

Master of Wine:

Jeannie Cho Lee

Recognized as a pioneer in her field and the first Asian to be awarded Master of Wine, Jeannie Cho Lee is a consummate professional who is passionate about living well, sharing her infinite knowledge and continuing to explore the meaning of 'Asian Palate'. With three published coffee table books under her belt, a coveted position on the Singapore Airlines Wine Panel and an enviable travel schedule that takes her to the most sought after dining and wine venues in the world, Jeannie talks to Asia Dreams about living the day-to-day of what we consider a charmed life.





ASIA DREAMS: Can you describe one memorable experience that led you to your love of wine?

JEANNIE: Drinking a bottle of 1982 Talbot in 1989 and feeling as though the door to the wine world just opened up for me.

ASIA DREAMS: Wine is experiencing peak popularity in Asia. What does the wine scene look like in Hong Kong?

JEANNIE: Very exciting. I feel fortunate to be in the wine hub of Asia where wine is becoming a part of our dining culture. On the business side, it is extremely competitive and that means for consumers, this is the best place to buy wine - no duty, no sales tax and great selection.

ASIA DREAMS: As a wine expert, you must find yourself invited to a lot of social events.

JEANNIE: Yes, and because I love my work (writing, assessing wine, consulting, teaching), I say no to more than half of the social events so I can spend more time doing what I love.

ASIA DREAMS: Your brand is 'Asian Palate'. How does the Asian palate differ from the rest of the world?

JEANNIE: Asian Palate is about a new modern lifestyle that combines traditional great tasting Asian food that we grew up with and enjoying it with wine. With the popularity of Asian cuisine around the world, this combination is not unusual or new. Based in HK though, I do see how this plays out in reality and what works better than others in terms of combination and compatibility. 'Asian Palate' as a way to describe tastes/preferences is still at an early stage and we are defining what it means to have an Asian Palate now.

ASIA DREAMS: Please tell us about your second book, "Mastering Wine for the Asian Palate."

JEANNIE: This is about adding a whole new lexicon/vocabulary that is Asian ingredient based to the world of wine descriptors. I loved writing this book and I hope that people who love Asian cuisine/flavors find terms/descriptors that work for them in wine.

ASIA DREAMS: Top 5 favorite restaurants in Asia?

JEANNIE: There are so many but here goes: Kokunoi in Kyoto, Lung King Heen in HK, Gaggan in Bangkok, Iggy's in Singapore and Poom in Seoul.

ASIA DREAMS: How does becoming more knowledgeable about wine improve upon other aspects of living a good life?

JEANNIE: It helps you appreciate what goes into making quality wine - similar to how one might appreciate food more once you discover the origin of the ingredients and how it was prepared. It helps me to stop and slow down when I eat, to linger, to savor and really enjoy what is in front of me.

ASIA DREAMS: Please describe an average workday for you.

JEANNIE: That very much depends on the day. Wake up early with my kids, have freshly brewed tea (alternating between different Asian teas each morning with my current favorite being white tea), go to office in Central, usually a lunch meeting (for charity, project, event), afternoon writing or more meetings. Then home around 7:30 p.m. to have dinner with my family. After dinner, starting around 10 p.m. when the kids have gone to sleep, I start writing either for various columns or for my new book. (This is when I am not traveling which is about 35% of my time.)

ASIA DREAMS: You were the first Asian to receive Master of Wine status. What does that mean to you?

JEANNIE: It means I was lucky and that people often see me in Europe/North America as a representative of Asian wine professionals. Often I am the sole Asian and sometimes the only female wine professional in a tasting or event. I take my work/position seriously and hope that my professionalism and level of knowledge/understanding says something positive about wine professionals in Asia.

Jeannie's Top 10 Picks:

Whether you're an avid collector or newbie to wine, Jeannie gives us the inside scoop on what to stock in your cellar now.

From Bordeaux:

1 2005 Palmer
"This is a sweet opulent Palmer that doesn't have the delicate floral notes yet; rather the flavors are dominated more primary fruits right now. The palate is explosive and shows great promise for a fantastic wine with great aging potential. A real beauty that tastes balanced young but with the potential to age for decades. Concentrated, very impressive wine."

2 2005 Ducru Beaucaillou
"This is a gorgeous young wine that has amazing complexity and depth. Filled with ripe black currants, cedar and cassis, this is one of the best vintages that Ducru-Beaucaillou has ever produced in recent years. Very long length with potential to age/evolve for decades."

3 2008 Leoville Las Cases
"Deep ruby purple. Dark, blackberry fruit flavors with hints of green pepper and cedar box. Well made with spicy notes in the finish and firm tannins. A long-term aging wine that will open up in the next several years. This wine was tasted blind alongside 24 other top Cabernet-based reds from around the world."

4 2009 Montrose
"Intense spices, cedar, hint of tobacco, ripe blackberries. This powerful wine is full and intense with mouth filling fruit and ripe, rich tannins. The density and power of this wine requires it to be laid down for many years before it can be truly appreciated. The classic density and power of St Estephe and Montrose's terroir shows through in this wine. According to Montrose's winemaker, they feel 2009 is better than their 2005 and I would agree."

From Burgundy:

5 2010 Ponsot Chambertin Clos de Beze
"Unlike other domaines, Laurent Ponsot says 2010 was not an unusually small yield. 25 hectoliters per hectare is an average yield at Ponsot and 2010 fell right within this range. The Chambertin-Clos de Beze offers delicate floral and ripe mixed berries on the nose but the palate offers much greater depth and intensity with spices and savory notes coming through. This is a gorgeous,

elegant wine with amazing finesse and great concentration."

6 2010 Arlaud Clos de la Roche
"This domaine is making wonderful detailed wines that adhere to precision and finesse. Flavors in the Clos de la Roche range from lavender, raspberry to peony flowers. The wine is energetic and lively on the palate and even during the five minutes I had it in my glass, it changed and evolved, offering different facets of its personality. Long finish."

7 2010 Leflaive Chevalier-Montrachet
"Leflaive made gorgeous wines in 2010 and Anne Claude Leflaive's ability to combine the energy from this vintage with lifted flavors resulted in incredible wines. The Chevalier-Montrachet has a glorious perfume of honeysuckle, ripe nectarines and mangosteens. The intensity carries through on the palate with layers that change and unfold softly on the palate. This wine is captivating, with seemingly endless facets that keep you going back and finding something more in the wine."

8 2008 Raveneau Chablis 1er Cru Butteau
"Lovely intensity with sweet ripe nectarine and apricot fruits coming through in the mid palate. Gorgeous spicy flavors along with core minerality and flinty background - a wonderful combination. Fantastic vintage for Butteau. Excellent wine."

From Other Countries:

9 2011 Colgin IX Estate
"This is the most impressive wine among the 2011 barrel samples I tasted at Colgin Cellars. Planted at the highest elevation, the 2011 IX Estate has intensity and depth with layers of flavors - black currant, cassis, plums, sweet spices. It has a lovely silky texture with tannins that are beautifully handled and well integrated into the wine despite its youth. The finish is long with an earthy, mineral grip. Wait at least until 2020 before enjoying this wine."

10 2010 Sena
"This is always a lovely wine and this vintage is outstanding. Elegant, polished, caressing on the palate and very long. Tasted several times during this week, it is always impressive."