

Tysan Pierce

The Herbfarm, Woodinville, Washington

WHEN A 5-YEAR-OLD REQUESTS PROSCIUTTO-WRAPPED MELON AND OYSTERS ON THE HALF-SHELL FOR HER BIRTHDAY DINNER, CHANCES ARE GOOD SHE WON'T BE DOWNING CANS OF CHEAP BEER ON HER 21ST BIRTHDAY.



The Herbfarm

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CARA GARDNER

Cara Gardner has spent the last 10 years living and traveling in Asia, Europe, and Central America. Formerly a newspaper reporter and magazine editor, she is now a freelance writer living in Denver.

In fact, Tysan Pierce, the little girl with the grown-up palate, was running a wine program by age 21. Now, still young by industry standards, Pierce is an instructor for the International Sommelier Guild and the sommelier at The Herbfarm, northeast of Seattle, where she has the luxury of serving guests five or six different wines during a nine-course meal. “What I do is a sommelier’s dream,” Pierce says. “The Herbfarm is more than just a restaurant. You go on a culinary journey for four and a half hours. We don’t serve nine courses just because we can; the entire meal is like a culinary play that unfolds with a climax and a resolution.”

Rated one of America’s top 10 restaurants in 2007 by Zagat and hailed each year by publications from *National Geographic* to *Travel & Leisure*, The Herbfarm is known as a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience that brings many diners back for seconds. Pierce is a major reason why;

working with chef Keith Luce, she has helped develop a menu that highlights food and wines from the Pacific Northwest. “We’re taking an old concept and tweaking it with modern culinary tricks,” she explains, “to showcase how regional food and wine synthesize well.”

Pierce’s keen understanding of the culinary arts can be traced to her artistic background. Her father was an overseas teacher, and the family moved around from Illinois to China and Switzerland. After graduating from Vassar at 19, Pierce took a series of serving jobs in upscale Manhattan eateries to help pay her way through the School of Visual Arts. Rather than finishing art school, however, she followed her palate. “What got me on this journey was a combination of not being a particularly talented artist and having a great manager who loved wine and encouraged us to taste,” Pierce says. “I liken my love of art to my love of wine. It’s easy to go to a

Photos by Jon Granen (above right), Ron Zimmerman

SOMMELIER SPOTLIGHT

SAMPLE MENU AND WINE PAIRINGS

THE FAR FIELD

A Prelude in Sea

Paddlefish Caviar on Crisp Salmon Skin
Rosemary-Mussel Skewer with
Cucumber Kimchi
Westcott Bay Oyster with Sorrel Sauce
2001 Argyle Brut, Oregon

Boletus and Dungeness Crab Handkerchiefs with Chervil-Chive Butter

*2004 Domaine Serene Chardonnay, Côte Sud
Vineyard, Oregon*

Lummi Island Reef-Netted Sockeye

in a Squash Blossom with Lemon Thyme
2004 WillaKenzie Estate Pinot Gris, Oregon

Puget Sound Perch

on Salsify Purée with Parsley-Lovage Sauce
*2005 Soter Vineyards Pinot Noir Rosé, North
Valley, Oregon*

Anderson Ranch Oregon Lamb

Loin on Tongue-of-Fire Beans
Braised Shank on Emmer
Tenderloin Poached in Olive Oil and Thyme
*1999 Glen Fiona Syrah "Basket Press,"
Washington*

Estrella Family Creamery Bea Truffled Cheese

with Desert King Figs and Herbfarm Honey

Muscat-Poached Peaches

with Anise Hyssop Ice



*Wine Library at The
Herbfarm includes an
1834 Madeira.*

museum, look at Monet's water lilies, think, 'Oh, that's pretty,' and be done. But if you know the context of the Impressionist movement, where Monet was when he painted it, and the struggles of the art movement to create such a piece, then it has so much more meaning; it is so much more beautiful."

For Pierce, it's the same with wine. Take a sip and it might be good, but to truly know that sip—to understand what went into making it—that's art. From New York, she moved to Portland, Ore., to be near her sister, and found herself in the heart of Pinot Noir country. After

spending a couple of seasons helping with harvest and crush at Westrey Wine Co., Pierce says her relationship with wine shifted from "passionate interest" to "obsession." "I fell into one of the fermenting tanks during punchdowns on the wine," she recalls. "I just lost my footing. I was baptized in wine."

Pierce became one of the youngest wine stewards in Portland, and by age 25, she was in charge of the largest wine program in the state, at The Heathman Restaurant & Bar. Her successful winemakers' dinner series, showcasing the best Oregon wines, got the attention of The Herbfarm in 2006. Pierce jumped at the chance to move to Seattle, where she could continue to promote Pacific Northwest wines. She is currently working toward a degree in environmental sustainability, which encompasses biodynamic

FIVE FAVORITES



The Herbfarm's Kitchen Gardens at dusk (top) and Salad Garden (bottom). Two suites on the property are available for guest rental.

D'Arenberg Shiraz "The Dead Arm," McLaren Vale	2005	\$112
Served with grilled Anderson Ranch lamb in a huckleberry sauce. A full-throttle Aussie red with a gamey, meaty texture and enough fruit to pair perfectly.		
Jermann Vintage Tunina, Friuli-Venezia Giulia	2005	\$112
Served with a handkerchief pasta stuffed with stinging nettles in a light butter sauce. Jermann is one of my favorite northern Italian white wine producers. This wine has a great texture that would have been even better with a few more years in our cellar.		
Christoffel-Prüm Riesling Auslese Ürziger Würzgarten, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer	1976	\$170
Served with fresh Dungeness crab. With age, German Riesling moves toward the sublime, featuring petrol aromas and amazing citrus fruits. That smell of summer rain hitting pavement exudes out of the glass.		
NV Jose Dhondt Blanc de Blancs Vieilles Vignes, Champagne	NV	\$100
Served with Kushi oysters on the half-shell and paddlefish caviar from the Yellowstone River in Montana. You can't mess with the simple perfection of this classic pairing.		
Huet Vouvray "Le Haut Lieu" Moelleux, Loire Valley	1947	\$1,600
Served with a thick, seared foie gras with grilled brioche, apricot chutney, and vanilla syrup—perhaps one of the wine pairings of my career. Late-harvest botrytis affected this Chenin Blanc with a perfect whiff of mushroom and earth. Honeyed and magical.		

farming and viticulture, at Antioch University in Seattle.

"Being particularly young and being a woman has made it interesting," she says. "I had a lot of guests who wanted to play the 'do you know as much as me' game." Although she is quick to add that all sommeliers encounter that kind of customer, Pierce notes, "It's very unlikely that my male counterparts in this industry are referred to as 'honey,' or that their customers continue to mistake them for the hostess."

When faced with these challenges, Pierce declines to play the

game. "Wine is way too good to be pretentious," she says. "When guests try to do the 'how many points did it score' bit, I refuse to engage. I couldn't care less what the score of a wine is. I love wine magazines, don't get me wrong, and any attention given to wine is good, but you can't honestly tell the difference between a 96- and a 94-point wine when it's in the glass, with the ambiance and the food."

A typical evening at The Herbfarm begins when a server offers baskets filled with rose geranium, lemon verbena, and pineapple sage. Each guest chooses an herb, which is then crushed and dropped into a flute filled with sparkling wine. "The herb doesn't change the flavor," Pierce says, "but it adds to the aromatics, so from the very beginning they are

smelling each other's glasses and commenting."

If the tasting menu is ordered, wines selected to match the various courses are poured freely by the staff, depending on the pace of the meal. Like the art historian helping students appreciate the context of a masterpiece, Pierce tries to give diners the story behind The Herbfarm's local foods and wines. "My favorite moment," says Pierce, "is watching people get it—how food and wine relate, and how exciting that marriage can be. I'm blessed to have that happen multiple times during a night." 🍷