

Leaning In

MEET THREE WOMEN LIGHTING UP THE BEVERAGE SCENE IN CHARLESTON, SC

by Helen Mitternacht

BE IT AT a restaurant with a James Beard–nominated chef, a hotel in a major tourist district, or an all-outdoor eatery, these three Charleston, South Carolina, hospitality pros are crafting beverage programs that speak to the individuality of their venues.

BETHANY HEINZE, co-owner, Vern's

Husband-and-wife team Daniel “Dano” and Bethany Heinze opened Vern’s—a modern American bistro in Charleston’s Elliotborough neighborhood—when they returned home to Charleston in 2021 after spending a few years working in the restaurant industry in Los Angeles. In 2023, Dano became a semifinalist for the James Beard Foundation’s Best Chef: Southeast Award; Bethany, for her part, continues to fine-tune the wine list that accompanies the stellar menu.

PHOTO: LIZZY ROLLINS



Describe your wine list.

We opened without a spirits license, so we could serve just beer and wine. I leaned into that. I wanted an exciting wine list with a lot of diversity [in terms of] regions and flavor profiles. I view wine as an agricultural product, so the farming really matters, with no additives. I don't label it as “natural,” because that can be misleading, but we focus on organics as our baseline and have as many [wines] as possible from small, independently owned and operated producers' vineyards. I'm championing the little guys because we are that in the marketplace. The list is organized by flavor profiles and weight.

Q: What's your personal favorite?

If I reach for a bottle, I gravitate toward a really dark rosé or lightly chilled red. I think because I taste a high volume of wine, my palate gets fatigued, and I want things with bright, juicy acidity and a little bit of texture.

Sicilian wines really sing with our foods. I love things with volcanic soil. We have a little charcoal grill in the kitchen, and that subtlety of smokiness really works well with those wines.

Q: Have there been any changes to the restaurant since the James Beard nomination?

I wouldn't say our ethos has changed at all. We've stayed steadfast in our sourcing. But I will say I have matured [with respect to] my own voice. I used to not give people obvious choices like Sancerre or Chablis because I wanted them to step into our world and try something different. But as a business owner, you realize you have to offer some things that make people comfortable. I now just accept that people have their own palates. It's so subjective and not everyone wants something obscure. Let's just give them something they are comfortable with [that's] within our ethos.

continued on page 62



AMANDA PHELPS, *beverage manager, Frannie & The Fox*

Frannie & The Fox sits inside The Hotel Emeline near the tourist-thronged Market Street, although beverage manager Amanda Phelps says that about half of the Italian restaurant's clientele is local. The restaurant opened in July 2020; despite the inauspicious timing, Phelps says the swell of people hungry to dine out again after the lull early in the pandemic helped keep the restaurant busy. Phelps also manages beverage needs for the hotel's banquet department and helps out at Frannie's nearby sister restaurant, Hank's, known for its fresh seafood.

Q: What's your wine list like?

Our list is very Italian; when I first started, [it] was very domestic. While Frannie & The Fox isn't traditional Italian, I wanted to throw Italian influences in, down to using Italian sodas. I also throw in things that are French and domestic so that our guests can find something familiar grape-wise and can feel comfortable choosing a wine grape they may know.

Q: Are you noticing any interesting trends among guests?

I would say people are asking for more orange wine, which makes me happy. I'm such a big orange wine drinker.

Q: How does your cocktail list reflect the Italian cuisine?

Our cocktails don't have a rhyme or reason, but I do think they tend to complement the Italian influence. I go to Chef Paolo [Rossin] to ask him about anything he may have seen growing up in Torino, Italy, that we could recreate. And we try to match the menu. Last year, we did a Panettone milk punch for the winter season. In summer, we make a Sgroppino, which is lemon sorbet, honeysuckle vodka, and Prosecco.

MORGAN COYNE, *beverage director, Lost Isle*

Lost Isle is on Johns Island, one of the many islands surrounding the peninsula of Charleston. The wood-fired eatery has all outdoor seating, which in the steamy South can make building a well-rounded bar program a challenge. Beverage director Morgan Coyne says her list leans heavily on cocktails, but the wines hold their own.

Tell me about your cocktails.

Our cocktails are a lot like our food; I do pairings with citrus and herbs. All our cocktails are on tap and we batch them fresh every day. I would definitely say I like to play with what's in house. My personal favorite is Down the Wabbit Hole. We had carrots on the menu and I made this riff on a Margarita with fresh carrot juice, orange, Campari, tequila, [and] lime, and the rim had Tajín and smoked pepitas.

Q: Is it hard to put together a wine list for a restaurant where the experience varies with the weather forecast?

We try to get wines that, like our dishes, aren't going to feel super heavy—wines that are not super bold or in your face. We have Pinot Noir that's not overpowering, and I feel like we try and get light and crisp white wines. We don't want something so overwhelming that you don't want to eat your dinner.

Q: What's your personal favorite?

We have a Sigalas Assyrtiko from Santorini that is just delicious. 

