

Local PROFILES

WINE GUY

STORY BY
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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Kurt Kiebler is the well-known "wine guy" in Shawnee. From recommendations to wine tastings, he's happy to share his knowledge.

A smashing REPUTATION

This certified wine expert shares his knowledge with customers

AT 6 O'CLOCK ON FRIDAY EVENING, MOST PEOPLE ARE RELAXING. But Kurt Kiebler is busy.

He threads his way up and down the wine racks at Jack's Discount Wine & Spirits in Shawnee. One customer asks for a good Merlot, another wants to know about Gewürztraminer. When patrons need wine advice, they're invariably directed to "ask the wine guy"—Kurt.

These days he's known both in the store and on Jack's Facebook Fan Page, where he contributes notes on his favorite beverage as "Kurt the Wine Guy."

He's earned the title, having spent the last eight years studying, tasting and, most of all, enjoying wines. While working at Gomer's liquor store in Kansas City several years ago, Kurt took a six-week class on wine. "That's when I really caught the wine bug," he says.

KURT'S LOCAL PICKS

These vintners within a day's drive of Shawnee make some highly recommended wines. Here are a few of Kurt's favorites.

NEW OAK VINEYARDS

11644 FLOURNOY SCHOOL ROAD
WELLINGTON, MISSOURI 64097
(816) 240-2391

WINE PICK: A full-bodied red made from grapes native to the United States

SOMERSET RIDGE VINEYARD & WINERY

29725 SOMERSET ROAD
SOMERSET, KANSAS 66071
(913) 294-9646

WWW.SOMERSETRIDGE.COM

WINE PICKS:

Oktoberfest

A spicy, semisweet white wine made from the Traminette varietal

Ruby Red

An award-winning blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Chancellor grapes

STONE HILL WINERY

1110 STONE HILL HIGHWAY
HERMANN, MISSOURI 65041
(573) 486-2221

WWW.STONEHILLWINERY.COM

WINE PICK:

Dry Vignoles

This gold medal-winning white boasts aromas of pineapple, strawberry and lime

HOLY-FIELD VINEYARD & WINERY

18807 158TH ST.
BASEHOR, KANSAS 66007
(913) 724-9463

WWW.HOLYFIELDWINERY.COM

WINE PICK:

Over the Rainbow

A winner of multiple awards, this raspberry wine "is killer," according to Kurt

Today, he holds several professional certifications, including Certified Specialist of Wine from the Society of Wine Educators, Spanish Wine Educator from the Wine Academy of Spain and Level I from the Court of Master Sommeliers. He is far from being a wine snob, though. Kurt enjoys helping customers find their own favorites.

"There are a few things I like to ask people who are just starting to get into wine," he says. "Do they like to drink soda? Do they like to drink iced tea?" Judging by a client's palate, Kurt recommends wines to match. "People don't realize wine is a food. People sometimes say, 'I need to get a red.' My first question is, 'What are you doing? What's it for?'"

THE KNOWLEDGE

A neophyte first must understand the wine label. Old World wines often are labeled by the vintner's region; Burgundy, Champagne and Bordeaux are examples. But these names say nothing about the type of grape, known as the varietal, of a particular wine. Unfortunately, says Kurt, early American winemakers tried to emulate the European style.

"They would list generic wines as being Chablis or Burgundy or something like that," he says, because Americans were more familiar with the names of French winemaking regions than with grape varieties. "That really changed, thank goodness."

In the latter half of the 20th century, American wineries began using varietal names on their wines thanks to a movement spearheaded by wine enthusiast and writer Frank Schoonmaker. "He was the one who discouraged Americans from using French names to describe their own American wines," Kurt says.

However, some large winemakers persist in the practice. "Gallo is infamous for this, 'Hearty Burgundy' and 'Blush Chablis.' In Chablis [France], all they make is Chardonnay. 'Blush Chablis' is meaningless," he says.

WINE DOS AND DON'TS

Kurt knows how to help a wine newbie with the basics. When asked about grape varietals, he names what he calls the big six: popular whites are Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling, while some commonly known reds are Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Jack's often posts "shelf talkers," which are excerpts of wine reviews from magazines like Wine Spectator that

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
PRIVATE WINE TASTINGS,
CONTACT KURT KIEBLER AT

kkiebler@andeslibre.zzn.com.

SERVING AND STORING WINE

"People tend to have their reds too hot and their whites too cold," says Kurt Kiebler.

He recommends taking white wine out of the refrigerator and letting it sit at room temperature for 20 minutes before serving. Likewise, he advises chilling room-temperature reds for 20 minutes before serving. Always refrigerate leftover wine, preferably after it's been deoxidized with a gadget like the Vacu Vin Wine Saver (available at home stores), which pumps carbon dioxide into the bottle to help preserve the wine for a longer period.

WHERE IT GROWS MATTERS

Quality vintners can be found all over the world, but climate and growing season affect the taste of the wine they produce.

HERE ARE SOME OF KURT'S
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POPULAR
VARIETALS:

PINOT NOIR *I generally like Oregon or New Zealand. I think Pinot Noir needs a cool climate; one where some of the fruit flavors can really shine.*

SAUVIGNON BLANC

Generally I'm going to prefer New Zealand. They're not oaking their Sauvignon Blancs, and generally what you're getting is these lime-grapefruit flavors.

CHARDONNAY *My favorite area is the Burgundy region. I like more of a dry, minerally type of Chardonnay.*

MERLOT *My personal favorite is Washington state. You're getting this great mixture of both fruit and earth [flavors].*

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— KURT KIEBLER

Martín Códax Albariño, Spain



highlight a certain wine. Based on a 100-point scale, the ratings are assigned by the publication's judge. But Kurt advises clients to "pay more attention to what the actual tasting notes say. Find out if it's going to match with what you like." Tasting notes describe a wine's character and flavors, like vanilla, pineapple or smoke.

Jack's stocks wine from dozens of vintners worldwide, making Kurt's expertise helpful. Shawnee resident and frequent customer Andy DeWitt says Kurt rarely steers him wrong.

"I've often tried his recommendations, and many of them have turned into go-to wines for me," DeWitt says. "He wasn't at all put off by my ignorance."

Dhaval Patel, whose family has owned Jack's since 2001, says patrons ask for Kurt by name.

"They like his input on wine," says Patel, noting Kurt's expertise was a big factor when he was hired about three years ago. Customers know whom to ask for recommendations on what's new and interesting.

WINE IN STYLE

"I'm excited about the trend toward South American wines," Kurt says. "You're going to get a lot more bang for buck."

Specifically, Kurt points to the Albariño, a Spanish varietal that he calls "the darling of sommeliers, because it goes with so many different foods." Kurt recommends the Martín Códax Albariño priced at \$9.99. Another pick is the Argentine Bonarda varietal, made from a native Italian grape that's "full of flavor." Jack's stocks the Cristóbal 1492 for \$10.99.

In the end, Kurt says enjoying wine is all about personal preference. He recommends oenophiles scout out wine tastings at www.LocalWineEvents.com and read Doug Frost's wine column in *The Kansas City Star*. But ultimately the wine experience should be about what pleases a particular person, and, according to Kurt, "The way to know is to taste." **ISM**

Cristóbal 1492, Italy



Somerset Ridge Ruby Red, Kansas



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