



# a chat with

## SOMMELIER JEANNETTE CLARKE



### **T**ell me about how you work with the Chef to match food and wine.

At ezard all new dishes and wine matches are discussed and fine-tuned before going on the menu. The chef provides me with a sample of the new dish and I talk my way through the different ingredients and components. I open a few wine

samples and taste the dish with as many different wines as possible. If nothing jumps out at me as being a particularly good match, we repeat the exercise until we find a winner.

### **So does the Chef seek your input?**

I think it depends on the restaurant, but at ezard I believe my role is to provide wines that highlight the food, and not vice versa. So, in this case my answer would be no. With the exception of course being special events like wine dinners.

### **Do you think that restaurants should have a sommelier?**

Again it depends on the restaurant, but I think that all restaurants should have someone (e.g. manager/waiter/barman) who knows the wines on the list and can confidently provide accurate advice to customers. It doesn't necessarily have to be a sommelier. That said, I think fine dining restaurants should have a dedicated sommelier.

### **There is a trend for customers to have sommeliers assist so on average how often are you asked to recommend a wine?**

Many times in any given night. I'd say maybe a third of our diners prefer to ask advice before making a choice of wine for their meal.

### **How do you choose your wines for the ezard Cellar?**

I choose wines with a number of factors taken into account. First, with the food in mind. Fortunately ezard has a great range of dishes (from very light and delicate to rich and strongly flavoured) that accommodate many different styles of wine so I have wonderful scope to work with. Secondly, the list needs to have balance at all times - the aim is for a good mix of the eclectic and obscure with more recognizable and 'safe' options. Thirdly, I like to support smaller and more boutique styled wineries and producers - many of whom follow organic and minimal-intervention grape growing and winemaking principals. Ultimately, wine quality is the deciding factor of whether a wine makes it onto the list or not.

### **As a Sommelier do you agree that the customer is always right (with the wine choice)?**

No, certainly not. Dining out is many things to many people. Some like to experiment and try new wines and matches allowing the sommelier to have some fun and suggest interesting or lesser known wines to best compliment their meal. Others however prefer to enjoy their meal with a favourite bottle of wine, one they already know and love, whether it suits the food or not. In these cases the sommelier should have enough savvy to realise that steering them in a direction of a different wine that will better suit their food will probably not enhance their dining experience.

### **So what then makes a good sommelier?**

I think the answer to this is a summary of what I've already said. A good sommelier is in tune with the food that the restaurant serves and knows how to create a link between the food and the wines on the list. An important aspect of what makes a great sommelier is a connection with the customer - understanding his/her needs and recommending accordingly.

### **What style and from which regions are some of your favourite wines?**

Oh dear, a hard question! A big lover of Italian wines such as whites from Campania and Friuli, reds from Piedmont, Mt Etna and Tuscany. If I'd had to choose only one country to drink from ever again it would be Italy. France would be next, especially Chenin Blanc from the Loire Valley and Burgundian whites and reds. Oh, and I could easily drink German Riesling every day for the rest of my life as well. As for Aussie wines the cooler climate Shiraz (Canberra, Grampians), some Yarra Valley Chardonnays and aged Hunter Valley Semillon would be my favourites.

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# Racine AT LA COLLINE – FRENCH AND DRAMATIC

Any week-end is a great time to experience new destinations and flavours and it was the NSW Central West region that offered challenges in both – the town of Orange and the restaurant Racine (at La Colline Wines).

For those interested in history the word 'racine' has a number of meanings but perhaps the best know is

that of the French dramatist and satirist Jean Racine born (Jean-Baptiste Racine) in 1639 in the former Picardy province in northern France. Racine was the greatest tragedian of the French classical period and his plays displayed his mastery of the dodecasyllabic alexandrine. The other common meaning of 'racine' in a culinary sense is that it is a root, part of a plant growing underground which anchors the plant and absorbs water and nutrients. It was this latter meaning that caught the eye of Chef Shaun Arantz who, with his wife Willa, run and own Racine Restaurant in the wine regions of Orange.

Set amongst the beautiful vines of La Colline (French for 'The Hill') with sensational views, Racine Restaurant is a spectacular venue for anyone interested in elegant fine dining. The menu is both innovative and creative with a focus on the best local produce which becomes evident in almost every serving.

At dinner my wife Lynne and our Doctor colleague Joe and his wife Margaret were greeted with warmth and courtesy and it was hard not to be impressed with both the



country décor and the simplicity of style – very chic.

We all ordered a different entrée to experience the creative style of Shaun's efforts and we were not disappointed with either the country terrine or the beef tartare. For the mains I savoured the pork belly whilst others swooned over the whole pressed duck, venison loin and slow cooked snapper fillet. As for deserts we were amazed at both the quality and finesse of the servings but for me

the apple mille feuille was truly outstanding.

Interestingly, the Racine Kitchen has a range of patisserie products made in the Kitchen at Racine and sold to various outlets in Orange and include bread, baguette's, croissants, sweet and savoury tarts, brownies, banana bread and specialty baked goods on request.

So, if you are after that memorable dining experience then you must head for Shaun Arantz's Racine Restaurant in Orange with sensational rural views across the vineyard, valley and the lights of Orange. Racine Restaurant encapsulates the best of Orange.

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