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Emily Wines

WINES ON WINES

Emily Wines shares her inspiration for the wine list she built for newly opened Sable Kitchen & Bar.

BY BROOKE SMITH



Emily Wines, master sommelier and director of wines at Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, has quickly and steadily worked her way up the wine ladder.

"I started in this industry the way most people do, by waiting tables. I worked in places with amazing wine lists and got the bug," she reflects. "When I started studying and reading about the cultures, histories and agricultural stories of wine, I got hooked." After moving to San Francisco in 2000 and working at Fifth Floor Restaurant, Emily was soon promoted to assistant sommelier. In 2004 she took over as wine director and the following year passed the sommelier's exam. In 2008 she passed the master sommelier's exam. Emily is one of only two women to achieve the remarkable feat of passing all sections of the exam on her first attempt, and one of only 17 women and 96 people total who hold the master sommelier designation in the U.S.

With Kimpton's newest restaurant, Sable Kitchen & Bar, having recently opened in River North, Emily has been busy building its wine list from scratch, full of perfect pairings for Sable's upscale gastro-pub fare. The wine menu is comprised of nearly 100 selections with an emphasis on great values, hidden gems and classic picks. "The Chicago market is very sophisticated, so I've gotten to play around with interesting wines to offer diners by the glass," she says. While the list features a variety of more

mainstream wines, Emily's also including some unique and quirky wines. "I'm particularly excited about having a Torrontes by Crios de Susana Balbo Winery on the list at Sable, which is one of the most quintessential examples of Argentine Torrontes out there."

To complement Sable's organic and local ingredient-driven New American menu, Emily is also including several wines from producers that fit into the organic, biodynamic and sustainable wine categories. Environmentally friendly wineries that will be featured on the list include Wente Vineyards, Paul Dolan Vineyards, Patz & Hall in California and Sokol Blosser Winery in Oregon.

Emily is a strong proponent for wine education, especially on the topic of eco-friendly wines, "because the quality is just as good, if not better than, the wines not made in that way," she explains. "The grapes come out of a healthy earth, which requires a lot of attention and hands on labor. Anytime you put that kind of love into a wine it pays off; they are just really solid." And, perhaps speaking of not only the winemakers who are passionate about producing "green" wines, but also her dedication to sharing them with others, Emily adds, "I also think it's very important to put your money where your mouth is." ■

Sable Kitchen & Bar is located at 505 North State Street.