

“Wine is a passport in a glass,” said Lyn Farmer, three-time James Beard award-winning writer and WSET wine educator. A twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face, he raised his glass of champagne to the room. It was only 9:00 in the morning, but that didn’t seem to deter anyone from raising their own glass in a toast, taking a sip of France’s famous sparkling wine. Lyn was in town for the weekend to facilitate the WSET Level 1 Award in Wines course at Vitis House, Raleigh’s premiere wine school founded by Chef Doreen Colondres. And he was absolutely correct—we were transported from North and South America to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and everywhere between. Every glass of wine brought us to a new corner of the world, all in a single day.

Before we dive in, perhaps I should tell you a bit more about who I am, and how I wound up sipping a glass of champagne with Lyn Farmer at 9:00 in the morning. My name is Alex Theo, and I live in Raleigh, North Carolina. I am a classically trained cook, and a proud alum of the Culinary Institute of America. When I was at the CIA in Napa, California, I fell in love with wine. I realized a meal was only as good as the wine it was paired with, and a wine as good as its food. Like partners in a dance, they should complement one another, each one allowing the other to shine, highlighting its strengths. Having studied at one of the top culinary schools in the world, I felt like I had a solid knowledge of the food side of this dance—but how about the wine? Where would I begin?

After moving back to Raleigh, I had the joy of meeting Chef Doreen Colondres. I knew instantly I had a lot to learn from her—hearing her talk of her love for food and wine reignited the spark in my own heart. When I asked her how I could learn more about wine, she laughed and said with a smile, “Well, the Wine and Spirit Education Trust, of course!” That night I signed up for the WSET Level 1 at Vitis House, and a week later there I was, toasting Lyn and Doreen with my glass of champagne at 9:00 in the morning.

WSET is a globally recognized organization that provides education and qualifications in the field of wine, spirits, and other alcoholic beverages. WSET started in London, England, but has reached to every corner of the globe, including Raleigh, North Carolina. Vitis House provides the world-class wine education of the WSET, but with the flair of its founder. When you take a sip of a Tempranillo from Rioja, Doreen is there with a plate of chorizo for you to taste with the wine. With your sip of Cava, a bite of Jamón Serrano. She teaches you firsthand how beautiful the dance between food and wine can be. It is truly a wine education unlike any other, which is the exact reason why I signed up for the Level 2 class the moment I walked out of the Level 1 classroom.

But perhaps most wonderful of all, you will not only earn an unparalleled education at Vitis House, you will also experience some of the warmest hospitality in Raleigh. When you walk through their doors, you are welcomed like family. If you are looking to expand your knowledge of wine, look no further than Vitis House.