



Phifer Pavitt offers world-class wine for your next "Date Night"

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Georgia-born winemaker Suzanne Phifer Pavitt explained that she won't tolerate bad food or bad wine, as my husband Chris Prawdzik and I sipped her excellent Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc over lunch at D.C.'s District Line. Growing up Baptist in rural Georgia, she appreciated the high quality of locally grown food from a young age. But wine? Not so much. Fortunately, as an executive in sales, she was lucky enough to learn and appreciate some of the world's finest wines "on an expense account."

In 1998, Suzanne's life took a turn when this country gal met and married her city-boy husband and current business partner Shane Pavitt from Los Angeles. Despite the couple's fast-paced and busy business lifestyle, they still always made time for a weekly "date night." Date night eventually took them "under the Tuscan Sun" to Italy's renowned wine region, where the Pavitts asked themselves: Where do we want to be in five years? The answer: On a farm, growing grapes and vinting fine quality wines. It wasn't too long before they launched this dream.

In 1999, Suzanne stumbled upon land in Napa Valley's Calistoga bearing the sign: "For Sale by Owner." With a phone call and a visit, she quickly knew this was home. The Pavitts bought the land and began their adventure by "car camping"—driving up to the property with BBQ onboard to enjoy their new home—albeit still barren. Suzanne soon found herself the general contractor for the winery and new home, working all the details from beginning to end.

Today, she works along side an impressive team that she assembled, which includes Dr. Gary Warburton (her father-in-law turned-California-Davis-educated winemaker) and lead winemaker, Ted Osborne. Suzanne remains part of the entire process, from site selection, to planting vines, tasting for ripeness and working to make the perfect style wine.

Currently, Suzanne makes two wines with plans in the works for others in the future. "More isn't always better," she points out. Accordingly, her production is limited but very high

quality. She currently sources grapes from Temple Family Vineyards in Napa's Pope Valley, but vines on her own property will soon add to her complement of wines.

At lunch we had the opportunity to enjoy both wines: Her 2012 Date Night Sauvignon Blanc and of her 2010 Date Night Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Sauvignon Blanc offered the great citrus fruit profile you expect from this grape but was tempered with some round creamy notes and the minerality that one might expect from Bordeaux Blanc. Produced in 100 percent stainless steel, this wine is also aged on the lees (yeast sediment), which adds complexity and interest. In 2011, her 250 cases quickly sold out, and in May 2012 she doubled her production. This wine retails for \$30.00 a bottle.

Suzanne's pride and joy is certainly her Cabernet Sauvignon blended with 1-3 percent Petite Verdot. Made with all organically grown, single-vineyard grapes and fermented with wild yeast, Date Night exhibits great concentration and complexity with rich black fruit and soft oak flavors that include cedar and spice. The grapes are handpicked at night to prevent oxidation, carefully sorted to ensure only the best quality, and then cold soaked (left on the skins in cold temperature to extract flavor before fermentation). Date Night is then aged for 16-18 months in 60 percent new oak barrels. The result is an exquisite wine that demands a small financial sacrifice of \$80 per bottle—but it's well worth it. You certainly could pay much more for this quality level. Like any good relationship, it's very approachable when young but will improve with time.

Pavitt's wines are not available locally, but may be purchased by direct shipping, particularly to the winery's club members. Check out the winery website for details. And keep your eyes open, too: