

## Culinary Chicks



# Brenda Audino, Twin Liquors

## A Miracle Worker Quietly Bringing Your Favorite Wines to Austin

Story by Robert Calvert  
Photos Courtesy of Brenda Audino

wineries. It was a fun thing to do, and I got to know the people and the wine. Then I got married and ended up in Oregon. We lived a mile from Ponzi Vineyards - I never really knew Pinot Noir before that. We started visiting Oregon wineries. And I took a wine appreciation class. We would visit vineyards and pick grapes and even do sugar testing. At that point, I knew I was going to do something in the wine industry sooner or later."

It was later. Audino and her husband lived in various places around the country for about 10 years before arriving in Austin. "We moved here from Wisconsin. I started taking a sommelier course here, and I visited retailers. After about a year I met some Twin folks. I talked to David Jabour [Twin's President], and I was hired as an associate for one of Twin's retail stores." Before long, Audino was promoted to manage the store at 620 and 2222.

Audino continued her studies and became a Certified Sommelier. "When I completed my sommelier degree, I took a two-month sabbatical to France. It was a reward for finishing. In France I visited each region for a week at a time, walking the vineyards." On returning from her sabbatical, Audino was promoted again - to wine manager, supervising Twin's wine programs.

"I continued with my studies and completed the Certified Wine Specialist program. I'm about halfway through the two-year program for the Wine and Spirits Education Trust diploma now."

Audino emphasizes the benefits of education for her colleagues at Twin's 53 stores, too. "I'm a huge proponent of education. It builds enthusiasm and passion. I've created a new eight-week course for our associates. After the course there's a little exam, and they'll get the Twin Liquor Wine Authority Certificate."

A wine expert's work is never done. Audino and her husband generally have wine with dinner, though not on days when the Wine Committee has met. Audino takes notes on the wines. "I think wine shows better with food. For example, when you're tasting wine and you notice acidity, it might not be the right wine just to drink, but when you have the wine with food, the acidity brightens up the food."

"Riesling, for example. It's a little sweet. But have it with spicy food - Asian food, for example - the sweetness makes the heat seem less intense."



"I'd like to bring it back to wineries where I started, in the Northwest: The Cellarmaster's Riesling from Columbia Winery in Woodinville, Washington, and the Pinot Noir from A to Z Wineworks in Newberg, Oregon."

We drove to our wine store and found both Audino's picks on the shelf - another miracle of the marketplace.

The **2006 Columbia Winery Cellarmaster's Riesling** (\$10) was a brilliant silvery color and had an inviting floral bouquet with a hint of spices. Its delicate sweetness was balanced by generous fruit - Red Delicious apples, pineapple, peaches, white nectarines. Good acidity and subtle mineral elements make it perfect to enjoy on its own or over dinner. Rieslings, including this one, tend to have a little sweetness, and Audino recommends them to accompany spicy Asian food. We enjoyed the Cellarmaster's Riesling with a meal of spinach-cheese ravioli under a very light butter-oil sauce dusted with grated Parmigiano, which also proved to be a delightful pairing.

A to Z Winery used grapes from 16 vineyards to produce its **2006 A to Z Oregon Pinot Noir** (\$18.) It was a luminous ruby color, and presented subtle fragrances of dark berries and spices. The fruity, uplifting flavor evoked memories of grapes and crunchy apples, with a hint of pepper and something mysterious that we identified as violets or lavender. Altogether this was a subtle, well-balanced, mouth-filling wine with good acidity for food. We enjoyed it over dinner - salmon prepared with dill.



**IT'S A MIRACLE OF THE MARKETPLACE.** YOU decide to have a bottle of your favorite wine with dinner. You drive to the wine store. The wine you want is on the shelf. Winemakers around the world make tens of thousands of wines each year. Who sees to it that of all the world's wines, the one *you* want is at *your* store just when you want it? Who exactly makes this miracle happen?

Brenda Audino does. She is wine manager of Twin Liquors, our local chain of wine and spirits stores. It's Audino who figures out which wines Twin customers are likely to want and makes sure that they are on Twin's shelves at the appointed moment. We invited Audino to join us for coffee recently to tell us how she does it.

"We have a Wine Committee," Audino explains. "I get together with a couple of seasoned managers every second Wednesday to taste new wines and new vintages." They must review a lot of wines. "We generally go through about 200 wines at each meeting," she says. "We don't drink the wine, of course, but you do get palate fatigue."

"It's really not pleasant," Audino admits. "After a while, your teeth hurt, your tongue hurts. And then when you have a wine that isn't good - maybe a tainted bottle or wine from a manipulative winemaker..." She doesn't elaborate, but one senses that Audino is a little impatient with badly-made wine.

It takes training and experience to do Audino's job. Today she has both, but didn't start out planning to be a wine expert.

## Audino's Wine Journey

Wine was Brenda Audino's hobby long before it became her business. "I was living in Bellevue and Seattle," she says. "A group of us would go to see

## Audino's Picks

Could Audino suggest a couple of wines for *austinwoman* readers to try?

## Summing Up

Audino says wine should be "an exciting journey."

"Try new wines," she advises. "You may like them or dislike them, but trying them will broaden your experience. And above all, have fun. Don't let wine intimidate you. Remember: Whatever wine you like is the right wine for you."

Thanks to Brenda Audino, Austin's miracle worker, we know that we will find the wines we like on the shelf. ★

### MORE INFO

All wines available at Twin Liquors. For store locations visit [www.twinliquors.com](http://www.twinliquors.com)

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## Wine Finds

### A Quest for Wine that Tastes Good and Doesn't Cost Too Much – Quixotic?

Story by Robert Calvert

**F**RUGAL. THAT'S WHAT WE ARE: thrifty, parsimonious, tight-fisted, penny-wise, even stingy. We love drinking posh potions as much as anyone, but we can't afford to tinkle the good stuff every day.

So what are we going to have with dinner? Can we find something tasty but not too pricey – \$12 or less for a nice bottle? Yes, we can.

We set out to locate some reasonably priced wines that we didn't have to save for a special occasion. We found quite a few pleasing bottles selling at realistic prices. Here are quick notes on several that passed our taste test with flying colors and didn't break the bank.

### Sparkling

Cava is sparkling wine that comes from Catalunya in the northeast part of Spain. About 95% of it is produced around the town of San Sadurn de Noya. It is made from unfamiliar Spanish varietals called Macabeo, Parellada, and Xarel-lo – plus Chardonnay and the native variety Subi-

Can we find something tasty but not too pricey – \$12 or less for a nice bottle? Yes, we can.

rat (also called Malvasia.) Although it is bubbly like Champagne, Cava's flavors are more rustic than those of its French counterpart.

The two best-known Cava companies are Cordoniu and Freixenet, both family-owned. Cordoniu is owned by the Raventós family,

descendants of José Raventós, who was the first to make Cava. Freixenet is owned by the Ferrer family, which also owns Segura Viudas.

We love the **Segura Viudas Brut Reserva Cava** (\$10). We drink it often, especially in warmer weather. It's light and refreshing, with a yeasty bouquet and pleasant acidity that make it good with food. And Segura Viudas makes a range of Cavas – including their delightful rosé. They're all quite reasonably priced.

### White

La Rioja lies in north-central Spain about an hour south of the coast. The region extends along the Ebro River and gets its name from a tributary of the Ebro called the Oja – Rio Oja.

Best known for their excellent red wines, wineries in Rioja also make *white* wines. In general, white Riojas are made from the Viura grape,

which elsewhere in Spain is called Macabeo. (Macabeo is one of the three principal grapes in Cava.)

Bodegas Montecillo's **2005 Montecillo Blanco** (\$9) is a light, fruity, pleasant wine that is great for summertime quaffing. There is a hint of yeast and minerals in the refreshing



"Wines for Frugal Drinkers."

bouquet. Fruitiness in its flavor is pronounced enough that the wine almost seems sweet, but it has good acidity, and pairs very well with food. It's great with seafood or pasta with butter-sage sauce made with fresh sage from the garden. It also paired very nicely on a recent evening with a Basque sheep's-milk cheese. We have been drinking the 2005 vintage; the 2006 should be in stores very soon.

We don't see much Chenin Blanc wine in the U.S. these days, but in South Africa, it is very popular.

The **2005 Kanu Chenin Blanc** (\$10) was a good example of what the South Africans can do with this grape. Actually, this wine is only 90% Chenin Blanc. The winemaker has added a touch of Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay to spice it up. Very light in color – almost frosty white – it offered a lovely bouquet of minerals and yeast, possibly augmented by whiffs of melon and spices. Its flavor was round and fruity with hints of pears and citrus. It had great body and a pleasant finish. Kanu says this wine is perfect for picnics, and recommends enjoying it with salads, char-grilled artichokes in olive oil or platters of ripe summer fruit. We sampled the 2005 Kanu. The 2006 should be in stores very soon.

What about the unusual name? According to the winery, the name Kanu came from a "mythical bird of promise." Supposedly, when the bird

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appeared, "all those who fell under its shadow would be blessed with a bountiful harvest."

If you are looking for a light, pleasant, fruity, low-alcohol wine to sip on spring and summer afternoons, you should give Vinho Verde from Portugal a try.

We have been enjoying the **Casal-Garcia Vinho Verde** (\$8) for several years. It is very light in color, and has a round, grapey bouquet. Naturally effervescent, it tastes tart, fruity, and lemony, and has only 10.5% alcohol.

## Red

Puglia is one of the most important Italian wine regions. Located at the bottom of the Italian boot, it includes the heel, the Salento Peninsula. Puglia has become famous for producing wines from the Primitivo grape, closely related to our beloved Zinfandel, but the Negroamaro grape is more widely planted in the area.

We enjoyed a bottle of **2005 Vecchio Greppo Rosso del Salento IGT** (\$10) recently. The IGT in the name means it is "typical" of the wines of the region. Made from 90% Negroamaro and 10% Malvasia Nera, the Rosso was a dark, rich color, and had an interesting bouquet in which we identified fragrances of pepper, tobacco, blood oranges and possibly violets. It was full and fruity in flavor, with hints of pomegranate and pepper. This is a great wine to serve with Italian food. It pairs well with mild versions of chili, too.

## So Many Wines, So Little Time

Our search turned up quite a few nice wines selling at reasonable prices in one or more local stores. We may have slighted red wines in our survey, but after all, summer is coming. Note that prices vary. If you look hard, you probably can find better deals than we did. Also, as new vintages begin to arrive, wine stores often put the wine already in stock on *sale*. Getting a great price is half the fun.

The wines we found by no means exhaust the possibilities. Amazing bargains are out there waiting to be discovered. The manager at your favorite wine shop can suggest some if you ask. Don't be shy. We weren't.

*We're always on the lookout for good wines that don't cost too much. Send email if you have favorites of your own: [RBCalvert@austin.rr.com](mailto:RBCalvert@austin.rr.com). ★*

## WINE FINDER

The wines discussed in this article are readily available at wine stores around town, including those listed below.

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## Teresa Wilson, Aquarelle Restaurant Français

There's always laughter  
in the dining room as  
this unlikely restaurateur  
brings good spirits  
to the business.

Story by Robert Calvert  
Photos Courtesy of Teresa Wilson



**N**INETY-THREE PEOPLE ARE COMING to your house for a sit-down dinner in a couple of hours. They all want to eat different things. They'll probably want to have 40 different wines with their meals. And they're going to be *very picky* about your food.

A horrible nightmare? It would be for most of us, but it's just an average day for anyone in the restaurant business. With all the storm and stress, it's not surprising that many restaurateurs say managing people is the toughest part of their business. Teresa Wilson agrees. She says her greatest challenge is "keeping harmony among the staff." People have different needs, she explains. "It's like a big family. The kitchen

"At first, I made frozen dinners," Wilson confesses. "Then I started getting recipes out - meatballs with mushroom sauce and pizza." Her mother is of Mexican extraction, and before long, Mom had taught Teresa to make Mexican food from scratch, including homemade tortillas. Wilson's oldest brother had a part-time job, and she soon found herself whipping up enchiladas, chiles rellenos, and fideo for her siblings at all hours. It didn't occur to her to pursue a career in the food industry, however. "I had a scholarship at UT in chemical engineering," she says. "But I had a young child, and the schedule in chemical engineering wasn't flexible. I couldn't be a single mom while taking classes. So I had to drop out."

## UPS AND DOWNS

RUNNING A RESTAURANT IS AN EMOTIONAL BUSINESS. DOES ANYTHING AT WORK MAKE TERESA WILSON MAD?

"Inconsistency of quality. If I ask someone to do something a certain way and they just don't do it, that makes me mad."

SAD?

"When people don't honor their reservations - and don't call!"

GLAD?

"It makes me glad to hear laughter in the dining room."

staff - they spent a lot of money to go to cooking school, and they don't make a lot of money. You have to fulfill your obligation to provide full-time work. You want to keep good employees."

Wilson runs Aquarelle Restaurant Français, one of Austin's finest dining establishments. Located in a restored 1900's house on downtown's Rio Grande Street, Aquarelle has garnered a reputation as a great place to enjoy an elegant meal in the grand style. And that reputation starts at the top. Wilson is an attractive woman with a healthy dose of poise and loads of charm, which must come in handy when tempers flare in the hot kitchen or customers ask for the really, really impossible. She seems like a natural for her job, but she never planned to run a restaurant.

Growing up, Wilson's mom had her hands full raising five active children - three boys and two girls - and "at a certain point" she told little Teresa that it was time for her to start helping out in the kitchen.

(Wilson returned to school and graduated 13 years later with a degree in Middle Eastern studies.)

Then came her brother's diving accident. "I started working nights so I could help at home." At first she worked in a nightclub, then took a job at Basil's, an Italian fine-dining restaurant. "I started as bus girl and ended up as manager," she says. Wilson worked "front of house" but eventually got into the kitchen side of the business when she began managing Basil's catering operations. After a while she also "started filling-in in the kitchen when folks were on vacation." Basil's nurtured several people who later reached high places in the Austin food world. Among them was Robert Brady, who partnered with Wilson to found Aquarelle in 2000.

Neither Wilson nor Brady had a French background. Why open a French restaurant in Texas? "We had been traveling in France and visited many restaurants there," explains Wilson. "We admired the French sense

See TERESA WILSON on page 74



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Teresa Wilson and Chef Jacques Richard of Aquarelle Restaurant.

TERESA WILSON from page 73 of professionalism and their attitude of respect for the food. We wanted to have that in our own place. Also, there was no competition here for a French restaurant.” Wilson and Brady evidently were on to something. Austin diners have made Aquarelle a signal success. The restaurant is particularly popular with wine enthusiasts, who like to arrange private wine lunches and dinners there.

Wilson says that getting fresh ingredients is a key to Aquarelle’s culinary achievements.

“We use whatever we can that’s local – turnips and potatoes, for example. We go to get produce at the Farmers’ Market. You can’t always get everything locally, though. Even in France they use ingredients from all over.” At present, Aquarelle’s menu includes duck, chicken and rabbit from local farms, and lamb, which they can’t find locally yet. It’s a little unusual to see rabbit on a menu in the United States, but Wilson says it has proved popular with her patrons. Traditional French fare like snails with artichokes in a red-

wine reduction are also on the list. The menu changes seasonally to take advantage of fresh ingredients available locally.

Robert Brady left Aquarelle last year, and Chef Jacques Richard, a native of France, is now managing the kitchen. Teresa handles front of house and runs the newly remodeled wine bar. What are Wilson’s plans for the future? “I’d like to do a Mexican restaurant someday,” she says. “Something a little more casual than Aquarelle, I think.” And that choice is partly to do with economics. “People cut back on fine dining when the economy is slow, but they’re not going to stop eating Mexican food. I’d like to serve some specialties from the interior – from Veracruz, one of my favorite places. We’ll have tequila, rum, and beer instead of a long wine list.” ★

## MORE INFO

**Aquarelle Restaurant Français**  
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