

Titillating TASTES

By: Wendy Burke

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A little romance over the holidays is good thing. After all, a combination of short days, cold weather and long, glittery nights do lend themselves to an inclination to stay indoors. And if you're inside anyway, plan to make the best of it. Why sit around with a bag of potato chips when you can cook up one thing that leads to another? Especially if there's a manual with colour photos and detailed instructions that explain how it all works...

Shari Darling is a Canadian food and wine columnist, teacher, and on-air personality who has just released *Orgasmic Appetizers and Matching Wines: Tiny Bites with the MOAN FACTOR* (Whitecap Books, \$29.95).

Her inspiration? Watching a group of women who were trying a pairing of a wine and an appetizer she had prepared. Conversation had stopped and in its place was something akin to a spiritual chant... it was what Darling calls the "moan factor." She decided to master the culinary technique needed to reproduce the experience at will.

Orgasmic Appetizers, like all good manuals, explains both the biology of the experience and some creative ideas on the best way to explore it. The first part of Darling's book covers the physiology of taste and its practical application. The second part offers recipes and wine pairings that let you put the application into practice. For the diner and/or cook who wants to understand the actual process of how to match foods and wines, it's a good science lesson that facilitates vigorous independent study. Basically, you'll understand the nuts and bolts of why certain foods go with certain wines and how it works on the palate. It makes it easier to know what you're looking for and to have a more meaningful conversation about which wine you'd like to purchase.

You've probably heard of a newly recognized taste category called "umami," which Darling describes as "the Japanese word for savoriness." (The other four tastes are sweet, sour, bitter and salty.) In a nutshell, umami is a taste sensation that's triggered by a chemical called glutamate. Breast milk is high in glutamate. This would reinforce an association with survival in infants, and remain in children and adults as a way of identifying what is good to eat.

Glutamate is what makes foods like ripe tomatoes, and cured meats and cheeses have the umami sensation. By processing foods that naturally trigger the umami sensation, by cooking or curing, for example, the strength of the umami is increased. This has an impact on the other flavours, which heighten the overall experience of taste and the satisfaction that comes with it. It is the key to what Darling calls the "culinary orgasm," her copyrighted "MOAN FACTOR" that is the inspiration for her recipes. The recipes that follow take advantage of this science to get the most flavour from the food and wine combinations.

Use these recipes and accompanying wine guidelines from *Orgasmic Appetizers* to select a locally available wine for an evening that might lead to more than just good food and conversation. The guidelines (take them along with you) will give you a good start with the language you need to better understand the assistance you can receive from trained staff at the liquor store or wine boutique.

Find out a little bit more about Shari Darling at her website at www.orgasmicculinarycreations.com and at www.sophisticatedwino.com.