

## joe's brew notes



## Women of Beer: Home Brewers

Men have dominated the world of beer almost from its start as drinkers, home-brewers, and professional brewers. With the craft-beer flavor revolution, women's interest has increased. Now more and more women view beer as a beverage of choice, home brewing as fun, and the brewing industry as an exciting, new career opportunity. With that in mind I spoke with three female home brewers, Karen McSwain, Rebekah Abrams, and Molly Naffke, about their home-brewing story.

I met all three at different times and places – Karen at an interview with Asheville's home brew club, MALT (she's president), Rebekah at the recent Brew-Off festival (she made a great chili-flavored beer), and Molly at Greenman Brewing (she's a bar tender there). As you would expect all three have different starts but a central theme of flavor and a desire to replicate, improve, and create new taste treats for themselves and their friends.

Born and raised in Connecticut Karen attended college in Oregon (in part because of its beer culture) and came back east to complete her Horticulture and Sustainable Agricultural degree at Iowa State and to accept a job at Warren Wilson College. Her beer history started with her father. He is a terrific cook who created meals of marvelous flavors. Although his favorite beer at the time was a typical American pilsner, Karen desired more savory beers. An acknowledged "foody" she reasoned, "I eat delicious food, why not drink delicious beer?"

Karen brewed, mostly without success, with a beer kit (a Grandmother's gift). New to Asheville and with an interest in beer, she joined MALT primarily to meet people. From the first meeting her beer knowledge grew along with her collection of brewing equipment and friends. With the help and support of other members, she quickly moved from extract brewing to all-grain, from questionable to excellent quality beer and, in the process, became a recognized beer judge. When she volunteered for a MALT project her enthusiasm and organizational skills were revealed and she was elected president.

Recently married she and husband Joel (also a home brewer) started brewing together against the advice of fellow malt members. Normally, married couples do not brew well together (too many chefs in the kitchen) but she and Joel are successful because they have different strengths; Karen tends to be more creative with recipes while Joel tends to keep more precise records of recipes and brew logs. They also take turns being "head chef."

What's ahead for this "Foody" who started brewing to be able to drink tasty beer, joined MALT to meet people, was

elected its president, and brews beer with her husband against all odds? Simple. Learn more about brewing and enjoy the results.

Rebekah was born and raised in Virginia and graduated from Portsmouth College in Raleigh, NC with a Bachelor of Science degree. Not satisfied with her career path after college and with a family history of baking and cooking, she attended Johnson and Wales culinary school. Just over a year later Rebekah had found a new career and her first kitchen in a Charleston, SC restaurant. She is a pastry chef and has been a baking professional for the past 10 years. She moved to Asheville about 8 years ago.

At the age of 25 she drank her first beer, a Bud Light. Not overly impressed with the flavor, but open-minded, her move to Asheville introduced the world of craft beer with its myriad flavors and aromas. Rebekah sampled and enjoyed the many styles produced by our local breweries and, about 3 years ago, decided to brew beer herself. Since she experiments with flavors and methods to make her pastry creations, "Why not do the same with beer?"

She started brewing with a kit purchased from Hops and Vines (hopsandvines.net), made a tasty IPA, and was hooked. The beer she entered in the recent Brew-Off competition was a collaborative effort.

From the start, she considered using chilies in a beer. Chili peppers can be smoky, hot, or have a chili flavor (not smoky, not hot) and could add an interesting flavor and aroma profile to a beer. A friend suggested she make a brown-ale style, another a name, and Down Town Chili Brown was born. She nailed it. The beer had the smoky aroma and flavor of chilis and ended with a distinct chili bite. Although not for the faint of heart, the beer is excellent alone but probably best paired with food.

As for the future, Rebekah wants to learn about obscure styles, move into all-grain brewing, and learn to keg. Her plan is to intern with a local brewery to learn more about brewing on a large scale and (possibly) become a professional brewer. With her science background, culinary skills, flavor curiosity and knowledge, and her brewing passion, she could become one very interesting, professional brewer.

Molly was born and raised in Florida, studied forensic psychology, and traveled extensively. She has a self-proclaimed "lust for life" and visited Asheville several times in her travels. When her parents moved



Karen McSwain



Rebekah Abrams



Molly Naffke

BY JOE ZINICH

here, she decided to move as well.

She considers Asheville's craft beer culture and variety of beer flavors to be superior to those she experienced in Florida and, soon after she arrived, Molly bought a beer kit from Hops and Vines and a copy of Charlie Papazian's book *Joy of Home Brewing*. She discovered that with knowledge, the right equipment and ingredients, and some work, she could make the styles she likes when she wants them. The world of brewing and beer had become her oyster.

She began brewing with malt extract and steeping grains (adds flavor subtleties) but quickly moved to all-grain. The more she brewed the more she believed she could make and improve on the beer flavors she liked or create

new ones. Molly had found her passion and a career direction — brewing. Call it luck, fate, or the alignment of the stars, soon after that realization she was hired as a bar tender at Green Man Brewing. She jumped at the opportunity to get started in the industry that so excited her.

To other women who think brewing could be a career path, she suggests you take action. Enthusiastic women brewers are welcomed in the industry, fellow brewers willingly share their knowledge and methods, and everyone works hard to further their art. Molly plans to become a professional brewer. With her passion for beer and brewing, her eagerness to learn, and her focus, no doubt she'll reach her goal.

If you are at a MALT meeting, a competition, or at Greenman and get a chance to talk beer with these ladies, do. Oh, and if you are lucky enough to sample one of their beers, smile, say "Yes, thank you," hold out your glass, and enjoy.



For eight years, Joe Zinich has been taking a self-guided, high-intensity tour of the Asheville beer scene. Contact him at: [jjinich@bellsouth.net](mailto:jjinich@bellsouth.net).

### Brewgrass, A Festival in Transition

For those from the Asheville area who were frustrated with the Brewgrass ticket-order process and disappointed at not getting tickets (like I was), please consider these thoughts. Brewgrass is evolving from its start as an ambassador for craft beer to an ambassador for Beer City USA.

We local beer lovers should embrace this change. If ticket sales went 100% to "foreign" beer drinkers, I would be happy for the Asheville beer community, our breweries, our hotels, and our restaurants. Visitors enliven our beer scene, enhance our reputation as "Beer City", and provide significant financial support to all our local businesses.

I will continue to attempt to buy tickets (starting day 2) and brag about Brewgrass even if I don't score a ticket. Besides, we have the Beer City Festival, an excellent event, and tickets can be purchased at, and only at, our local Breweries and Barley's. It is, in essence, a locals-only event that I have enjoyed these past two years. It is well organized by the Asheville Brewer's Alliance with help from the people who manage Brewgrass.

For those who aren't aware of the event or its history, Brewgrass is a wildly successful festival that celebrates the music of the mountains and its craft beers with part of the proceeds donated to Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Western North Carolina. The festival started about 14 years ago by the owners of Barley's who were working very hard to introduce craft beer to the Asheville area. Early festivals were not well attended; now it draws larger and larger crowds from the area, the region, the US, and foreign countries.

As Asheville's beer scene and reputation grows, thanks in part to Brewgrass, demand for Brewgrass tickets will continue to grow dramatically. For the last 5 years Brewgrass has sold out at an increasingly earlier time. Last year tickets were scooped up in 21 hours (6 months before the event); this year ticket demand slowed their website to a crawl. Buyers were on-line for 4 to 5 hours to get tickets and many did not succeed. As you can imagine wall-posts on Facebook bluntly reflected the frustration and disappointment felt by many. The people that run Brewgrass vowed to correct the ordering process next year and I believe they will. This is one of the best-produced festivals I attend and I celebrate their success and the benefits Brewgrass brings to the city of Asheville.

# joe's brew notes



## Women of Beer: Asheville Beer (City) Divas

It's no surprise in a city with Asheville's rich beer culture and passionate beer-community that a beer-inspired social club of, by, and for women would soon form. A group of women who gather to learn the ABC's of beer and chat in an atmosphere which encourages them to "sit, sip, and relax" — the Asheville Beer (City) Divas.

The word diva (literally goddess) was introduced in the late 19th century in reference to distinguished female opera singers, the prima donna (principal woman). Language evolves and the term 'diva' expanded to include respected, successful, female performers in many arenas but is now also used disparagingly for someone who acts overly entitled. Diva, no matter its interpretation, is a word that resonates with women.

Asheville's beer-community divas Julie Atallah, Caroline Forsman, Anne Fitten Glenn, and Mary Eliza L McCrae are known and highly regarded beer enthusiasts who met at various places on a regular basis to talk beer and life while they relaxed



From left Divas Lexi Close, Mary Eliza L McCrae, and Stacey Sparks.

BY JOE ZINICH

with a favorite brew. After a time, they believed other women might like to do the same and the Asheville Beer City Divas was formed. Although the word City has been dropped from official communications, it's used in personal conversa-

tions to reflect Asheville's Beer City title.

From the start the purpose of the A.B. Divas is for women to "meet up" for an enjoyable night out, discuss and learn about beer (if interested), or just socialize. Many members are homebrewers and also brew together; their tasty Divalicious Pale Ale was entered in the recent Just Economics Brew-Off competition. Some members just want to learn more about beer to improve their knowledge or to be able to speak fluently about beer with their friends and relatives. Others have little interest in beer but want to hang out with other women. No matter, everyone is welcomed.

I was issued a special Guest-Diva pass for the September "meet up" at Barley's Asheville and had a great evening that included beer samples, pizza, and engaging conversation. I met and spoke with, among others, Mary Eliza McCrae, Lexi Close, Tanya Fletcher, and Stacey Sparks. Lexi is a passionate home-brewer (member of the State of Franklin Homebrewers Club) and travels from Johnson City for almost every meeting to talk beer. Tanya, a first-timer who works for a brewery- and pub-directory publishing company, wants to meet and "talk beer talk" with knowledgeable people.



Stacey drinks mostly wine and makes almost every meeting for the camaraderie and relaxed atmosphere.

While there I recognized how many accomplished women, both in beer and in life, attended. They included brewers, writers, public speakers, marketers, managers, and business owners. All were friendly and willing to share their knowledge and history. The Divas are a great networking opportunity for any woman who may want to make a career change in, into, or outside the beer industry.

If you are a woman who wants to sit, sip, and relax with a brew and talk about beer, life, and whatever else comes to mind, join the Asheville Beer Divas and enjoy the convivial atmosphere and camaraderie. The Asheville Beer Divas meet the first Tuesday of every month. Find them on Facebook or email [avlbeerdivas@gmail.com](mailto:avlbeerdivas@gmail.com) for more information.

### Asheville Beer Divas — The Founders

Julie Atallah is co-owner of one of the top 5 beer stores in the world. She is also a graphic designer with over fifteen years experience in creative marketing, design, and print media.

Caroline Forsman is the General Manager of the Thirsty Monk and the event planner and buyer for both the downtown and south locations.

Anne Fitten Glenn writes about beer for the Mountain Xpress and her Brewgasm blog. Also look for her "Edgy Momma" articles for the Xpress and blog with the same name.

Mary Eliza L McCrae is craft-beer-brand manager for Budweiser of Asheville.

### Brew News

**Greenman Brewing** has a Hopfest-Tap-Takeover on Saturday, October 1 from 2 p.m. until closing with 14 hoppy beers made by both the Greenman and local home brewers. Enjoy a White IPA, Red IPA, Black IPA, single hop pale ales, imperial pilsner and imperial ESB, hoppy black saison, and many more. Free admission and \$2 Lil-Greenie half-pints all day long.

**Pisgah Brewing** releases LEAF Amber October 13 at the Thirsty Monk Downtown's Pint Night. A portion of the proceeds supports LEAF, a local non-profit organization, which builds community and enriches lives, locally and globally, through the Arts with a variety of programs. On October 27 Pisgah hosts a collaboration event with the Black Mountain Tailgate Market non-profit that facilitated the growth of the local food movement in the Swannanoa Valley for over 16 years. The tailgate market will benefit from the proceeds.

Next day join Pisgah at the **Thirsty Monk South** for a flight night that features a firkin of Vortex II, a savory Russian Imperial stout. Find more information at [pisgahbrewing.com](http://pisgahbrewing.com).

The former sales marketing director for Highland Brewing now teaches local Budweiser salespeople about craft beer as well as ordering, buying, and advertising.

### October Events at The Weinhaus

#### Wednesday, October 5

Wine dinner at Chef Mo's Restaurant. Chef Mauricio Abreu did a lovely job creating a menu for our Burgundy tasting last spring. We are thrilled to return to enjoy more of his cuisine. This time we will present a variety of wines to pair with Chef Mo's five course feast. Join us in his private dining room for a fun filled evening in South Asheville. The time is 7 p.m. Price: \$65 all inclusive. Please call the Weinhaus for reservations at (828) 254-6453.

#### Friday, October 28

Monstrous Malbecs. Join us for a ghoulish evening. We will lurk through the cellars of the producers of one of the darkest of grape varieties. We will taste some classic French examples, as well as the popular Argentine expressions of the grape. The wine will be accompanied by light hors d'ouvres. The price is \$10. Time is 5:30-7:30 p.m. Held at the Weinhaus, 86 Patton, Ave. Asheville.

**The Weinhaus, 86 Patton Avenue  
Asheville, NC (828) 254-6453**

## Great values & styles

### FREE Wine Tastings on Saturdays from 2 to 5 p.m.

Tasting wine is not only fun, but it presents a chance to learn about wine and what it is about a particular wine that you like, or don't like. You can sip while you shop. Find some new favorites — try it before you buy it. We will usually have a few whites and a few reds open, with the occasional guest speaker. Please stop by!

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## DECEMBER 2011 BREW NEWS

Winter is a wonderful season for Asheville beer enthusiasts. Our breweries treat us to a bunch of outstanding seasonal brews and the Winter Warmer Beer Festival returns.

**Asheville Brewing** recently released their Moog Filtered Ale and their (Warren Haynes) Christmas Jam Ale. Parts of the proceeds from each benefit the Moog Foundation and Habitat for Humanity respectively.

On Monday, December 5, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., **Bruisin' Ales** will conduct a special tasting for the WNC launch of San Francisco's award-winning 21st Amendment Brewing beer. Also, December 23 is Bruisin's 5th anniversary. Happy Anniversary – "live long and prosper"!

**Green Man** has released their new Black Forest Stout and, in January, will re-release their Russian Imperial Stout on draught and in their new 750ml bottles. Their sister organization the Next Generation Beer Co. now distributes beers from Nantahala Brewing in Bryson City, Olde Hickory in Hickory, and Buchi kombucha brewed in Asheville.

**Highland Brewing** has released a new seasonal "Thunderstruck Coffee Porter" using Dynamite Roasting Company beans and has re-released their iconic Cold Mountain.

**Pisgah Brewing** has re-released their Valdez coffee stout made with local Asheville Coffee Roasters' coffee beans; look for their San Francisco Lager and Doppelbock as well. Join Pisgah at the French Broad Chocolate Shop (South Lexington Avenue, Asheville) on Thursday, December 15 for a special pairing of Valdez with freshly made Valdez truffles. Mingle, listen to live music and enjoy complimentary tastes of the beer and

truffles (while they last). A pint and 2 truffles can be purchased for \$6. Check out either website for more information.

**Wedge Brewing** releases their scrumptious raspberry-flavored Imperial Stout on December 9.

The 5th annual **Winter Warmer** is scheduled for January 21, 2012 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Asheville Civic Center's exhibition hall. Your ticket gets you samples from 20+ regional craft breweries, locally catered food, music and this year plans are in place to serve some special beers from Deschutes Brewery, Bend OR. Deschutes is the US's 5th largest craft brewery and their beers are not distributed on the east coast. Also, expect an increase the number of food stations and "relief" stations; both were a bit overwhelmed last year (growing pains). Tickets are on sale now for \$39/person with some of the proceeds benefitting River Link's greenway expansion on the French Broad River. For more information and to purchase tickets visit [brewscruise.com/beerfest](http://brewscruise.com/beerfest).

**The Thirsty Monk South** has a team trivia contest that began in November, and takes place every Tuesday through February 7, 2012. The two teams with the most accumulated points will faceoff for a New Belgium Beach Cruiser.

On December 5, celebrate 21st Amendment Day (repeal of prohibition) at **Thirsty Monk Downtown** with the WNC debut of 21st Amendment Brewery's Back in Black and Brew Free or Die on draft. On December 8, Sierra Nevada's head brewer Terence Sullivan will be at the downtown location with 4+ Sierra beers on tap. Visit both locations December 21 for a Thirsty Monk Pint Night that features special holiday glasses.

## Women of Beer – Brewing Professionals

BY JOE ZINICH

As the third article in the "Women of Beer" series, this one is focused on women directly involved in beer production. The first in July 2011 was about Women Homebrewers and the second in October 2011 was about Asheville Beer Divas, a beer-inspired women's social club. All are written based on the premise the craft-beer flavor revolution increased women's interest in beer as a beverage of choice and the beer industry as an exciting career opportunity.

This article will feature Erica Nelson, the leader of Highland Brewing's quality assurance and quality control department, and Denise



Erica Nelson is the leader of Highland Brewing's Quality programs.

Jones, brewmaster at Moylan's Brewery and Restaurant in Novato, CA.

But first, as a review, brewing beer is the conversion, in a water base, of starch into sugar and the sugar into a drinkable liquid that contains alcohol and carbon dioxide. It becomes a more complicated process when the word "flavorful" is substituted for "drinkable". A flavorful beer requires the knowledge of a scientist and the soul of an artist; brewing it again and again requires experience and attention-to-detail.

To produce a tasty beer the brewer decides on its desired flavor, aroma, body, color, and alcohol content, and then chooses the starch base (any combination of various malted grains), bittering agents (hops and/or spices) and their addition times, yeast strain (to transform the sugar), and fermentation conditions (so the yeast can work effectively) to create a recipe. The brewer then sanitizes all the equipment (multiple brewing vessels and packaging containers) to kill bacteria (they like sugar too and ruin flavor), addresses the pH (acid/alkaline balance) and mineral content of the water (95% of beer), follows the recipe precisely and, if the correct brewing conditions are chosen, produces a savory brew.

In a commercial brewery all of that complexity and more is the responsibility of the brewmaster. They create the recipes, select the raw materials and equipment, and oversee each stage of the process. For a better understanding I spoke with Denise Jones, an award-winning brewer with over 17 years of experience. She is brewmaster at

Moylan's 4,000-barrel brewery and supervises a staff of nine.

Born and raised in CA, Denise held a variety of jobs and regularly visited brewpubs enjoying the beer, the food, and the camaraderie. After a time she wanted to find a career she could feel passionate about, one that challenged her mentally and physically.



Denise Jones, Brewmaster at Moylan's Brewery and Restaurant, selects hops.

Her passions were beer and food and beer won. Never a home brewer she entered the UC-Davis brewing program. The program included an internship at Great Basin Brewing, which later hired her to brew. That led

to a job with Third Street Aleworks where she was brewmaster for 8 years prior to her current 5 years at Moylan.

Her advice to women who want to be brewers is "be prepared for long hours and hard work." Brewing requires constant movement, not great strength, and a willingness and ability to learn the brewing art as well as its science, which includes math, biology, and chemistry. Also, the title brewmaster adds hiring, firing, and training to the other duties. Be realistic in your salary expectations; "brewing is a lifestyle job." Your greatest reward is making a product you and others enjoy.

Denise brews a variety of "clean, stylistic beers" primarily American and English ales and lagers as well as seasonal specialties. If you'd like to try some of her brews, stop by Bruin' Ales in downtown Asheville. So far, I can recommend the Tipperary Pale, the IPA and the Moylander Double, all flavorful, delicious beer. For more information visit [moylans.com](http://moylans.com).

As circumstances change, a successful brewery eventually requires more people. Positions are filled based on the brewery's needs and their philosophy. It is no surprise then that Highland Brewing with its reputation for consistent, high-quality beer chose to add a quality-control person to their staff. It's also no surprise the person is Erica Nelson.

Erica developed her passion for beer and brewing at her Dad's knee. He was a homebrewer and even at a young age she helped him brew. Over time his interest

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## restaurants &amp; wine

# The Wine Steward's Nightmare Before Christmas

## - PLUS, ADVICE FOR HOLIDAY WINE SHOPPING

BY MICHAEL PARKER

**D**iner: "So, tell me about your pinots, ah.. What's your name?"  
 Me: (one) (two) (three)  
 "Michael." I always answer this question after a conspicuous hesitation, to send a signal that I don't like giving my name. Diners don't need to know servers' names. Really, what's in it for them? Control issue? Got-your-number? On the bucket list: speaking the words of Blake, Alec Baldwin's character in *Glen-garry Glen Ross*, when asked his name. He said, "\*\*\*\* you. That's my name."

Him: "Ah. Michael. Nice to meet you." He extends his hand for a shake. This blows my mind. I am not a car salesman. I am a server. I'm not at this table to build a relationship. Now I need to go to wash my hands. Of course he didn't give his name.

Me: "Pinots?"

Him: "Yes Pinots."

Me: "Pinot Gris, Grigio, Blanc?"

Him: "Noir. Do you have Silver Oak?"

Me: "Oh. I didn't know they produced a Pinot Noir."  
 Him: "Uh.. the Cab."  
 Me: "Oh. Do you mean the softer one, from Alexander Valley? The one that..."

Him: "You have that?"

Me: "No."

Him: "So how about your Pinots. Do they have acid?"

Me: "Lysergic?"

Him: "What?"

Me: "Sorry. I worked in a winery. Sometimes the high tech words slip out."

Him: "How's this one?"

Me: "The Burgundy from Joil-lot? Old world style. Earthy."

Him: "What's earthy?"

Me: "Well, you can literally discern the dirt, the soil that produced the grapes. The French are very proud of..."

Him: "Does it have acid?"

Me: "Yes, but balanced. Are you trying..."

Him: "Ah. Sonoma. Sonoma's

good. This is from Sonoma?"

Me: "Sonoma Coast, there's a difference between..."

Him: "How's this Russian River one?"

Me: "Estate bottled, 5 years old, ready to drink. I sold..."

Him: "How's this Atalon?"

Me: "That Merlot is sold out. Sorry. Are you looking for a style that's..."

Him: "Well, all this talk about acid. I need to know about the acids in the wine."

At this point I have the feeling I'm being watched. True. His lady's eyes are fixed on me, as if she has money on when my eyes are going to roll. I'm a pro. She will lose this bet.

Him: "Have you had this Russian River one?"

Me: "I have tasted none of the wines that are not served by the glass. But I sold that one two nights ago and the customer..."

Him: "I'll take that one. What the hell."

I think to myself, *And I'll take a pair of tall boots, the kind that can be hosed off, and a shovel, before I step back into this conversation. The shovel is not for the bull\*\*\*\*. It's for the \*\*\*\*head.*

Him: "Is this a proper cab glass, Michael?"

Me: "Yes, Sir."

Moral of the story: Don't be this person. You don't have to sound like you can pass the test before you take charge of selecting wine for others. Just think before you think out loud. It's OK to trust some sales figures and customer feedback. It's also beneficial to allow your server to complete the answer to your question.

Oh yeah, others. This man abandoned all concern for his lady's preferences. In the end, it was about spending seventy to a hundred dollars to impress me as much as the lady, who, by the way, never saw the list and never knew the price.

and create great beer. If you want it, do it. She also recommends women check out the Pink Boot Society, pinkbootssociety.org, for inspiration and contacts.

"Women in beer" has been a noteworthy series. A lot of remarkable women shared stories about themselves and their view of an industry literally exploding with flavors and opportunities. Salud!



**For nine years, Joe Zinich has been taking a self-guided, high-intensity tour of the Asheville beer scene. Contact him at: [zjinich@bellsouth.net](mailto:zjinich@bellsouth.net).**

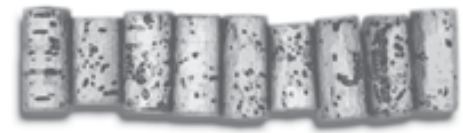
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waned and hers grew. Erica became the brewer and her father the occasional assistant. After she earned a dual-major business and science degree at the University of Arkansas, she successfully completed the UC-Davis Master Brewers program and started her job search in the beer industry. At the time the beer scene in Arkansas was weak and a friend suggested she visit Asheville.

After her arrival, she submitted her resumes around town and received a job offer from Highland as a tasting-room bartender. Undaunted, Erica accepted, met the staff, worked hard, and pushed her knowledge and interest for a position at the brewery. Her persistence paid off when Highland asked her to play a leadership role in quality assurance and control.

Highland had a lot of basic tests in place but wanted to go into more depth on those tests and develop others. For example, beer is sensitive to oxygen; Erica developed a protocol to more accurately measure oxygen in bottled product important for flavor, shelf life, and to help optimize the packaging line. The job has proven to be challenging and rewarding and she recently brewed a pink-hued beer for breast cancer awareness (Areola Ale) on Highland's 3-barrel system. Sweet!

Erica's training, perseverance, and enthusiasm for great beer paid off. She recommends the same approach for others. The brewing industry is about the beer. It is very accepting of anyone who is enthusiastic, wants to learn and share, appreciate



## HOLIDAY SHOPPING ADVICE

I surveyed some of Asheville's wine shops for a few pearls of holiday shopping wisdom, not specific recommendations, but advice for a wine shopping strategy.

Table Wine owner Josh Spurling advises, "Buy early. You may not find what you want if you wait. Think about it – shops don't stock up for January the way we do for December. Oh, and buy local." True. The bargains are moving as you read this.

Vinsite owner Les Doss speaks his wisdom with, "Know your importers." Indeed, this trick can prevent disappointment, save shopping time, and make you more independent. Some importers have very high standards you can consistently rely on.

Weinhaus owner Hunt Mallett wants you to think about this: "One case equals twelve gifts." Not only that, a second case is your grab-one-and-go time-saver as you are running out to another holiday party. The discount is sweet as well.

The Wine Guy's guy advises you to "Trust the man behind the counter." Yes, they have tasted hundreds of inferior wines so you don't have to.

The Wine Studio of Asheville is owned by the sweet and fabulous Jessica Gualano, Certified Specialist of Wine, Society of Wine Educators. She could not be reached for comment before deadline (my fault), but I'll bet her advice would include this: "Wine is fun, never forget that."

Finally, the much, much-missed Martin Pusser, the former wine wizard of Greenlife, wishes to soothe your nerves. "Don't worry so much about the perfect pairing. Trust what you like. Holidays are more about enjoying others." Word.

## Great values & styles

### FREE Wine Tastings on Saturdays from 2 to 5 p.m.

Tasting wine is not only fun, but it presents a chance to learn about wine and what it is about a particular wine that you like, or don't like. You can sip while you shop. Find some new favorites — try it before you buy it. We will usually have a few whites and a few reds open, with the occasional guest speaker. Please stop by!

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