

# Larks is an ambassador for local wineries

I moved to the Rogue Valley in 2015 as what is sometimes known as the “trailing spouse” (translation: the spouse who had not yet found a job). One of the first places that my bride (the leading spouse) took me was the Inn at the Commons in Medford.

First impressions are key, and the low, semi-circular bar and the funky Jetson’s vibe captivated me. More importantly, the food and wine lived up to the promise of the room. Coming from northern Idaho, my knowledge of Oregon wine was largely limited to the ubiquitous Willamette Valley pinot noirs. Larks wine list was the beginning of my education into the rest of the Oregon wine scene.

When Larks Home Kitchen



**KEVIN BRECK**

Cuisine opened in Ashland Springs Hotel, its mission was to “develop a strong, sustainable, well integrated program to tell the Oregon story,” said Ava DeRosier, director of food and beverage for Larks and Neuman Hotels. For Larks, the Oregon story incorporates both food and wine. DeRosier firmly believes that “the very best meal you can have is [made with] with food grown locally and paired well with wine grown in the same area.”

For me, the perfect meal is a dance between equal partners, the food and the wine. Each supports and compliments the other. In the Larks ballroom, both partners are homegrown.

For wineries, distribution and exposure are crucial. However, most distributors require that wineries produce at least 10,000 cases a year. But in Oregon, 70 percent of Oregon’s wineries produce 5,000 cases or fewer per year, making it difficult to find distributors. Restaurants, however, can step in where distributors are unwilling to go.

“Restaurants are our number one ambassadors for Oregon wine,” observed Michelle Kaufmann, communications manager for the Oregon Wine Board.

Larks has wholeheartedly embraced its role as an ambassador for local wineries. More than 80 percent of the wines on Larks wine lists are from Oregon, many from small, local wineries. (Ashland Springs Hotel in Ashland and the Inn at the Commons in Medford each has its own wine list.) In Medford, try a glass of Linda Donovan’s (of Pallet Wines) 2014 Viognier. In Ashland, order a glass of Irvine Vineyard’s Rosè of pinot noir.

On the semi-homegrown front is DeRosier herself. Although she was born in Bandon, she was raised in Phoenix. The hospitality bug bit her at an early age when a family friend with a catering business let DeRosier work at an age that was perhaps not

strictly legal. At age 23, she moved to Ashland to complete a teaching degree. To make ends meet, she began busing tables and working banquets at Ashland Springs Hotel. As her present position indicates, hard work and dedication pays off. In her spare time, DeRosier has earned her Level 1 Sommelier, and is working on her Level 2.

Earlier this month, Larks’ dedication to Oregon wine was rewarded when the Oregon Wine Press and Oregon Wine Board named Larks the 2017 Wine Program of the Year.

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