

WINE EDUCATION UNCORKED



THROUGH HIS "NO SNOBBERY" APPROACH, SCOTT JONES SEEKS TO IMPART SOME OF HIS EXPERTISE TO THE MASSES, MAKING THE WORLD OF WINE ATTAINABLE TO EVERYONE.

Sparkling white or ruby red, a glass of wine is one of life's simple pleasures. Author, chef, and wine expert Scott Jones wants to keep it that way. "Wine has a long and cultured history, but we've made it more complicated than it has to be," he says. "I try to demystify the

extravagant image that we've given wine."

To help others break through the stuffy exterior surrounding wine culture, the Birmingham-based expert launched Jones Is Thirsty, a "no-snobbery" wine education service. "Everyone should be able to feel confident

when they order, serve, or buy a bottle of wine," Jones says. "There's a lot to grasp, so it's easy to be intimidated."

Prior to starting Thirsty, Jones served as executive editor at *Southern Living*. Over the past decade, he has contributed culinary insight to a variety of publications

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PHOTOGRAPH BY LIESA COLE



EACH SESSION OF JONES IS THIRSTY FEATURES A SELECTION OF WINES ENJOYED

and began his own food-focused media company, Jones Is Hungry, in 2011.

Along the way, Jones has hosted his own wine tastings. After hosting an event in Ross Bridge in 2013, he realized that he could take this professional passion in a new direction. By that September, he popped the cork on Jones Is Thirsty, ready to share his knowledge with others. “I do it because I enjoy it,” he says. “The idea was percolating for a long time, and was too good to pass up.”

Jones Is Thirsty now offers a range of specialized sessions for both large and small groups. Each session features a selection of wines enjoyed at a comfortable pace, with plenty of time to discuss and learn. “It’s very interactive, but it’s not a classroom,” says Jones. “You can learn in a relaxed environment.”

Jones has cultivated a laid-back atmosphere to make his clients comfortable when entering new territory. “Even confident people can get nervous when dealing with something they don’t know,” he

says. “I want to empower them. I help them understand that they don’t have to like every kind of wine or feel unsophisticated when encountering new terms. You like what you like and everyone can learn something new.”

Sessions are customized to fit the client’s interests. “We do whatever they want to do,” says Jones. “We find the right food and the right pairings to suit their tastes.” The expert supplies the wine and glasses, and can even arrange for chefs and catering.



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In addition to casual wine tasting, Jones offers more in-depth sessions that take a more focused look at specific aspects of wine, from how it’s made to regional variations. Those traveling abroad can also consult him for planning their culinary itineraries.

The right wine can make a good meal grand, and Jones loves to share his insight on wine pairings. Naturally, he has some thoughts on an Alabama standard—barbecue. “One of my favorite wines for barbecue ribs is cracked black pepper Syrah,” he says.

“It has enough body to handle robust fat and meat, so it’s great for pork. The tannins of this wine can cleanse the palate and really bring out the most in the meal. You’ll even get a nice peppery note.”

On the Gulf Coast, where seafood is supreme, Jones recommends a white wine. “For grilled fish or shrimp, consider an unadorned Chardonnay,” he says. “It feels full-bodied, but it’s also fruity. That makes it perfect for seafood, especially with spice. Many default to a pinot grigio or a sauvignon blanc,

but those don’t always stand up to heavier seasoning.”

So what’s the idea behind a good pairing? “A wine should complement and contrast the meal,” says Jones. “When you get dressed, you don’t typically wear one solid color head to toe. You need to mix and match.” A good wine choice should work together with the meal to emphasize each other’s strengths.

“Look at classic pairings like red wine and steak,” Jones explains. “A rich meat needs a hearty drink. White wines go better with lighter



meals as they won't overshadow any delicate flavors." When planning a meal, Jones recommends cooking the style of food from the wine's home culture. "Don't be afraid to 'bridge' wine and food, either," he says. "Cooking your wine into the meal is a great way to bring out the elements of both the food and drink."

Jones has an eclectic history

of wining-and-dining experiences, but his favorite is surprisingly low key. "I've been blessed with many good meals," he says, "but I'll always think back to the fresh oysters on the California coast. You can eat them right where they're caught in Tamales Bay, then walk to a convenience store to buy a local sauvignon blanc."

With bottle in hand, Jones

walked down to the ocean to enjoy his meal. "My friends showed me this place, and it was a great experience to have with them," he says. "Since then, I've gone back to Tamales Bay with my wife. That's what makes the experience special. When you're sharing with friends and loved ones, you can have a very simple meal and it would taste like gold."