



FOOD OR WINE SHOP

RED FEET WINE MARKET

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In 2001, Dewi Rainey decided she wanted to learn more about wine. She was two years into running her very popular restaurant Maxie's Supper Club & Oyster Bar. While most people might start with a popular wine book, Dewi took a different approach. She would bus down to New York City on Tuesdays to take an evening course from the Wine Spirits and Education Trust (WSET), wake up the next day and take another course with the Sommelier Society of America and, in the evening, take the very popular Windows on the World wine course with Kevin Zraly. She would treat herself to nice dinners and really interesting wine bars in between. Each week, she would take the 11pm bus out of Port Authority, arriving home to Ithaca at 4am.

Anyone who knows Dewi wouldn't be surprised by this kind of commitment when doing something she felt passionate about. By 2007, with her restaurant days behind her, she opened Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions. When you walk into Red Feet, you immediately notice the warm, natural, inviting feeling given off from the wood floors and reclaimed wood shelves, like you feel when walking into an old-time general store. Within seconds you are greeted with a smile and an offer of help.

"I wanted to bring my hospitality background to retail," Dewi says. "I wanted to service our guests. Make them feel good. I wanted to talk about food, asking 'What are you eating tonight?' And finally, I wanted to provide learning."

It is this kind of genuine high-touch customer service, reminiscent of that visit to your favorite local market, that makes Red Feet so special to its customers. It's an integral part of Ithaca's Fall Creek community scene that values the intimacy of markets, as evidenced by Red Feet's venerable neighbors, The Ithaca Farmers Market and The Piggery.

The products on the shelves at Red Feet further mirror Dewi's attentive, careful and customer-driven philosophy. Dewi, and her buyers, Empar Sicroff and Mary Pat Rouse, focus on tasting and buying wines regularly that are delicious, well made, authentic, family-driven and environmentally sound. The wines cover all price ranges,

but no matter the price, provide value through quality. They are wines that are pure and true and show a sense of place. She calls it "liquid geography."

As far as Finger Lakes products are concerned, the shop has consistent wineries, cideries and distilleries from which it buys, but Dewi says there are no limits to what they can carry for the Finger Lakes. They particularly encourage producers to come to the shop themselves, so she can taste with them and hear their story.

"As with all our wines, they know we hand-pick based on tasting. I want to buy these wines, I want to be wowed by them instantly."

One of the highlights at Red Feet is "Thursday Hang Time," their weekly wine tasting. "There's real sense of community and camaraderie among the many that come in regularly," she says. "I know they enjoy the learning, but they also enjoy being pampered and paid attention to. We put a lot of thought and time into the program, creating tasting sheets with thematic writeups and information for each wine every single Thursday. That is why we don't have distributors or outsiders do it. But all the preparation pays off in ongoing staff education and clear customer appreciation."

In the end, for Dewi and the entire Red Feet staff, it's all part of going back to what a true market experience used to be. "It's about making life better for people."

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Laura Winter Falk owns Experience! The Finger Lakes, a touring and events company. She holds a PhD in food and nutrition and is a Certified Sommelier, with a WSET 3 award in wines. She is an adjunct professor of wine at Tompkins Cortland Community College.

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