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Wine 101

A new guide to
the grapevine
— for gals

By CHRISTINE MUHLKE

Did you know Chardonnay is the basic black of white wine?

The versatile vintage pairs well with almost any food or situation.

And Sangiovese is the sleek "Italian heels" of reds, given its stylish, pricey nature.

So says Leslie Sbrocco, author of "Leslie Sbrocco's Wine for Women: A Guide to Buying, Pairing, and Sharing Wine" (William Morrow/HarperCollins, \$24.95), which is just one step in her plan to "empower women to buy and order with ease."

Most wine guides are in "encyclopedic format, or they're maps or buying guides," says the Sonoma, Calif.-based public speaker, TV host and columnist.

"But women simply say to me, 'I'm cooking dinner tonight. What's good?' So much of what's out there misses the link between food and lifestyle - the sharing aspect of wine."

Not just another "Wine for Dummies," Sbrocco's book demystifies the grape with humor and easy-to-absorb information, often using fashion analogies to explain a wine's taste and personality.

To wit, her explanation for why we swirl wine in the glass: ". . . all we're really doing is making the wine comfortable in the glass. It's like taking off your pantyhose after a long day at work."

Chapters on white, red and pink/ bubbly/ sweet include clear histories and



I drink what I want, I see who I want," said Lana Turner in "The Bad and the Beautiful" — but did she know anything about the wine she was drinking? — MGM/The Kobal Collection

explanations of every grape. Sbrocco also includes food-pairing tips, entertaining ideas and helpful shopping guides broken down by price.

"The most common question women ask me is, 'How do I find wines I like in my price range?' And I say, 'First, you have to tell me what you like.' Find a benchmark - maybe it's Chardonnay or Vigonier. Then you jump off."

For those of us who don't have time to bone up on our Bordeaux before trying to impress tonight's date at Veritas, Sbrocco offers a few tips.

First of all, don't feel pressured to order the most expensive bottle. "Price has so little to do with wine," she says. "I rarely pay over \$50 in a restaurant."

Another surprise wine-

professional pick is rosé. "It's the most refreshing, underrated wine, and it goes with everything from barbecue to spicy Pacific Rim dishes."

But Sbrocco stresses that wine is for fun, not showing off. "Wine. . . is not a status symbol or collector's item," she writes. "It's about

enjoying life with family and friends, one bottle at a time."

