

Living & Arts

Grand Tastings highlight 13th Wine Fest

Yacht club home to 100-plus wineries this weekend

By Joshua Balling
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The Nantucket Wine Festival kicks into high gear today, although many of its smaller symposia and private tastings have been sold out for weeks. But there's still plenty of events to be enjoyed, including what has over the past 13 years become its signature event: The Grand Tastings.

This year's four two-hour tastings will be held Saturday and Sunday at the Nantucket Yacht Club. Tastings like these are the great equalizers of the wine world, allowing oenophiles and wine novices alike to sample the finest vintages from more than 100 of the world's best winemakers in one place, at one time. Single-session tickets are \$85 apiece, or four for \$300.

"This year we have a new configuration at the yacht club so that we're surrounded by water, and we've got the greatest collection of winemakers we've every had. It's our showcase, a gastronomic Nirvana," festival founder and president Denis Toner said Tuesday.



File photo

California winemaker Ehren Jordan, who grew up on Nantucket, pours a glass of red at last year's Nantucket Wine Festival. This year's Grand Tastings will again be held at the Nantucket Yacht Club and tickets are still available. The festival kicked off yesterday.

"Sunday in particular is a great time for island people to come see us, to get out with their friends, and savor Nantucket.

Savvy islanders know this is the tasting to go to. There's an incredible amount of food as well as great wine. The tensions are

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off a little, it has a very local flavor since a lot of the restaurateurs come and taste the wine after working all weekend, and it's a chance to really hang out with some of the winemakers," Toner said.

Wine should be about pleasure – not excess or pretension – said Toner, long a promoter of the inhibition-lifting and dialogue-creating qualities of the fermented grape.

"Wine is for enjoyment," he said. "Wine is about the pleasure of the table. If you hoard it in your cellar, you're missing the point. The conversation, the cul-

Wine: Grand Tastings highlight 13th annual Nantucket Wine Festival

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ture – and often the inhibition – that comes along with wine is transmitted in many ways at the table. We look forward to the responsible enjoyment of wine. It's about learning. The operative word is savor. That's what we believe in."

To that end, Toner, Orla Murphy LaScola and Amber Cantella, two of the island's top wine buyers, offer the following advice to the novice oenophile about to enjoy their first festival, or venture further into the magic of the vine.

- Have a strategy. "That's why we split the Grand Tastings up into four sessions. You need to have an idea of what you want to do. Make your choices based on country, or on color, or you may want to do it based on variety. It really helps to have a focus. If you don't, it's easy to get confused," Toner said.

If you start to suffer "palate fatigue," where all the wines are starting to taste the same, Cantella recommended getting some cheese or sparkling water as a palate cleanser.

- Check the price. "It won't do you any good to fall in love with a wine that's not in your budget.

It's also good for comparing," Cantella said. "You will probably at some point say, 'Gee, for \$20, this one is a much better value!'"

- Remember to spit. "That's what the professionals do, and it's a way to save yourself unnecessary trouble," Toner said. "Sixty percent of enjoying wine is about the olfactory component, and then the taste. It's really important to spit. It's a wine tasting, not a trough."

- Attend a wine dinner. "Make sure you do at least one wine dinner, or one singular tasting event," said LaScola, the sommelier and co-proprietor of American Seasons with her husband

Michael, the chef. "It's an amazing hands-on experience, to get that one-on-one face time with the actual winemaker. These small little events are fantastic." American Seasons will host a wine dinner Friday with DuMol Winery.

- Ask questions. "Always ask questions. The beauty of winemakers is that they're farmers, they love their product, and they're excited about it," LaScola said. "Pick up some key words, learn how the winemaker would describe the wine."

- For those with an interest in wine and theater, Nantucket native Mark Kenward will stage

his one-man show "Towle's Hill," about the history of one of California's oldest wineries, Friday at Bennett Hall.

"In essence, it's the story of the California wine industry told in a really compelling way," Toner said. "It's appeared in eight cities already. We're fortunate to have the playwright, the star, and the winery guy here. It's a great opportunity to learn about wine, and drink at the same time."

For more information about the festival and ticket availability, log on to www.ack.net and click on "Nantucket Wine Festival."