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INSIDE

Corporate Ladder Yahoo! A new research director PAGE 30

Table Talk Chakra in Paramus PAGE 31

Wine anxiety

Novices are taking control with education and training



BY LISA FICKENSCHER



W YORKERS ARE TIRED OF FAKING IT.

After too many experiences of poring over inscrutable wine menus, wandering aimlessly in liquor stores and struggling to decipher the lexicon of oenophiles, they are taking action.

Enrolling in wine courses has become as fashionable as scoring a reservation at Spice Market or Per Se these days. Trend-conscious, mostly twenty- to fortysomething New Yorkers are seeking to educate themselves about vino. The goal is not just to reduce embarrassment,

See WINE on Page 30

THE STATS Grape Explosion

available vs.

20 years ago

Wine novices get educated

Continued from Page 29

but to be able to speak knowledgeably about an increasingly hip topic.

"I feel a lot of pressure when I'm handed the wine list," says Jodie Fanelli, who runs real estate firm J.V.D. Development with her two siblings. "When I finally pick a bottle the waiter recommends something else, and I feel like I chose a horrible wine.' Ms. Fanelli decided to bolster

herself by taking a \$480 course at NYC Wine Class. As a Christmas gift, she also signed up her fiancé, Salvatore Strazzullo, who has his own law firm. Interest in wine has been building for many years, as have the num-

ber of varieties available. Knowing one's way around French, Italian and Californian wines isn't enough anymore. Many more countries, including Argentina, Greece and Hungary, have entered the U.S. market over the past 20 years. All 50 states have wineries now, too. Beverage of choice

A RECENT GALLUP POLL shows that, for the first time, Americans prefer

wine over beer. "This is the golden age for wine, says Kevin Zraly, who has written several books on the

topic and has been teaching the Windows on the World Wine School class for 30 years.



says a wine has legs ... I just don't get it'

year at the Marriott Marquis, is \$995 for eight weekly classes. And a THE FORMAL TASTING: DOS AND DON'TS

Education isn't cheap, though.

Mr. Zraly's course, offered twice a

seminar he's been holding with retailer Sherry-Lehmann for the past three years costs \$250 to \$350 a person for one evening.

But cost is no object when one's reputation is on the line.

Mr. Strazzullo, for one, wishes he'd been savvier when a client sent him a \$500 bottle of Sassicaia four years ago. "The client called me afterward, and I didn't even know what Sassicaia was," he says. Rather than saving the special wine for an appropriate occasion, he says, "I drank it with [Ms. Fanelli] that week."

Tower of babble BUT THESE BUDDING connoisseurs

are not just trying to avoid awkwardness. Knowing about wine is now a mark of sophistication, and having just a passing acquaintance with the language no longer cuts it. "Full-bodied," "oaky," "buttery" or "good tannins" are among the terms New Yorkers want to demystify. "If someone says a wine has legs

or that it's nutty, I just don't get it," says Adrienne Lopez, a lawyer and co-author of To Love, Honor, and Betray: The Secret Lives of Suburban Wives. She plunked down \$75 to attend the CD101.9 New York Festival of Wines last weekend.

Start with white, then red Let wine fall over entire tongue



Use the spit bucket

Don't wear perfume or cologne Don't eat vinegary salads or brined foods beforehand

Don't chew gum

Source: Manna Lee, president of MYC chapter of Women for WineSensa

to know about wines for my job, but

Most people assume that if a wine is expensive it must be good and, conversely, that a cheaper bottle must be bad. Ms. Lopez wants to

walk into a wine store and not feel that she has to spend \$20 or more to get a decent wine. Though she's often tempted to buy a zinfandel, "they're really cheap, and I don't think that's good; I wonder whether I'll get a headache," she says. Others are informing them-

selves so that they can make the most of expense-account meals. A year ago, Maria Grazia Asselle, a vice president at Citibank, joined the New York chapter of Women

for WineSense, a nonprofit group

that meets once a month for tastings

and lectures at local restaurants. Now when she's invited to fancy

restaurants by clients, she takes

charge of ordering the wine. it reduces your embarrassment in "Sometimes no one knows anybusiness situations," Ms. Lopez says. thing about wine, so I don't want to

> bottle," Ms. Asselle says. All this training is paying off. Adriano Mattei, sommelier at Churrascaria Plataforma Tribeca, which has earned an award of dis-

> waste the opportunity to try a great

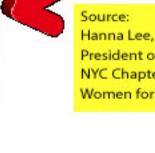
tinction from Wine Spectator, is fielding fewer requests from customers who need his expertise. That's no small feat when one considers Churrascaria's list: a 20-page book including 700 choices. Still, Mr. Mattei knows when to come to the rescue. "Sometimes we get customers who look like they are

reading Egyptian," he says. "A sure

sign that he needs me is when his

head is pointed down but his eyes are looking around for help."

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