

Margaret Jabour

Twin Liquors Co-Owner Proud of Persistence that Grew – and Continues to Grow – the Texas Wine Market

By Patricia Colligan

Margaret Jabour doesn't want you to know what her favorite wine is. That's not because she's not passionate about wine. She is. She just doesn't want to influence your decision. She firmly believes that enjoying wine is a very individual experience.

"The best wine connoisseurs are your taste buds," says Jabour, vice president and co-owner of Twin Liquors, winner of the 2004 Retailer of the Year award given by Market Watch magazine.

That's why she's excited about the SAVEUR Texas Hill Country Wine & Food Festival, April 7-10. The first year of the 20-year-old festival, only three Texas wineries participated. Over time, the event has grown to include the 80 wineries from Texas and around the world that will be flaunting the best of their wares for the public to sample.

The public tasting has also evolved from a one-day event in Driftwood to a two-day "Big Taste" food fair at the more centrally located Auditorium Shores in downtown Austin. Jabour believes the event is the perfect opportunity for anyone interested in wine to become more familiar with what is available.

This year, she says the grape varietal whose popularity is fastest growing is pinot noir, thanks in part to the movie "Sideways." Spanish wines are also gaining popularity in the United States.

But Jabour says she's also very proud that the festival is bringing some well-deserved attention to Texas

vintners. Although not historically known as a "wine state," production of wine in Texas actually began before it did in California. According to Vineyard & Winery Management, Spanish padres in El Paso were making wine in the mid-17th century, but the difficult environment eventually overwhelmed production.

The difficult conditions still exist today. Searing summer sun and unpredictable and inconsistent soil and water quality make for trying circumstances for wine makers in Texas. Ja-



Margaret Jabour when she and her brother, David, of the growing Twin Liquors chain, were named Market Watch Leaders 2004 Retailers of the Year

bour says that "if you [produce] a really great bottle of Texas wine, you'd better be very proud of that accomplishment."

The many successful Texas wineries have proven that perseverance and determination can triumph over the inherent challenges of growing in Texas. For instance, Fall Creek Vineyards has poured its wines at three presidential inaugural events. One reason for these successes is that Texas winemakers now understand what works and what doesn't in the unique environment.

"The climate conditions in Texas favor white wine production over reds," says Jabour. "Texas viognier, a white wine varietal, for example, is being produced with awesome

results."

And the industry continues to grow. The Texas Wine Marketing Research Institute reports that Texas had grown to be fifth largest wine producing state by the early 1990s and that the industry employed 1,600 people in 2003.

Jabour says she thinks growth in the wine industry may be related to changes in society. She sees wine

"The best wine connoisseurs are your taste buds."

– Margaret Jabour

becoming more a part of everyday lives and recognition of its health benefits when consumed in moderation, rather than drinking being seen as a vice.

Because of events such as the SAVEUR Texas Hill Country Wine & Food Festival, more people are also becoming aware of wine. And the wine industry is doing more to court neophytes; some big-name winemakers are packaging their finest in cans and screw-top containers to appeal to the more on-the-go and convenience-focused society that is developing.

Jabour isn't sure yet how she feels about the new direction of wine packaging, but she hopes the trend will introduce wine to a broader market. That's the premise that Twin Liquors was founded on. When she and her two brothers opened the business in 1982, their dream was to educate the general public about fine wine and spirits and to provide affordable access so that anyone could learn to enjoy them.

She believes that the Wine & Food Festival operators have the same mission. That's why Twin Liquors has been involved for the past decade, acting as supplier liaison and providing manpower and products for the tasting event.

Whatever festival-goers choose, Jabour wants them to remember that "all wines, whether simple or exotic, are great when enjoyed with great cuisine and great friends." ★



Twin Liquors
The chain is approaching
24 locations across the
entire Austin area.