



Discovering wine, one country at a time

Catherine Seda | Posted: Friday, April 15, 2011 12:00 am

Lisa Johnson's life has been anything but ordinary since getting into wine. Galloping along the base of the Andes in Argentina while learning about torrontés and malbec wines, kicking back in Greece's Nemea sipping Agiorgitiko, living on vineyard property in Napa Valley and taking in everything about cabernet sauvignon — once Lisa succumbed to a life in wine, she decided to really live it.

Last Saturday, Lisa Johnson became Lisa Stavropoulos. In sipping wines on the ancient soils of Greece's Santorini island, high-altitude Mantinia, Agiorghitiko-loving Nemea and mountainous Cephalonia, intrigue turned into life-long commitment. Lisa and Alexi Stavropoulos wed, surrounded by vines, in the place where they first met — California wine country.

Before the wedding, and with good humor and total understanding, Alexi watched as Lisa fell in love dozens and dozens of times in Greece. He did too — for the incredibly special wines of one of our most ancient civilizations.

Greece has made wine for more than 4,000 years, but a Renaissance has occurred in the last decade, one that is giving Greek wines a lot of attention here in the U.S. And Lisa is bent on making sure that happens more often. There is no better thing to market than something you have fallen in love with yourself. Whether Lisa helps to tell a Greek wine's story through its packaging, marketing materials or in front of a trade audience, her excitement is contagious. And she is known for making things happen.

Before Alexi, and before becoming an Indiana Johnson of sorts in the wine trade, Lisa worked in marketing in New York, San Francisco and Philadelphia for large corporations. She was successful, moving her way up the industry.

And then she decided to chuck it all out the window. Lisa would turn her love of wine into a grand adventure. First stop, Napa Valley. Lisa packed up her apartment, dog and marketing skills and headed west.

In Napa, Lisa threw herself into the industry, educating herself on all things Napa Valley. She discovered the magic of food and wine together and built life-long relationships over many bottles of Napa Valley Cabernet with friends at Cain, Joseph Phelps and Robert Mondavi. She drank well. She worked at Chappellet on Pritchard Hill, living on the property when she first arrived.

The pull of the equator was strong for Lisa, though. After several years in Napa, Lisa wanted to discover the undiscovered. She had become intrigued by Argentine wines. And when Lisa is intrigued by something — she packs up the apartment, the dog and her marketing skills and sets sail (well, OK, flies) toward discovery. Lisa headed to Mendoza where she immersed herself in the culture and wines of Argentina. She worked with the Vines of Mendoza, now a big local and tourist sensation.

It was while horseback riding at the base of the Andes, and stopping in the middle of a vineyard for an asado (a cookout), that she fell in love with the crisp torrontés wines that satiated her thirst, and the rich, fruity malbecs that went mesmerizingly well with the cooked meats of the asado.

Napa Valley would, in time, pull Lisa back. She returned to the U.S. as marketing director of Vine Connections and continued to tell stories of the great place and wines of Mendoza.

But as with all great adventurers, several years later, Lisa started to feel the itch of new discovery. Meeting Alexi and setting foot in Greece did the trick.

Lisa and Alexi live in Sonoma today. When they can't be in Greece, they just pull out a Greek wine, put on a little Greek

music, prepare bites of dolmades and spanikopita, and travel to the various islands of Greece, if only for the night.

Catherine Seda believes that wine is a million stories and she is set on telling them. Catherine holds the Diploma in Wine & Spirits from London's WSET. If you have a wine story that begs telling, contact Catherine at catseda@gmail.com.