

winetime

International Wine Festival
is for anybody interested in vino

RODNEY WILSON | CIN WEEKLY

For many of us, selecting a wine comes down to choosing between varietals from master vintner Charles Shaw.

A visit to the Cincinnati International Wine Festival, a two-day introduction to all that is vino – and perhaps an opportunity to add some class to your rack of Two-Buck Chuck – might be what we need.

If the world of wine seems confusing – well, it can be. We spoke with a former Cincinnati/current Oregon winemaker for some tips on how to get the most out of the wine festival.

GOODBYE, LEXUS

Kelley Styring spent five years as a market researcher for Procter & Gamble, and she and her husband took refuge from the workday world in times with friends and a bottle of wine.

"We spent a lot of time with our friends enjoying some of the restaurants and wine bars, particularly in the O'Bryonville and Hyde Park area," Styring explains.

The couple's move to Texas was accompanied by a new set of upper-management jobs – and a deeper longing for something more.

"We always kind of went back to those times of happiness that surrounded our passion for wine," she says. "We wanted more passion in our everyday life, instead of just weekends, when we would enjoy wine with our friends, and we thought if we studied winemaking and became winemakers maybe we could fall in love again in a way. And so we did that – I sold my Lexus to buy a tractor, we sold our home in Dallas and we came out here (to Oregon).

"We ... bought 40 acres of what was at that time fallow farm – there was nothing here but grass. We apprenticed for two years at a local winery and in our third year we moved into our own small wine barn on the property."

Since that time, Styring Vineyards has grown into its own, providing a wide variety of artisan wines for discerning palates. And Kelley and Steve Styring have grown as people, as well, adapting quite well to the change from professional analysts to farmers.

TIPS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE FESTIVAL

"This is my second year involved with the festival and I really enjoy it," Styring says. "I enjoy meeting people who are familiar with the wine and having the opportunity to introduce people to our wine."

She offers the following tips to help you enjoy the festival as much as she does:

1. "Get there early so you can get a program and take a few minutes to look at it. Don't just walk up to the first table you see and start to drink, because you have to limit yourself – there's so much wine there, and it's little overwhelming. So get a program and take notes."

2. "Focus. If there's a particular varietal that interests you, focus on that. Some people come by my booth and they say, 'I'm only drinking Pinot Noir' or 'I'm only drinking Riesling.' Or choose a region or a culinary theme, like 'I really like Italian food, so I only want to taste Italian wines.' Have some way to guide yourself through the festival."

3. "The winemakers have special badges on, and feel free to approach the winemakers and ask them a question. It's a unique opportunity if you've tasted a wine from their region and want to ask something about it. We thrive on attention and the questions that people have."

4. "If you taste something that you really like, ask someone where you can get it. Not all of the wines are available at the bigger shops – our wines are only available in the smaller wine shops, finer restaurants and Jungle Jim's. It's good to know where you can find a wine."

5. "Bring a pen. Write information down on the program and make notes for yourself. As the night goes on – you've had a little bit to drink, you've been walking around with your friends, and it's easy to get lost."

6. "Trust your own palate, your own judgment. Sometimes I think we trust other people's judgment in an industry where you really are the final judge of whether or not you like the wine. If you taste something that you really like, pursue that – find it in a shop and serve it with your friends and good times. People always ask us what goes best with this wine, and my answer is always, 'Good friends are the best accompaniment to any wine.'"



Above: Styring Vineyards makes several kinds of wine.

Left: Kelley Styring of Styring Vineyards will be bringing her wine to the 2008 Cincinnati International Wine Festival.

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: The Cincinnati International Wine Festival

WHERE: Duke Energy Center, 525 Elm St., downtown

WHEN: Grand tastings 6:30 to 9 p.m. Friday, and 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 to 9 p.m. Saturday, March 28-29. Special tastings begin an hour before grand tastings. Charity auction and luncheon 10 a.m. Saturday, March 29.

PRICE: Grand tasting tickets – \$65 in advance, \$70 at the door Friday and Saturday night, \$55 in advance, \$60 at the door Saturday afternoon. Special tastings \$35 with purchase of grand tasting ticket. \$125 for auction/luncheon.

PARKING: Garages on Fifth and Elm streets

CONTACT: 513-723-9463 or www.winefestival.com

ETC: Try Styring wines for yourself at a tasting dinner (\$125) on March 30 at Red. Call 513-871-3200 to make a reservation. Ten local restaurants will also be hosting official winery dinners at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, March 27, for \$125. Check Web site for details.