

CRITIC

Two drinking aficionados defend their

Wine is finer!

Jeannie Cho Lee, wine warrior

"Wine is hot. In Hong Kong, beer sales have been stagnant while wine sales have been on a steep incline. Every week, there are reports of world-record achieving wine auction results, a new swanky wine bar opening, or wine cellaring or consulting services being offered. The Hong Kong public is demanding wine.

I've seen fads come and go, but wine is definitely here to stay. There are a number of reasons why wine is so popular now: it's duty free, it is seen as a healthier alternative to spirits and beer, and, let's face it, it is a cool beverage. Here are the top five reasons why beer can never hold a candle to wine:

1. Wine enhances our appreciation of food. It is an essential part of European meals, but it is becoming a regular feature in Asian meals as well.
2. Wine has a strong social element because we share a bottle among friends and family. With beer, it is a very individual experience and one person can order Budweiser while another orders Heineken.
3. Wine is made from hundreds of different species and varieties, making it an intriguing drink. Beer can't compare with wine's symphony of flavours.
4. Wine courses through the body slowly and sensually, after it has caressed your palate and tickled your nose nerves. Beer moves out of the bottle right down to your throat and seems very quickly to course right down to your bladder.
5. It is hard to deny the health element. Resveratrol and the polyphenols in red wine are proven to reduce heart disease. This argument alone can convert a beer drinker to a wine lover in a snap."

Jeannie Cho Lee is the first Asian Master of Wine and her wine book, Asian Palate, is available to order at select retailers such as Dymocks and Watson's Wine Cellar, and at books@theasset.com.



FACE-OFF

favoured tipples in a battle for the ages

“First, spare me your tired cliché that all beer is the same. We’re talking about real beers, about pale ales and whits and barley wines and bitters and lambics versus your wines of choice. The gloves are off – we’re not doing a debate here about the merits of mass-market Stella Artois versus mass-market Yellow Tail (and we can both be thankful for that).

Oh, I’ll see your usual arguments about food pairing and breadth of flavour, and if you care about food, you should care about beer. Yes, beers have your aromas of grapefruit (Sierra Nevada pale ale), hints of plum (St Feuillien brune) and your notes of butterscotch (Leffe). I’ll open your mind to flavours of olives and blue cheese in bottled form.

And food pairings? Heck, it’s easier with beer. From crisp Pilsners to refreshing weizens to peppery saisons to potent Trappist triples to sugary lambics, I can match them with fish, chicken, salads, cheese and desserts at a cost everyone can afford. I can walk to a dinner party and bring a Saison Dupont and know it’s going to match up with something on the menu and blow people away with its flavour. All for \$50. Show me a bottle of wine that can do that.

Sure, wine has its place. A great wine is just as awesome as a great bourbon or beer. I’ll take wine with my pasta or tapas. But every beverage has its time and place and emotion, and beer has a broader range of them. Feel like celebrating? Grab a beer with a buddy. Just broke up? You drown your sorrows with beer, not wine, my friend. Beer’s about having heart, not making an impression. Look in a pub and look at the smiles as we toast a pint. We’re not swirling our drink to show off; we’re loving life, a pint at a time.”

Jeff Boda was the beer critic at the Chicago Tribune before moving to Hong Kong and has written about beer for the International Herald Tribune.

Beer is best!

Jeff Boda, beer barbarian



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