

The Vine Guy » **Scott Greenberg**

Wines to set sail with

I love a challenge, but I was recently put to the test when I was asked to pick several red and white wines to pair with six dinners on a seven-night cruise made up of passengers with a wide range of wine sophistication. The tricky part was that I had to select the wines before I had even seen a menu for a single dinner. In sailing terms, that's an order as tall as a mainmast. But given that the assignment also came along with passage for two as the ship sailed through the Black Sea, I was determined to rise to the occasion.

Of course, picking wines that many palates demands quite a bit of research, which, in turn, required that a few bottles of wine had to be opened. But first, I had to come up with a theme. Since the cruise originated in Athens and ended in Istanbul, I initially thought that it would be interesting to feature wines from the different ports of call along our route. Unfortunately, finding wines to sample from Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine in Washington, D.C., was more difficult than I anticipated.

Instead, I decided to select wines from various parts of the world that would provide my shipmates with both a sense of adventure as well as cater to the yet-as-unknown cuisine. Lastly, because of the wide disparity in wine knowledge and palates of the passengers, I wanted to make sure that the wines were "friendly" enough to appeal to a broad audience. My main goal was that everyone on board would find at least one wine per night that they would enjoy.

Call it hard work, luck or just good karma, but by the end of the cruise, my new friends were genuinely pleased with the wines and I was relieved that I wasn't tossed overboard. All in all, the trip was worth every cork we pulled to find the ideal wines to set sail with. This week, I'll cover the white wines featured on the cruise and follow up next week with the reds. Retail prices are approximate.

Since we were boarding the ship in Athens, I thought it would be appropriate to feature a lovely local white wine. The **2008 Santo Yannis Assyrtico (\$18)** is a dry white wine from the island of Santorini where this native grape flourishes in the fertile volcanic soil. The assyrtica grape produces a wine that has similar characteristics to sauvignon blanc, but favors more citrus and mineral flavors. The



abundant acidity keeps the lemon/lime flavors bright and crisp while letting a touch of spice and minerality shine through on the refreshing finish. It's a nice alternative to un-oaked chardonnay.

For our second night at sea, I thought I would try something a little more traditional. I chose the **2008 Le Clos Chartier Sancerre (\$22)** from the Loire Valley in France.

This stylish Loire sauvignon blanc is light and crisp with floral aromas on the nose and flavors of green apple, ripe pear and green melon on the palate. Notes of wet stone round out the crisp finish.

By the third day, I was beginning to earn the trust of my fellow passengers and the **2008 Catalpa Chardonnay (\$18)** from Mendoza, Argentina, helped solidify my reputation. This delicious chardonnay is made by the same winemaker who worked for Joseph Drouhin in Burgundy for three years. It is crafted in the Burgundian style, with a buttery frame featuring flavors of ripe apple and pear tart. The elegant finish features just a touch of creamy vanilla.

Just when I was getting cocky, I introduced the **2008 Koonowla Riesling (\$21)** from the Clare Valley in South Australia. Many of the passengers thought that all rieslings were sweet wines. Well, they were happy to discover this bone-dry version from one of Australia's prime riesling regions. The nose features aromas of ripe pear, citrus and just a touch of petrol on the classic bouquet. On the palate, flavors of lemon, lime and tropical fruit fill the mouth while the bright acidity provides a dry-as-a-bone finish.

With my reputation still intact and the temperature climbing, I thought that the **2008 St. Paul's Pinot Grigio Egg Leiten (\$25)** from Alto Adige, Italy, would provide some relief from the heat. This crisp, refreshing wine offers a surprisingly rich profile with notes of white peach, lemon, lime and honey. The clean finish has excellent structure and carries a hint of minerality on the end.

To celebrate our last night on board, I chose the delightfully charming **2008 Elk Cove Pinot Gris (\$20)** from Willamette Valley, Ore. Willamette Valley has just the right combination of warm days and cool nights to bring out gorgeous aromas of pear and honey on the nose while showcasing flavors of nectarine and citrus flavors on the palate. The stylish finish is elegant and balanced.

Next week: Part two of the Vine Guy's look at cruise ship wines.

Young chef brings fresh energy to Fresh Start

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Fresh Start Catering

» **Where:** DC Central Kitchen, 425 Second St. NW
» **Info:** 202-234-0707, ext. 125

Combine high-octane fuel with double-strength caffeine and a spurt of typhoon-level winds and you end up with Allison Sosna, the 25-year-old contract foods executive chef for DC Central Kitchen's catering business, Fresh Start. Unlike most catering companies, Fresh Start provides farm-to-table catering to the public, to seven District public schools, one charter school, one day care center and one private middle school for low-income boys. It must take that amount of energy to handle it all.

Born in Brooklyn, but raise in New Jersey, Sosna concedes to having two overarching passions in life: sports and cooking.

"With sports, you name it, and I've done it," she said, which includes softball, fencing, basketball, soccer, biking and rowing. All of that must explain why this slender, trim young woman does not weigh 500 pounds after cooking and dreaming about food, all day, every day.

Oddly, her first passion was sports, which led to her second one. As she explains, in college she thought she would end up being a professional rower, but during a semester in Italy and while training for an international rowing event, she worked out daily in a small gym just north of Rome.

"In my spare time I would go to local bodegas, local markets that featured tons of amazing local foods," she said. "I loved learning about food, and knew I would never be tired of it. Food is so intricate: it's history, culture, sociology, arts, music, science. I wanted to make food my living."

It's no surprise, then, Sosna's life was about to make a dramatic change: she fell in love with Italian cooking.

"I loved the food there, and it changed my life," she said. "I found I had a weird relationship with food; I became an athlete turned foodie."

After working in numerous D.C. restaurants — including with her mentor, Barton Seaver, when he was at Hook — she graduated from Gaithersburg's L'Academie de Cuisine.

"After working with Barton Seaver, I got why we eat local and seasonal," she said. "He was the connection."

Then she did a stint in the kitchens of the Inn at Little Washington, reinforcing her dedication to using fresh, local and sustainable ingredients.

When Sosna started at DC Central Kitchen as the executive sous chef for Fresh Start Catering, she was tasked with creating customized menus, and

obviously was so successful she was promoted to executive chef in just three months.

"Oh, Mom, you will not believe what just happened," she said about immediately notifying her mother of the promotion. "I stayed up all night writing ideas. That promotion changed my life."

As she wrote up a catering business plan for simple meals made from local and seasonal ingredients, she says she ended up spending months sourcing what she could get, writing training manuals and developing streamlined yet appealing menus with delicious, basic sandwiches, salads and a continental breakfast.

"Yes, we have only 15 items on our menu," she said, "but it is the best we can make. It is about the integrity of the products."

As for Fresh Start's work with schools — nine in all at this writing — Sosna oversees a daily menu program that makes food from scratch.

"It's all about from fresh to local to scratch cooking," she said. "We provide kids with real food."

As she talks about biking around town from one job or destination to the next, Sosna sums it up.

"It's not about ego; it's about doing what's right for these kids' health and building stronger communities," she said. "I want to bring people together with food. Feeding kids is the coolest thing in the world. They are the toughest critics in the world."

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