

## Define Wine with an Asian Vocabulary, Enjoy it More

Newcomers to wine tasting in China may be confused about some of the standard descriptions of wine. For example, what is black currant, and how does it taste? There are many other descriptions that simply do not relate to Chinese culture. To remedy this, Jeannie Cho Lee, the first Asian Master of Wine, from South Korea, provides a solution: Describe wines in your own way.

Recently Lee was at the Grand Hyatt Beijing to promote her second book, *Mastering Wine for the Asian Palate*, in English. Meanwhile, the simplified Chinese version of her first book, *Asian Palate*, will be published locally in October. While the first book is about how to pair wine with Asian foods, the second book is how to understand wine using Asian descriptions.

"When I studied wine, I wanted to have books relevant to my life experiences in Hong Kong and South Korea," says Lee, who has lived in Hong Kong for 17 years.

"Why is it important for us to have a vocabulary of our own? Because every time a Western descriptor is used, it is not relevant," she says. "But the wine is remembered through that experience."

Lee says sometimes she would describe a wine to Asian friends with Western descriptors, and a little later ask them if they remembered the terms.

"When you try to remember, and it is foreign, there's no reference points," she says. "I do this to show people how difficult it is to order the same wine again."

Lee's book lists all the major wine categories, from different parts of the world, and indicates how they can be defined with descriptors familiar to Asian people. A cabernet sauvignon, for example, can be described as Chinese red dates, plums, and green or black tea leaves. Syrah can be described as Chinese salted pork, sweet red bean paste and jasmine tea leaves. Asian descriptors for Merlot include persimmons, dried Chinese hawthorns and Chinese dried mushrooms.

"Language dominates thinking. We are one of the top wine consumers. It is time to change to the Chinese way of thinking," she says.

Lee says wine ratings by wine masters such as Robert Parker might not represent Asians.

"Chicken feet, shark fins and sea cucumber - if we think some food has a quality, then it does," Lee says. "It is time to redefine quality for us."

At her demonstration, Lee asked the audience at the book's promotion to taste champagne, a sauvignon blanc from New Zealand, and a 2007 Merlot from Italy. She then gave them Asian descriptors, describing the sauvignon blanc as having lemon, citronella, and longan tones. But when she described the merlot as green tea, some of the audience did not agree. Is it because, even with Asian descriptors, some wine fans require professional training to be able to describe wines successfully?

Lee suggests some methods for Chinese to train themselves and expand their wine vocabulary. "Try to remember smells when you go shopping, and see if you can find them in your wine," she says.

She says if one can describe the smells of the top 10 wine categories, then one will be able to describe 80 or 90 percent of all grape varieties with Asian descriptors.

In her book's foreword, Lee writes: "Asian ingredients provide a wealth of new vocabulary to the world of wine. Mastering wine for the Asian palate is the coming together of cultures, of contributing to the language of wine to make it uniquely our own."