

BY GREG BONDAR

Wine of the month

With varying altitudes from 600 metres and with vineyards planted as high as 1,100 metres the climate of the Orange wine region, in the Central West of New South Wales, can best be described as cool with a winter-spring dominant rainfall. It is in this region that Philip Shaw selected in 1988 to make classic wines with elegance, depth and bright fruit. Philip Shaw Wines are sourced entirely from his 47 hectare Koomooloo Vineyard which produces a clearly defined varietal character that displays elegance, power and length.

At a recent restaurant tasting a wine that stood out in both style and quality was one of the wines from Philip's "Numbered Series" – the No. 89 Shiraz 2008 (POA).

The fruit for this wine came from two blocks of nearly 20-year-old vines with a yield of 3-4 tonnes per hectare. Interestingly it also contains 1 per cent of Viognier from his block 19 which was co-fermented with a batch of Shiraz. This has added complexity and complements the peppery character associated with this cool climate Shiraz.

This wine displays flavours which are vibrant coupled with the aroma of spicy fruit characters. Soft tannins combine with great length of flavour to give the wine a sense of youth that will repay cellaring. The wine was aged in barrels comprising 50 per cent new fine grain French and American oak for 18 months.

• www.philipshaw.com.au



Wine matching with chilli

Most people know that water is useless for putting out the flame of eating chillies; the only liquid that truly neutralises that blaze is alcohol.

While beer, particularly sweeter-styles, acts as an excellent foil for hot dishes, chillies and wine have always been a challenging combination for chefs and sommeliers.

When tasting wine we detect four distinct flavours with our tongue – sweet, sour, salty and bitter – whilst our nose is able to differentiate over 200 different aromas. The secret to pairing food, in this case the chilli element, with wine lies in the combination of sensory qualities on the tongue, in the mouth and on the nose. Humans are able to experience a vast array of flavours and nuances so we need to be cognisant of the flavour of the foods which can contradict or complement selections, when wine matching.

That said, there are plenty of options for matching wines with hot foods, especially if patrons are happy to drink red wines which display a good balance between acidity and tannin. Most wine lists have a range of domestic and foreign wines made from popular grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz, which are both ideal for chilli-based dishes. There is also a case for recommending lesser known grape varieties such as Malbec or Tempranillo, as they are also able to handle the heat.

For the white wine lover, a dry-style German or Alsace Riesling or even a sparkling wine will work, as the bubbles can help reduce the impact of the spice.

Many experts also advocate a dry Rose as a very viable option for pairing with chilli. **OH**

Sommelier profile: Kim Bickley

Kim Bickley is head sommelier for Luke Mangan's Glass Brasserie at the Hilton Sydney and is a committee member of Sommeliers Australia NSW.

Q: What makes a good sommelier?

A: Someone that loves wine and customer service. It also helps to be open minded; committed to working long hours, often with late nights, and happy in a job that requires almost continual study. And, in my opinion, the best of

the best are the sommeliers who are totally modest and not arrogant about the knowledge they have acquired; the ones that can have a good laugh, especially at themselves.

Q: How do you choose wines for the Hilton?

A: I choose the wines based on the overall quality of the wines, their value for money and the general balance of the wine list that I'm putting them on. Almost all wines are tasted before listing and blind-tasted if I'm looking at more than one sample to fill a certain category. If it's a wine I cannot taste, such as very expensive Bordeaux, Burgundy or rare wine, I look for opinions from people such as Jancis Robinson, Lisa Perrotti-Brown, Clive Coates and James Halliday.

Q: On average how often are you asked to recommend a wine?

A: I would say around 60-80 per cent of tables ask for a recommendation. Ten years ago the majority of people were asking "what's a sommelier?" rather than "Can I see the sommelier?"

Q: Should sommeliers always agree with the customer on their wine choice?

A: Yes and no. I'm a big believer in relaxed, friendly and hospitable service, and if someone wants to drink Shiraz with fish or put their \$500 bottle of Grand Cru Burgundy in an ice slush so it's almost at zero degrees when they drink it, that is their prerogative. On the other hand, if someone orders a wine that I think is not drinking at its best I will certainly suggest something more suitable.

Q: What are your favourite wines?

A: That is a tough question and one that is asked often. I love Riesling, whether is sweet, medium or dry; good Chardonnay and some of those interesting varietals. I also have a special place in my heart for DRC La Tache, as it was a bottle of this famous wine that ignited my passion to become a sommelier.

