



# DestinAsian

FROM ASIA TO THE WORLD

## Q & A: Wine Expert Jeannie Cho Lee of AsianPalate.com



Jeannie Cho Lee is the oenophile behind [AsianPalate.com](http://AsianPalate.com), a site that celebrates the confluence of Asian food and wine. Her book *Asian Palate* explores Asian food and wine pairings in 10 Asian culinary capitals, and she also wrote *Mastering Wine for the Asian Palate*, which provides an Asian perspective to appreciating wine by broadening the wine lexicon (she uses Asian descriptors like red dates, persimmons, and ginkgo nuts to describe wine).

She was born in Korea and has lived in Hong Kong since early 1994. A contributing editor for *Decanter UK* and a columnist for the *South China Morning Post*, she is also a wine consultant for Galaxy Macau, responsible for the master wine list of nearly 50 F&B outlets, as well as for Singapore Airlines, involved in selecting all the wines served on all routes.

**Can you pick a few restaurants in Southeast Asia and point out how a specific Asian dish on the menu**

### **is complemented by a particular wine?**

From Singapore, I would recommend Iggy's, although it is not representative of Singaporean cuisine, and instead can be classified as contemporary Asian food. They have interesting starters that are very much Japanese cuisine-inspired, such as the sea urchin with cauliflower and ponzu. This is terrific paired with a sparkling sake which Iggy's offers by the glass; but if one would prefer to have wine, a good choice would be a mature Chablis (1er or Grand Cru) from Raveneau where one can find much of the mineral character echoed in the dish.

You & Mee in the Grand Hyatt Bangkok is a casual Thai restaurant that I frequent often to have something very basic like *por-pia sod* (Thai spring roll), green curry, or pad thai. The *por-pia* has a strong sweet, sour, and slightly spicy profile, which I always prefer with something with good acidity, like a German full-bodied Silvaner or lightly sweet (Feinherb) Riesling. Chicken green curry would pair well with a full-bodied Pinot Noir from Baden or Pfalz.

### **Why do those pairings work well?**

Japanese food and delicate food work with a sparkling sake or a minerally European white wine because the wine doesn't overwhelm the food, and allows the delicate flavours and textures to fully express themselves. A full-bodied wine with a stronger personality would detract from the delicate flavors of a raw fish dish or umami-laden sea urchin.

The *por-pia sod* has a whole gamut of flavors, with a soft outer skin like a French crêpe and crunchy vegetables and meat inside (it can also have shrimps), seasoned with fresh herbs like cilantro. With such a mixture of different flavours and textures, an intensely flavored wine with fresh, lively acidity is needed to stand up to it, such as a Silvaner or Riesling from Germany. The green curry requires a more robust flavor profile (from a warmer region in Germany like Baden) with great acidity to stand up to the spices and coconut sweetness.

### **Where is your favorite place in Hong Kong to purchase wine to take home?**

I would say that the most common places I would buy wine are directly from importers as I buy by the case, and like to watch a wine evolve with time — open one bottle this year, then watch it change in the subsequent years. With the importers, I can be assured of the best price. There are lots of great wine retailers in Hong Kong, and I would recommend **Oliver's** (their wine department has a great selection) in

Prince's Building, Ponti's Wine Cellars in Alexandra House, Watson's Wine Cellars in Pacific Place, and Rare & Fine Wines Ltd. in the Bank of East Asia in Central. Their sources are very good — so for anyone who is potentially afraid of fake wines or not sure of their provenance, these are very reliable retailers. I think that trust means more than just price.

### **What wine bars in Hong Kong or around the region can you recommend?**

In Hong Kong, in terms of hotels, I would recommend the Q88 bar in the Marriott hotel in Central, as they try to do a lot of wine-by-the-glass promotions and an affordable selection of wines to taste. For bars, I would recommend Staunton's Wine Bar in Soho, Amo Eno in the IFC or California Vintage in Lan Kwai Fong, as they are very active and do a lot of wine-by-the-glass promotions.

Japan and Korea have the great wine bars — Tsubaki in Ginza has a good selection, and in Korea, Casa del Vino have an amazing selection of wine by the glass, and the owner (@kpeun) is a huge wine lover and active blogger

### **Addresses:**

**Iggy's Pte. Ltd:** The Hilton Hotel, 581 Orchard Road, Level 3 Singapore 238883 **You & Mee:** 494, Ratchadamri Road, Pathum Wan, Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330, Thailand **Oliver's Wine Shop:** Shop 201-205, 2/F Prince's Building, 10 Chater Road, Central, Hong Kong **Ponti's Wine Cellars:** Shop B2, B1/F Alexandra House, 18 Chater Road, Central, Hong Kong **Watson's Wine Cellar:** LG1 Great Food Hall, 88 Queensway, Pacific Place, Admiralty **Rare & Fine Wines:** Shop L6, Lobby Floor, The Bank of East Asia Building, 10 Des Voeux Road Central, Hong Kong **Riedel Room at Q88:** JW Marriott Hotel Hong Kong, Pacific Place, 88 Queensway, Admiralty, Hong Kong **Staunton's Wine Bar & Cafe:** 9-11 Staunton Street, Soho, Hong Kong **Amo Eno:** Shop 3027, Podium Level 3, IFC Mall, 1 Harbour View Street, Central, Hong Kong **California Vintage:** G/F, 77 Wyndham Street, Lan Kwai Fong, Central, Hong Kong **Aoyama Tsubaki Lounge:** Sunbridge 2/F, 3-8-2 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo **Casa del Vino:** 141-13 Cheongdam-dong Gangnam-gu, Seoul, South Korea