

## Greatest American Dog

I'm not a big television watcher, and, with the exception of "American Idol," which I sheepishly confess captures my fancy, reality TV doesn't hold much interest for me. "Survivor" will survive without me, I have never been a fan of The Donald and his apprentice and I could care less who marries the millionaire.

But, apparently CBS thought they had a live one by the tail with the concept of the Greatest American Dog competition, airing on Thursday nights at 8 pm. Over 9 million people watched the premier episode two weeks ago, making it the sixth most popular show during prime time television. For 10 weeks, the 12 owner-and-pet pairs compete for the \$250,000 prize by performing tasks.

The whole thing sounded pretty lame to me, but because it involved people and their pets, I have been making a commitment to watch. The dogs are adorable; their owners are a pretty quirky bunch that offer a mix of backgrounds from the beach bum who works construction occasionally when the waves are bad to film producer to a Manhattan doctor.

The weekly competition is the Dog Bone Challenge. The winning pair, whose reward is to stay in the private luxury suite called the Dog Bone Suite, also gets to pick which pair has to spend the night outside in the Dog House. Meanwhile, the rest of the group live communally at the Canine Academy, an ugly building tastelessly decorated with dog-themed tschotski and canine-inspired topiary yard art.

The first week, the Dog Bone Challenge was doggy musical chairs. When the music stopped, owners had to get their dogs to jump up onto a platform and sit, and as in regular musical chairs, there was always one less chair than contestants. JD, a professional dog-entertainer who owns 10 dogs, and his dog, Galaxy, an English Pointer/Border Collie mix, won this one.

In last week's episode two, the focus was on obedience. In the Dog Bone Challenge, the dogs had to respond to their owners within a specified time to come, sit, sit-stay, shake right paw, go back and circle. Emerging favorite Travis, a bartender and aspiring actor, and his 1-1/2 year old Boxer, Presley, took home the honors.

The second piece of the competition involves all the dogs performing in front of a panel of three judges, two dog magazine authors and a TV series host, who pick the bottom three pairs and choose the pair to eliminate. The first week the challenge required three teams to come up with a skit showcasing

their dog's basic skills. The winning team performed to a Hawaiian theme. Aspiring comic Michael, who emceed his team's doggy disco performance, overshadowed and cowed his Boston Terrier, Ezzie, according to the judges, and got the boot. Michael was obviously surprised and made a tearful exit.

The second week, a long banquet table was set up in front of the judges. Divided into two groups, the contestants entered, dressed for a party, and were seated with pet and owner alternating. First, the owners had to put their dogs on a sit-stay, then get up and go around the table. Owners reseated. One

by one the plates in front of the dogs were uncovered to reveal a beautifully-presented portion of the dogs' favorite food. Here the command was "Leave it," a tough discipline challenge as the dogs sniffed and salivated. Tillman, the Bulldog, was the most sorely tempted, and with his expressive face, you could feel his agony of indecision as owner Ron hissed "Leave it," into his ear.

In the bottom three for the second time, owner Beth Joy was roundly criticized for dressing her dog, multi-breed mix Bella Starlet, for the party. However, it was Elan, an aspiring dog salon owner, who got eliminated, along with her dog Kenji, a gorgeous purebred Giant Schnauzer. You could almost hear the sigh of relief from the other contestants because Elan's training techniques left a lot to be desired; her continual vocalizing was annoying to fellow competitors and confusing to her dog.

Of course, the communal living situation provides other opportunities for drama. Elvis, the undisciplined Jack Russell Terrier owned by Dr. David lunged at the Bulldog Tillman, biting him by the eye. Already selected to initiate the Dog House by JD on the first night, Dr. David elected to remain out there for another night while tempers cooled inside.

Last week, Star, the full-bred Brittany, yelped while exploring in the bushes and owner Texas Bill was convinced she had a fatal snake bite. A bleeding Star was rushed to the vet where the diagnosis leaned toward an encounter with barbed wire or a feral cat and she quickly rallied.

If you can get past the corniness and schmaltz, watching the different techniques people use to work with their dogs is interesting and the dogs are very entertaining. The teams are mostly a likeable assortment that has already inspired an active online following. Tune in tomorrow night and see for yourself.

Jan Jaeger is owner of Geronimo's, Ltd., Nantucket's pet supply and gift shop, and is a member of DWAA and CWA (Dog and Cat Writer's Associations of America). Send e-mail to [jan@geronimos.com](mailto:jan@geronimos.com) (7/18/08) ■



## Wine and Food Pairing

With summer now in full swing, many folks are finding more reasons to get together with friends and family than during other seasons. If you're on vacation, that is reason enough for celebrating. So, the all-important question: How do you select the right wine for your get-together?

The most common question I am asked, as a wine merchant and sommelier is "What makes a good food and wine pairing?"

I love when people come to my shop with their menus, asking for advice for a good wine selection. Truth is, there are many wines that will pair well with almost any dish; there isn't just one 'magic' answer. The trick is to learn some tips that will point you in the right direction.

When pairing food and wine, the goal is synergy and balance. The wine shouldn't overpower the food, nor should the food overpower the wine. Think of wine like a condiment — it should complement the food.

Wine drunk by itself tastes different from wine with food, because wine acts on food similarly to the way a spice does. Acids, tannins and sugars in the wine interact with the food to provide different taste sensations; proteins, sugars and starches in the food may change the way the wine tastes.

Here are some tips to get you started on successful wine pairings:

- Match quality of food and wine. If you're bringing wine to a dinner party, don't feel like you have to match the wine with the food (unless you've been asked to do so). Just choose a good wine. It may or may not be served at the party. Keep in mind the occasion: A retirement party or wedding anniversary deserves a better bottle than a barbecue with burgers on the grill and chips from a bag.

- Light precedes heavy. When you're serving more than one wine at a meal, serve lighter wines before full-bodied ones. Otherwise, you risk not being able to taste light-bodied wines after your palate has adjusted to the heavier ones.

- Balance flavor intensity. Pair light-bodied wines with lighter food and fuller-bodied wines with heartier, more flavorful, richer and fattier dishes. Delicately flavored foods — poached or steamed — pair best with delicate wines. Match the wine with the sauce, seasoning or dominant flavor of the dish.

- Match complementary flavors. This takes a little wine knowledge, or the help of someone else who knows a little something about which flavors

are found in which wines. Then it goes back to basics: an earthy Pinot Noir goes well with mushroom soup just as the grapefruit/citrus taste of Sauvignon Blanc goes well with fish.

- Balance sweetness. The wine should be sweeter than the food. Sweetness in food will increase the awareness of bitterness and astringency in wine, making the wine appear drier, stronger and less fruity. If the wine is sweeter than the food, the true flavors will be heightened. (Perhaps this explains why Riesling with a little bit of residual sugar is considered by many savvy wine

drinkers as the "ultimate food wine.") If you are serving dessert and want to pair an appropriate wine, in general, caramel and fruity desserts work well with white dessert wine; chocolate does well with red dessert wines or Port.

- Consider pairing opposites. Very hot or spicy foods — some Thai dishes, or hot curries, for example — often work best with sweeter wines. Opposing flavors can play off each other, creating new sensations and cleansing the palate.

- Match by geographic location. Regional foods and wines, having developed together over time, naturally go together. There is definitely something to be said for Chianti paired with tomato sauce and pasta, for example.

- High amounts of acidity in food will decrease awareness of sourness in wine and making it taste richer and mellower — sweet wine will taste sweeter. Hence, a citrus sauce can pair well with a grassy, grapefruit-tinged Sauvignon Blanc.

- Bitter flavors in food increase the perception of bitter, tannic elements in wine. This goes back to the sweetness factor. A good testament to this principle is bitter chocolate. When paired with Cabernet Sauvignon, it can bring out some harsh tones in the wines, unless the wine has a little sweet, ripeness to it.

- Sourness and salt in food suppress a bitter taste in wine. Salt in food can tone down the bitterness and astringency of wine and may make sweet wines taste sweeter. This is why salty foods like Pecorino Toscano cheese and charcuterie pair very well with bold red wines like Dolcetto that on their own can be slightly chewy. Put them together and everything harmonizes.

Above all, don't stress about your food and wine combinations; remember that there are many wines that will pair with different foods. Experiment if possible before the "big dinner." And have fun. Having a splash of wine while cooking can bring the flavors into focus as well. If you approach the pairing element with the idea that it is part of the creative process of cooking, then it will be a success.

Leslie-Ann Sheppard is the owner of The Cellar, a wine and cheese shop on Surfside Road, now in its fourth busy season. ■



### NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

In accordance with MGL Chapter 131, Section 40, and pursuant to Regulation 310CMR10:05, et seq., and Nantucket By-Law Chapter 136, Section 3D, the Nantucket Conservation Commission will hold a Public Meeting on Wednesday July 30, 2008 at 4:00p.m. in the Town Annex Conference Room at 37 Washington Street to consider the Request for Determination of Applicability filed by Surfside Investment Realty Trust to determine if the area and work depicted on plans referenced is subject to the Wetlands Protection Act or any wetlands bylaw of Nantucket at 50 Nonantum Avenue, Assessors Map 87, Parcel 38.1.

NANTUCKET CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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(Lots 1, 2 & 3)

NANTUCKET CONSERVATION COMMISSION