



The Courage of Conviction

AT LARKS HOME KITCHEN CUISINE IN ASHLAND, OR, **MOLLY SHAUGHNESSY**
DOES THE RIGHT THING

When it comes to the farm-to-table movement, the hospitality industry is not always what it seems. For instance, it's often the case that chefs who hang their toque on organic ingredients work with sommeliers who pour conventional wines that are the antithesis of their ethos.

In November 2021, I visited Molly Shaughnessy, CMS, in Ashland, Oregon. Shaughnessy aims to set things aright. As restaurant manager of Larks Home Kitchen Cuisine, she remains faithful to the restaurant's farm-to-table code, which celebrates strictly local, seasonal, responsibly raised foodstuffs sourced from Southern Oregon farmers, ranchers, artisans, and foragers. By the same token, Larks' wine program focuses solely on local producers that follow sustainable practices.

"Farming and sustainability go hand-in-hand—we cannot take from the earth without paying our dues," she told me, noting that there's "moral comfort" in applying this philosophy to hospitality. "If you care how a chicken is being treated, you should care about how grapes are grown. . . . This can be done without sacrificing highest quality."

Neither is Shaughnessy concerned about achieving a well-rounded selection. "There might be no region as diverse in terms of terroir as Southern Oregon," she said. "For our lighter dishes, especially in spring and summer, I can source from Irvine & Roberts," which grows delicate yet soaring Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays on a windswept, east-facing Ashland-area hillside at an elevation of 2,100 feet. The winery is third-party certified by both Salmon-Safe and LIVE, Oregon's sustainable winegrowing organization.

PHOTO: RANDY CAPAROSO



For heavier dishes, added Shaughnessy, "Rogue Valley producers such as Kriselle Cellars produce fuller-bodied wines, and sustainable farming is a big part of what they do." We tasted Kriselle's rich, spice-inundated 2018 Malbec along with its equally intense and peppery blends of Grenache, Tempranillo, and Bordeaux grapes, all showing a real sense of place. "There is something to fulfill every palate right here in this little valley," said Shaughnessy.

The Demeter Biodynamic and Regenerative Organic Certified Troon Vineyard in nearby Applegate Valley naturally has Shaughnessy's attention; Troon's mineral- and acid-suffused Vermentino and grippy yet perfumed Syrah have been fixtures on Larks' wine list. "I would like to eventually add the Troon 2020 Amphora

Amber Vermentino," said Shaughnessy, "but it will require staff training." For her, orange wines like this skin-fermented offering, with its sexy, musky spice notes and meaty citrus-peel textures, "have so much to offer in the way of food pairing and experimentation with our cuisine."

Applegate Valley's Quady North, which is a farming company as much a winery, really floats Shaughnessy's boat. "I am always blown away by Quady's Flagship Syrah," she gushed, and the 2018 we tasted together may be more like the Northern Rhône in terms of incense-like spice than any wine grown on the West Coast. The Quady North 2019 Mae's Vineyard Cabernet Franc, meanwhile, is as savory and distinct with cedar and

green herbs as any Chinon, but in a way that is utterly "Mae's," while the Quady North 2016 Merlot from Layne Vineyard plantings dating to 1972 is beautifully svelte and velvety. "Not only are Quady wines LIVE certified," noted Shaughnessy, "but the certification is printed on their labels, which helps me and my staff communicate our commitment to these kinds of wines to our guests."

There are other Southern Oregon wineries that Shaughnessy truly believes are producing world-class wines, such as those of Weisinger Family Winery and Awen Winecraft, but "unfortunately, [they] have yet to put up sustainability statements"—so for now, she is taking a pass on them. Commitment takes courage, and she's the rare professional who embodies both. **LD**