Western food,” she added.

The evening ended on a fun note as the seminar’s participants were blindfolded and made to taste a Pinot Noir with two Burgundy glasses—one belonging to LUCARIS and another to a competitor brand—to compare their differences in taste. The LUCARIS glass, whose larger bowl shape allowed the wine to develop more nuanced aromas, got the nod of approval from the crowd with a majority vote. **e**

