



How to Annoy a World-Class Chef

As the World Gourmet Festival kicks off at Bangkok's Four Seasons, a few of the experts share tales of injuries, madness and passion for food and wine.

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Jeannie Cho Lee, Master of Wine



Jeannie Cho Lee gets paid to drink wine. On that basis alone it would be difficult to dislike her if she wasn't so nice.

The first Asian Master of Wine (MW) and an award-winning writer, wine critic, judge and educator, Cho Lee is the author of "Asian Palate," a book that explores Asian food and wine pairings in 10 Asian culinary capitals.

She was born in Korea and has lived in Hong Kong since early 1994, where she is contributing editor for Decanter magazine, writes for several newspapers in the region and is a wine consultant for various hospitality companies.

Check out her website, AsianPalate.com, for more on pairing up Asian food and wine.

Wildest moment on the job: "The wildest moment I had in a restaurant was when I was invited by a senior Chinese government official in China for a very sumptuous banquet and in the middle was asked suddenly to sing!

"I did end up singing (not well because it is clearly not my forte) an old Korean folk song and everyone realized why I never dreamed of going into the music industry and stuck instead to wine."

Most annoying thing a person could ever ask a Wine Master: "What is your favorite wine?" It is like asking Picasso, 'what is your favorite colour?'"

Dining trend more people should embrace: "I would like to see more people enjoy their local meals with wine, to make wine part of our food and dining culture here in Asia.

"Pairing is about maximizing pleasure and if taken too seriously, it can make people nervous or uptight about exactly what to serve with which dish or meal.

"Experiment, don't be afraid to make mistakes and remember the great pairing moments.

"We have such a rich culinary heritage, I hate to see people changing authentic, traditional flavors just to 'suit' wine. There are enough wine styles out there to ensure that for every meal, there are good wines that will pair well."

On her passion for wine: "Great wine, like great music and art, is a thing of beauty. I am always in awe of beauty.

"Wine still holds mystery for me -- that no matter how hard I try, I won't be able to truly 'master' it. I appreciate the symbiotic coming together of human craftsmanship, product of the earth and influence of nature."

Style of wine she couldn't live without: "One with inherent harmony, no matter the style or color. Wines that exude beauty in its fleeting perfection."

Biggest misperception about wine pairing: "That there is a formula or 'right answer' in pairing.

"While there are guiding principles -- tannic wines make dishes with chilies taste hotter/spicier, acidity in wine cuts through grease and fat pretty well -- these are just starting points of understanding. What tastes great for me does not for you."