

SCOTT JONES TAKES A NO-SNOBBERY APPROACH TO WINE EDUCATION

JONES

... knows wine



Scott Jones, owner of Jones Is Thirsty, puts on wine tastings for gatherings of all sizes.

BY DONNA CORNELIUS
PHOTOS BY MICHELLE LEPIANKA CARTER

Whether you're already a wine lover or want to be one, Scott Jones is a good person to know. Jones, a food and wine professional who lives in Hoover, shares his knowledge and enthusiasm for wine through his company, Jones Is Thirsty.

He puts on tasting sessions for groups of all sizes. But whether he's talking to small gatherings of friends or at large corporate events, his mantra is "no snobbery."

"The tastings are a way for folks to have fun and ask questions," Jones said. "You get experience without intimidation."

Jones knows wine — and food, too. He's an author, journalist, chef and the former executive food editor of *Southern Living*. He's been writing and talking about wine for more than 10 years.

"Tasting sessions can be from six to 200 people," Jones said. "It's up to the person's imagination. I can work with any budget and any location, whether it's a kitchen in someone's home, a hunting camp or on the Quad during a big football weekend."

His corporate customers find the tastings a good way to put employees or clients at ease, he said.

"Business people may go in thinking 'I hope this event allows me to impress my clients' and come away saying 'I really had fun and learned a lot.'"

Jones recently was in Tuscaloosa to put on a wine tasting at Jack and Louise Gambrell's house in The Townes of North River. The Gambrells invited their neighbors, Pattie and Frank Bonner, and Jack's sister, Donna Lushington, to share in the experience.

SPIRITS



The hosts and their guests brought food for the event (see our Foodie News section in this issue for photos and recipes), which Jones said isn't uncommon for in-home events. He likes for guests to feel free to eat — as well as drink and be merry — while he's pouring samples and talking about wine, he said.

At the tasting for the Gambrells' group, Jones started with a sparkling wine.

"All champagne is sparkling wine, but all sparkling wine is not champagne," he told the group. "With sparkling wine, you really want it cold. If it froths when you open it, it's not chilled properly."

Next up was a Sauvignon Blanc from Chile followed by two red wines. As he poured, Jones talked about each wine and answered questions.

"We tend to serve our white wines too cold and our red wines too warm," he told the tasters. "When white wine is served too cold, the flavors are muted. You don't want to see condensation on the

glass."

He advised putting red wine in the refrigerator for a few minutes before serving it.

"Feel the bottle — it should feel cool," he said.

He also gave suggestions for good food pairings.

"The context of my company is to think about wine with food," he said. "White burgundy is so good in the summertime with grilled salmon or roasted pork."

La Tribu, a red wine that's a blend of syrah, Grenache and monastrell, is "a great food wine," Jones said. "I love this wine with Dreamland ribs, a pulled pork sandwich or fajitas."

The Gambler, a Malbec from Argentina, "would be the one I'd serve with a bigger piece of meat — lamb or beef," he said.

He put his guests at ease when he asked them to describe the flavors in the wines they tasted.

"You might hear people say a wine tastes like gooseberries. I've don't think I've ever had a gooseberry, so I don't know what that tastes like," he said, smiling. "Use your own taste memory."

Jones also talked about the regions where the wines were made, ways to identify different wines — a classic flavor component of a syrah, he said, is cracked black pepper — and winemaking methods.

"Do you ever have people say they buy wines by the labels?"

Louise Gambrell wanted to know.

"Only about 75 percent," Jones said, laughing. "Marketing is a big part of the wine industry today. Who doesn't want to buy a wine with a cute name like Cupcake?"

Jones finished with glasses of Malvaxia Passito, an award-winning dessert wine made by Virginia's Barbourville Vineyards.

"The rule with dessert wine is this:

It has to be sweeter than the dessert," he said. "How many times have you been to a family reunion and had sweet iced tea with your fried chicken and butterbeans? Then you eat a very rich dessert, and suddenly that sweet tea doesn't have a sweet taste anymore. It's the same with wine."

Lushington said she liked that kind of practical advice from Jones.



TOP: Scott Jones fills tasting glasses with a sparkling wine, one of several choices for the evening.
ABOVE: From left, Pattie Bonner, Louise Gambrell, Frank Bonner, Jones, Jack Gambrell and Donna Lushington toast at the tasting.

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“It’s nice to learn about finding the best wine for your meals,” Lushington said. “Scott was so knowledgeable — and entertaining, too.”

Pattie Bonner said she appreciated Jones’ wine wisdom and his approach.

“He’s such a nice person, and he shares what he knows without being pretentious,” Bonner said.

Jones recently partnered with Neverthirst, a Birmingham-based charitable agency that provides clean water to the poor through local churches. The goal of Jones Is Thirsty is to build a well for a Cambodian village, Jones said.

“I think it’s important for my company to have a role in helping to alleviate real thirst in the world,” he said. 🍷



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Guests sample a Los Vascos Sauvignon Blanc from Chile as Scott Jones gives advice on food pairings and answers questions about the featured wines.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.JONESISTHIRSTY.COM. YOU CAN ALSO DONATE TO NEVERTHIRST ON THE WEBSITE. TWO DONORS WILL WIN A TASTING FOR SIX PEOPLE, SCOTT JONES SAID.