

WINE TALK

Wine Talk: Trisha Yearwood

Heading to Napa for a music festival, the country music star and cookbook author talks with *Wine Spectator* about her love for wine, a good meal and travel



Trisha Yearwood says the most important rule for wine is to drink what you like. (Russ Harrington)

By **MaryAnn Worobiec**

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Trisha Yearwood is heading to wine country. The country music star will be in Napa for Festival Napa Valley's Arts for All Gala on July 17. The festival's 16th summer season will take place July 15 to 24, and also features Joshua Bell, Larisa Martinez, the Brubreck Brothers Quartet, Tessa Lark, the Young People's Chorus of New York City, a "Tchaikovsky to Rolling Stones" dance gala, Donizetti's "L'elisir d'amore" and more.

Yearwood is a singer, actress, author, chef and entrepreneur. She has numerous Grammy, CMA and ACM Awards to her name. She has also penned four bestselling cookbooks and has designed cookware, furniture and home accessories. With Williams Sonoma, she has collaborated on her signature cocktail mixes, her new Gwendolyn dinnerware collection honoring her mother and a

variety of food products. Her hit Food Network series *Trisha's Southern Kitchen* garnered an Emmy Award in the category of "Outstanding Culinary Show."

Yearwood recently chatted with senior editor MaryAnn Worobiec about the Napa festival, her discovery of wine after growing up in a family that didn't drink and what she looks for in a good home-cooked meal.

Wine Spectator: How did wine enter your life? Was there wine at the table when you were growing up?

Trisha Yearwood: Nobody in my family drank! So my introduction to wine started in college. I had nowhere to go but up. My roommates and I would often buy Boone's Farm in all its many flavors. I seem to remember Strawberry Hill and Country Quencher being among my favorites. It was \$2.19 a bottle in the '80s and I likened it to Kool-Aid with a kick.

It wasn't until I got out of college, moved to Nashville, and went to a few industry dinners that I tasted really good wine, and then I felt like a light bulb went off in my head.

I went to a fundraiser dinner in Nashville many years ago, and there was a different wine that went with each course. (You definitely wanted to hire a driver for this event!) I tasted everything from Port to super-expensive wine, and I learned that night that it doesn't matter to me how much the wine costs, just that it tastes good to me. Thank goodness I don't have super-expensive tastes.

Do you have a preference for red, white, specific regions or grapes or producers?

My wine tastes have definitely changed over the years. I graduated from blush wines to a good white, and then have mostly landed on reds. I gravitate toward Pinot Noirs, and if I'm having white, I usually opt for a Pinot Gris.

I must say that I almost always prefer wine as a cocktail or after-dinner drink, almost never with a meal. I like to savor wine on its own, without altering the taste with food.

When traveling for your career, have you visited any wine regions?

On a girl's trip with my sister and my friend Mandy through California, we stopped in at [Bernardus Winery \[in Carmel Valley\]](#) and really enjoyed popping into different wine shops to taste. It was a really fun day.

I also remember being on tour and playing a show in the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and I had enjoyed their wines for years. It was so nice to actually be in the region where the wine was being made. And of course, the fair organizers sent me home with a few bottles of wine. That was a good gig.

You'll be in Napa soon for Festival Napa Valley—have you been there before? Any favorite places to visit or things you're looking forward to experiencing for the first time?

I have been to Napa a couple of times and have even played a couple of shows. I'm a fan of [Frank Family Vineyards](#) and also [Alpha Omega](#) (I have a friend in the wine business who has introduced me to those) so I hope I get a chance to give them a taste again while in Napa.

As you developed your best-selling cookbooks, did your relationship to wine change? Do you enjoy cooking with wine?

Again, I didn't grow up in a house that had any kind of alcohol in it, so I didn't really learn to cook with wine until I became an adult. I learned how nicely a white-wine reduction could flavor a dish, or how red wine (I use it in chocolate cake) could be so versatile in sweets and savories. I make a mushroom risotto that uses a lot of vegetable stock, but that first cup of liquid is always a nice white wine.

Your recipes resonate because they are user-friendly and easy to understand. Are there any suggestions you have about how we could talk about wine to make it less intimidating?

I honestly believe so many people are intimidated when it comes to cooking, and so many are intimidated when it comes to choosing wine. My advice is the same for both. Don't make it so complicated! The worst thing that can happen when you cook is that you learn something, even if you fail. When it comes to wine, I always just choose what I like. Keep it simple and don't worry about what anybody else "says" you should be drinking. Drink what you like. That's all that matters.



The Far Niente stage is one of several that will sing with live music during Festival Napa Valley this month. (Paul Richardson)

What's your go-to recipe when you're hosting? What recipe are you proud of developing?

Cooking brings me joy and relaxes me. I am most happy when someone enjoys a dish of mine that brings them comfort or evokes a memory. Food is so wrapped around our childhood memories and it's a wonderful gift to continue passing down to the generation behind us.

I think some of my most requested meals are: Sunday Dinner (roast beef, rice and gravy, green beans and homemade biscuits), Key lime cake, and skillet apple pie.

The recipe I'm most proud of developing? Maybe the double-stuffed brownies I dreamed about one night, then woke up the next day and paired my mom's amazing brownie recipe with the yummy white fluff that's inside the Oreo. I'm pretty proud of that one. Ha.

Any tips on what a budding home cook should have—anything you can't live without in your kitchen?

I really do believe in the power of a good knife. And I recommend you splurge and spend some money if you can. One really good, sharpened chef's knife does it all, and is better than having 10 cheap knives that don't do anything.

I also love an electric mixer. It saves time in the kitchen, and speeds up blending everything from cakes and cookie dough to meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

What's coming up for you?

Being home for almost two years was a challenge. But the "pause" gave me time to really think about what I wanted to do, and in that time I wrote a cookbook, my favorite one so far [*Trisha's Kitchen: Easy Comfort Food for Friends and Family*], and also launched a pet line [Trisha Yearwood Pet Collection], which has been a passion of mine my whole life.

So, I'll hopefully write more books, film more cooking shows, make more music, and shepherd the charity arm of the pet line, Dottie's Yard, into being able to give much-needed funds to animal shelters across the country for many years to come. That makes me happy.

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