

Chasing Good Taste in Food and Wine

WITH LAURA DONADONI

Julia Chebotar 00:04

Spice up your life with me Health Chef Julia, as I set out on the journey of What is Healthy. In each episode, we'll explore the different meanings of healthy for some healthy means indulging in something decorative and delicious. For others. It's a mental health day and a good workout. There's more to health than just food. It's about living well, enjoying your life and having fun. Having you heard redheads doing best. Come with me, and we'll find out just what healthy is. Welcome to a new episode of what is healthy podcast where we share every hack to get a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle. I'm Chuck Julia, and today we'll be talking with Laura Donadoni. It's so nice having you on thank you so much for doing this. I obviously, follow you on Instagram. And I love all things to do with wine and sustainability. And I'm just so curious to pick your brain. And I would love it for you if you could introduce yourself to the audience.

Laura Donadoni 01:02

Okay, so first of all, thank you for having me. And I'm so pleased to be here with you and chatting with you and your followers in this session. And yeah, I'm known as the Italian wine girl. That's my handle on Instagram and on the other social media. And basically, I'm an Italian journalist, I came here in the US seven years ago. And my aim is to communicate Italian wines to American people. That's basically my job, which is defined as a Italian global wine ambassador. And to do so I have my blog, the Italian wine girl, my one community online and also a wine communication agency. So I organize events like wine glasses, wine dinner, or meeting with professionals or bloggers or influencers to talk about Italian wines to educate basically about Italian wines. So that that's what they do. And I'm very, you know, lucky, because it's a very nice job. I'm very proud. Yeah, I'm very proud of my own country. But I'm so grateful to the US because I feel so welcome here. And I became a citizen just a couple of months ago. So yeah, I feel at home here now. So

Julia Chebotar 02:22

where are you from?

Laura Donadoni 02:24

I'm originally from bear gamma, which is a small city, 20 miles east of Milan, the northern part of Italy Lombardi area. And if you follow the news in the last month, you may have heard about, because it was one of the most cheating CD for the pandemic. So it was up where, you know, the majority of fatalities happened for the COVID. And so it was a tough time for me being here and then hearing about on the sufferance, and that's and my parents being there, my family and being there. It has been rough. Yeah, but now it's better.

Julia Chebotar 03:09

I mean, your family's Okay.

Laura Donadoni 03:11

Now, yes, everybody's safe. And we had lost, but we are over over it now. So we are looking to the future with the euro. So everything now is behind us. So that's, that's good. That's our attitude.

Julia Chebotar 03:30

So I go around, and I interview different people. And I asked them what healthiest to them because everybody has a different take, and a different insight on health. And I would love to know since you're in the wine world, what is health mean to you and being healthy? And within the wine realm, I

Laura Donadoni 03:50

guess? Yeah, to me, being happy is all about attitude. You have a two word wine in this case, and in particular is about moderation. And the way you taste wine can make a difference between a healthy relationship with wine and a healthy relationship with wine. And it is a tough topic to talk about because it happens to me also in the wine industry to see people that are I can say the word addicted to the wine and wine. So alcohol can really drive you to addiction. So moderation is the key. And what for me is important is that when you choose to drink wine, you do that for the taste and the flavor and for the experience not to get high, not for the alcohol content. So this is the difference. Very important difference. You have to switch in your mind. You have to think about wine as an experience as a sensorial experience, and not as way to get high or to get wasted. That's a big difference. I love that. Yes. And that's what I try to do with my one my one indication courses like talking about food pairing, for instance, how one can complement your recipes, your food and what you're eating. So enhancing the experience of what you're tasting through wine. And so this is the right way to consume wine. For instance, we in Italy, we rarely drink wine myself, when I grew up as a child, I remember the wine being on the table with the meal. And my grandpa or my father never had a glass of wine outside meals. So it was intended as a complement of flavor, not as a drink itself. So that's key for me. And also, I'm trying to spread this kind of culture around wine and wine consumption.

Julia Chebotar 05:56

I think that matters so much to really care about what you're drinking and eating to have a beautiful experience and not to over consume and be wasted. When did your passion and relationship with food and wine start was it with like growing up in the home and seeing how you guys all ate meals together?

Laura Donadoni 06:19

Yeah, consider that my grandpa had in my family still have a winery, a small winery, near Bergamo. So I grew up in the vineyards with my grandpa, and they were producing and they still are producing wine for self consumption. So we don't sell our wine. But it's pretty common in Italy that many families produce their own wine because it's a traditional thing. So I grew up with my grandpa in the vineyards and I breathe, let's say the the atmosphere of vt cooler viticultural area since I was a child. And I remember this beautiful time of the year, which is our best time and with me with my family and my friends are visiting the graves and then the squeezing them and, and the you know, this smells, the flavors. And I think that all that remain in me in my DNA. And once I grew up first I did the journalist for many years in Bergamo, before moving into the US, but I was already talking about food and wine. So I was an gastronomical journalist. So like the importance of flavor and describing flavors, and food and traditions, it has always be my, you know, my passion. And so when once I came here in the US, I

translated that into the Italian wine girl, and I focused on Italian wines, because of my origins. I love it, you know,

Julia Chebotar 07:53

one of my favorite Italian wines, I have yet to be able to find it. It's a Sicilian red. And I was I was in Paris a few years ago. And it's amazing. It's my favorite place. I've been a few times. But the Sicilian reds are really hard to find in the US.

Laura Donadoni 08:09

Yeah, it's changing now, because we have some wine region, especially close to panarea. You have the, you know, the ethna, when I read that now is becoming very popular among the high end restaurant in the United States. So you can easily find a way to narrow so which is a wine produced by an from nerello mascalese a grape. And so it's pretty easy to find. Now, but it wasn't. It wasn't like this in the past. And in the past. I'm talking about two, three years ago, where you maybe you could find some less quality wines from Sicily, many cheap wines, but they were not so representative of the region as the narrow Swan is. And yeah, Sicily is amazing. I mean, is a is a word in Ireland, they say because they have mountains, they have a shoreline, I have lakes have different kinds of wines, all in one island, which is a small part of Italy, that diversity is is really a characteristic of Italy in terms of wine and food. We have more than 600 grape varieties from which we produce wine. And this number is one third of the worldwide grape varieties. So yeah, it's a tiny, tiny nation, Italy because it's a lot larger as California compared to the US, but it has so much diversity, and so you can get bored. If you want to drink an Italian wine every day, you still you have 365 days a year and you still can choose another new one for the next They so

Julia Chebotar 10:01

yeah, then what's the other three largest

Laura Donadoni 10:04

France and France? Yes. And Spain in Europe. They made my one producer. Yeah, but France as the 30% of the grape varieties of Italy. Well, in number compared to number, they are focused on what we call international variety. Like Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, these are French varieties, we call them International, because you almost can find them everywhere now. So also here in Napa, they produced Chardonnay Cabernet or Pinot Noir. So they had they had become like International, so planted everywhere, Italy as his own peculiar varieties that can grow only there. So that's why you can find so much diversity. And so, you know, different kinds of wines coming from Italy. That's our, you know, our asset, let's say, yeah, on the market that diversity, yes. But coming

Julia Chebotar 11:05

from Italy, to the United States, and you know, starting your brand and kind of expanding it here. What are the most like challenging things about your job as a small Union as a wine and food pairing just says that educator in wine that you find

Laura Donadoni 11:22

us, it's different. So at the beginning, for me, it was a kind of a sort of a cultural adjustment, because then the way to the consumption of wine is different here, than in Europe. As I mentioned before, here, for instance, it's not uncommon that somebody ordered a glass of wine without a meal, it's not uncommon that maybe you you go home after your work. And you open a bottle of Chardonnay, just relax and have a glass of wine. And for me, that is, at the beginning, it was weird. And so I had to adjust to this different culture around wine. And then I had to learn how to tell about Italian wines in a different way. Because here in the US, people started consuming consuming wine daily, or on a regular basis, just 20 years ago, in the last 20 years. So before, nobody Yeah, nobody before that was drinking wine. on a regular basis, maybe once a month to celebrate something, it was more about beer and spirits. So it's not part of the American culture, to drink wine on a daily basis. So not so many people know about wine. And so I had to start from scratch, explaining things that for me, maybe were obvious, or were part of me, because I grew up in a very different culture. So why need occasion is still a challenge. Because sometimes I have to think, with the mind of a person that grew up in the United States and doesn't have my traditional background. So I spent the first seven years of my, you know, my stay here in the United States, studying again, from scratch, for the one location. So having my taking my certifications, my diploma, with the American institutions, about wine, so and getting to know the dinette of sorry, of professional so the other colleagues and people that are working in the wine industry, to be able to, you know, invite them to my events. So it was a lot of work of PR. And starting again from from scratch, how to communicate wise with the proper language here.

Julia Chebotar 13:48

I've seen the some movie and just the word in the description. So I was just like, I'd be happy to remember all of this. I did.

Laura Donadoni 13:57

Yeah, it was tough. The first two years that when I started like crazy at this point, it was very tough. Yeah, I don't regret it. I mean, it's all learning something. It's the best gift you can make to you. And so I was really glad to have this opportunity to start again and study from scratch. What wine is here in the United States and also to get to know the American wine regions to go and visit Oregon for instance, or Washington state or a single place so it has been an incredible journey.

Julia Chebotar 14:42

What are your so when you do your wine courses? What are some things that you teach in like, kind of savant, what if I want to go to the store and I want to purchase a bottle of wine are there like specific key elements that I should be looking for Yeah,

Laura Donadoni 15:02

the most difficult thing is to understand which kind of wines you like. Mm hmm. So before going to the store or going one shopping, you should really pay attention of the kind of flavors you like the most. And this can be done also through food. For instance, if you're a person who likes spicy food, who likes acidic food, maybe you put a lot of lemon on your salad, a lot of vinegar on your salad. Or maybe you're a person who likes sweets. So you're like, you're more on the sweet side. So this helps you to also understand which kind of wines you would like. And so when you go to a wine shop, for instance, you can ask for assistance to say persons start saying these things. I'm a person who likes the salty food

and acidic foods. So I would like to complement my food with a wine so he can give you advice from certain kinds of wines, and excluding totally another, you know, another area of the world or kind of grapes. So that's the first starting point. And then what I say also is that you have to look for deals, and what does it mean? Sometimes so you have this very famous wine region denomination, then and the wine can cause somebody since I don't know Brunello di Montalcino or bar or no, this Napa Cabernet Sauvignon that really costs I don't know hundreds and hundreds per bottle. And if you if you want to drink something similar, you should look for one region closer to the wine region of that kind of wine. And probably you will have a similar taste profile because the grapes are grown in the proximity of these very famous wine regions. So that and you can have the wines for a fraction of the cost and get something similar to the you know, luxury experience. So these are just examples. But on my Instagram account, I may make specific examples and there is a section called wine buying one on one where you can go and find tips and definitely go Yeah.

Julia Chebotar 17:29

Do you have a favorite one?

Laura Donadoni 17:32

It's a tricky question for a while. Because

Julia Chebotar 17:37

the child is

Laura Donadoni 17:38

Yeah, I want a job so so never stop tasting because from other beverages like spirits, wine change on the times, I mean, for instance, if I taste 2017 vintage, a Cabernet Sauvignon that I like, next year, the same brand and the same Cabernet Sauvignon will be totally different because vintage from vintage, you have different wines because it depends on the condition of the grape grill with like, if it was a rainy year, if it was a sunny year, the arvest was good and not good. Something happened to the wine so everything is different. So it's not easy for a wine professional to say this is my absolute favorite. But I have a range of of grapes I prefer on on others. So typically very light body wines with versatility and minerality. spiciness. I love like very neat, clean wine I don't like when they are like lashes and they have a lot of fruit or too sweet or very heavy wines. So my taste is more I like a lot of white wines and sparkling wines. Yeah, because also with the food I consume, you know, I eat a lot of fish. I live in California. So I eat fresh vegetables, fish and fresh dishes. So to complement that kind of food. You go with sparkling wines, white wines, the rosae wines. And if you have a steak instead you go with a very bold red wines, but it's not what I eat on a regular basis. So that's my favorites.

Julia Chebotar 19:28

What are your thoughts? How do you see you know the wine industry right now with all the forest fires and Napa And do you think that will affect the taste of the wine and everything that's happening

Laura Donadoni 19:45

which is the defect that can happen in these vintages. When these fires we had enough fine Sonoma before consider that many wineries in the area decided not to produce this instead. Because it will be

probably 100% be tainted by the smoke from the fires. So some some people like think that this gives character to the wine. So a little bit of smoke paint is kind of a hallmark of this vintage. So it would be a rare vintage because it's an exceptional condition. And some other similar things that know that the wind is just bad because this mark is too overwhelming. And you can drink it. So it's a it's a choice of the winemaker whether to release on the market the wines from this vintage or not. The Sure thing is that this was unprecedented. So Napa and Sonoma, they never had so many fires in one vintages and so close to harvest time, because it was in the middle of October, and many wineries were out of sync. So it was really tough on them. And for you know, there are insurances, but they had big losses also in in volume and in production. So and with the COVID pandemic on top right, it really it has been a black year for Napa and Sonoma. But anyway, let's see. We will see what comes out. Yes. Yes, yeah. Yeah.

Julia Chebotar 21:17

What about the caught like natural wines? I think I'm allergic to red wine, certain red wines, because I get very stuffy and things you know, like sneezy is the way that European wines are produced different than American one.

Laura Donadoni 21:40

In terms of substances are allowed to be used during the growing season, for instance, pesticide or like, for, you know, frost control or any kind of oranges in the vineyards. So the regulation are different. And also the certifications are different. So when you buy a wine, for instance, that is producing the year in the United States, and it says organic, and you have another one coming from the European Union, and it says organic, the two organic definitions are different. So generally speaking in in Europe, there are stricter rules about organic wines. So if you see a wine coming from Europe that says organic, it's basically like more. Yeah, the rules that applies to that wine are stricter, so probably is more, let's say natural, even if I don't like this term, because all the wines are natural, even the ones that doesn't say organic. So they comes from grapes. And they don't also in the UI that in the European Union, they don't allow to add colorants, or other substances that hearing us are allowed. So for us, for Italy, for instance, this is not a thing because we know they can't do that. But here in the US is better that you check with a producer on the label, if that particular wine is produced is are in a more natural way, let's say. And some substances can give allergies. As you mentioned, for instance, if you had a red wine, considered that many wine that is, above all, like for cheap wines, they add colorants to the wind to retain the proper color, or to lean on to make them last more on the shelf when you open them. And these can give you energy reactions. Yes, no. Issue can me more. Yeah, check on the label or on the website of the producer is based on you know, chemicals to the wine. Okay,

Julia Chebotar 24:08

yes. Okay. Well, now I know that before we finish, every time before we finish the podcast, I asked what your last meal would be. This is your last day on earth and you could pick an appetizer and entree and a dessert. What would it be?

Laura Donadoni 24:28

I'll be very simple appetizer, we'll pick bread and tomatoes. Italian bread freshly baked. lightly toasted with very sweet tomatoes from Naples this tomato nanoliter tomatoes and olive oil, garlic and basil bruschetta and I would have for sure pasta with seafood. I love seafood. So I don't mean worse. I was

do like a linguini spaghetti with shrimp or, you know, a mix of seafood mussels. Yeah, the more the merrier. And then as a second I will go for a gelato. I'm very, very fun. Very Yes. geeky person on gelato. Italian gelato for me is like

Julia Chebotar 25:27

I agree. 100% my, my dessert would be an avocado. I want vanilla. espresso.

Laura Donadoni 25:34

Oh, that's, that's great. I love chocolate and pistachio. pistachio are my favorite flavors. But the Italian gelato in particular is so soft and creamy is not like dangerous as the ice cream. Yes. So I love the texture of the Italian gelato. And yeah. That would be my my favorite meal.

Julia Chebotar 26:00

Thank you. Do you have any other upcoming projects happening or anything that you want people to look out for?

Laura Donadoni 26:07

Um, I'm working on the translation of my first book. I published my book in Italy this year. Excellent. Thank you. And it has about 60 million producer with inspiring stories, producer that saved from extinction, some native varieties, some very specific story to women and for men. And it these stories are really, really interesting. And so in Italy, it has been a success. So I found our publisher in the US and we are working on the translation. And in 2021, it will be released on this market. So

Julia Chebotar 26:47

please let me know what I will promote it on all all things.

Laura Donadoni 26:50

Okay, thank you. Thank you, of

Julia Chebotar 26:53

course. Please tell everyone again, where they can find you where they can contact you all of the all the places.

Laura Donadoni 27:01

Yeah, you just look for the on Instagram, and my blog is.com. And on LinkedIn and Facebook, I'm as with my Don Antonio, you can find me like that. And yeah, my email is there. So reach out. Even if you have a question about Italian wines, or you're curious about it. I'm here to help if I can.

Julia Chebotar 27:24

Thank you so so much for being on. I really appreciate you taking the time out to chat with me.

Laura Donadoni 27:31

Okay, thank you, of course. And

Julia Chebotar 27:33

so that's all for today's podcast. Thank you all for listening, and remember to follow Italian wine girl and to follow help ship Julia and subscribe to this podcast.