

Ep 83: Wine stories, wine pairing and a whole load of wine tips with Worlds best drinks journalist Natalie Maclean



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just can not get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, hoping you're all fantastic today. So today's episode is a goodie. I'm chatting with the Worlds best drinks journalist, according to The World Food Media awards; Natalie MacLean. I mean, she's only gone and won herself 4 James Beard foundation journalism awards. And so we will be talking to her about her two wine books that are out on the market. You'll get to listen to incredible stories of what it's like to be down in the cellars of DRC; Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, and you'll get a whole load of tips from organizing tastings with friends. Some great cheese and wine pairings and what you should be doing when in a wine shop, to make the right decision. I have to say my favorite part is right at the end when Natalie pairs famous books with wine. So you must stay till the end to see what she picks and why. So grab a glass of wine and get ready to laugh along with us.

Janina Doyle 00:01:41 Hello Natalie, thank you for joining me today.

Natalie MacLean 00:01:45 I'm so glad to be here with you Janina.

Janina Doyle 00:01:47 Um, doing my research. I kind of feel like you're Canadian wine royalty. What do you think of that title?

Natalie MacLean 00:01:56 Well, I, as long as it doesn't have any responsibility, I'd rather be a, like a rogue princess or something that doesn't really have to do all those formal duties. It's like, that's no fun. Thank you.

Janina Doyle 00:02:07 There is a lot of responsibility. No. With all your wine knowledge comes a lot of responsibility.

Natalie MacLean 00:02:14 The crown is heavy

Janina Doyle 00:02:15 Okay. Put the crown down for a second. Pick up a glass and let's continue. I want you to tell me a little of your story because you didn't start drinking at a young, young age or, you know, the dinner table with parents. This is your husband's doing right?

Natalie MacLean 00:02:31 Yes. Yes. Well, I like to say I start started drinking when I met my husband and I, I haven't found a reason to stop.

Janina Doyle 00:02:39 Did he make you drink? He drove you to drink?

Natalie MacLean 00:02:41 Yeah, that's right. He is my ex by the way, but that's a whole other story.

Janina Doyle 00:02:45 Oh, can we fit in another podcast?

Natalie MacLean 00:02:48 Yes. Get into the juicy juicy bits.

Janina Doyle 00:02:49 Absolutely wine and relationships. Okay. Right. So that husband, moving on, carrying on.

Natalie MacLean 00:02:55 Yes. Moving on, moving on. So, right. So we, uh, attended graduate school together. We both did an MBA, so it wasn't really, till we got out of school and had some money to get fancy that we actually started drinking wine. I couldn't cook. He didn't like to. So we went out to restaurants a lot and started ordering wine. But, um, I do remember the first trip we took. I wasn't a wine writer. I was in high tech, um, ah, high tech marketing, and we went to Italy and it was so beautiful. I mean, it was just, uh, you know, I'm sure as you know, Janina, um, I mean, it's a feast for the senses from, you know, the, that those slanting amber rays of the sun to the tall type Cypress trees, the terracotta buildings. And of course the food and wine, it was just glorious and it was endless. And I just thought, oh, I want to live in this world. And so the only way I could take it back with me was pretty much through a bottle. Um, so we, you know, we took as many bottles as we could sneak away with clinking through customs going: Yep, just got one bottle.

Janina Doyle 00:04:00 Anything to declare? Nope, Nope, definitely not, chink, chink, chink, chink.

Natalie MacLean 00:04:08 Um, but, but those bottles, you know, when we opened them back home, you know, even in our rainy apartment in Toronto, they did bring back the memories. And, um, we weren't quite at the Mediterranean, but I just loved the experience. And it really, it, it turned me on to wine literally, because I grew up in a Scottish family from the East Coast, Nova Scotia. So it was beer and whiskey. Wine wasn't part of the family table. So this was really my introduction to wine.

Janina Doyle 00:04:35 And now, I love this title, I feel like I should steal this title. You've named yourself, which is probably better than wine royalty, so the crowns off. The chief of wine happiness. I mean, fabulous. Now, you, well, I'm stealing it. So, um, you have written incredible wine books that have got you awards. You are on television, giving people advice, uh, running online wine courses. So you're doing a whole load in the spectrum of delivering wine excitement and knowledge. So what, what is a typical day for you? Does that exist?

Natalie MacLean 00:05:11 Yeah, well probably like you Janina. I, you know, there is no typical day, but I can generalize. Um, I'm good at that. So, uh, all Chardonnays taste like this. No, but, um, I usually get up, uh, pretty early, like around five in the morning. And um...

Janina Doyle 00:05:28 Yes, Circadian rhythm. I am with you on this. Yes.

Natalie MacLean 00:05:31 Yes. I am an early riser. Then again, I, I go to bed at nine, you know, and everybody's just getting going, but anyway, I find my best brain is in the morning. Um, so that's when I do writing. Um, and you know, for magazine columns, uh, for my online food and wine pairing courses,

I'm now working on a third book, a, a memoir. So my, I use my brain in the morning. Um, and then afternoons are more for physical stuff like running errands, um, working out to keep off the calories. Um, because there's a natural dip in my energy. And I think for a lot of people that sort of mid to late afternoon dip, um, but I come out of it around four or five and that's when I do my tasting. So anywhere between, you know, 10 and sometimes up to 30 wines, I'll taste, enter reviews for the website. Um, those go on my mobile apps, uh, that have the barcode scanner and the front label optical reader. Yeah. Yeah. So you know that, I try to keep up with the wines that I get, um, the number of samples. I get no pity, um, about that. Oh, it's such a hard job!

Janina Doyle 00:06:43 No, it genuinely, sometimes it's really stressful when you realize as well, you've committed to specific deadlines where things need to be written about or tasted and you are like, oh my God, I, and also, I, I, from my perspective, I actually, unless I don't like the bottle, I really wanna drink the wine. Some winemakers put his heart and soul into that bottle. And for me, just to, when I get a, given a whole bottle to taste a sample and then be like, oh, I've got 10 bottles open and, oh, well, I'll just pour it down the sink. I'm like, no, I need to coordinate my timings to make sure I drink those bottles and, and have them with food as well, and, and really get the most out of each one. So then for me, yes, sob story, it's very stressful.

Natalie MacLean 00:07:29 It is. People just don't know how much we suffer, like our livers' for, for the people. But when my, uh, my partner of 10 years now, um, post divorce, when he first saw me pouring wine down the drain, he thought it was a wine crime. It's like, what are you doing? What are you doing? And, um, so at first, you know, uh, he, he made me cork them all and he would distribute them to friends, but subsequently I now have a team of people who review on my website. So I just take the ounce or two, recork for them and they come pick him up. He's very sad that things have turned out that way but it's like, you know what? You've got a lot of benefits. Let's not be too mopy here.

Janina Doyle 00:08:08 Uhhuh. There's enough wine around.

Natalie MacLean 00:08:10 Yeah, exactly. Exactly. We live in a castle of wine. Anyway.

Janina Doyle 00:08:15 Now I've already mentioned, I touched on the point that you are on TV, so you are on CTV, which for it, The Social it's called, right. It's for many of us in, in the UK who are listening to this podcast, it's basically, it's not just any daytime television show. It's like the largest daytime television show. You, you know, just go for the best. So you are on there and the CTV news and on morning shows educating the world. So, I mean, this has got to be so much fun. Is this the peak or is this just one of the things you enjoy doing?

Natalie MacLean 00:08:47 Well yes. I'm past peak. I'm on the decline now, but you've caught me before I've slid into the, the gutter. Um, no, I just, The Social, um, that was fun. Like I've been doing, I've been on that show now for well, since 2013. So that's seven, eight years. The Social is modeled after, um, The View, if anybody's familiar with the show, The View, uh, in the States. In that they have four celebrity hosts who talk about like a variety of issues, often quite controversial, the old guests and so on. And it's filmed before a live studio audience and it's live aired out to 3.6 million viewers across the country. So there's no taping, there's no editing. Uh, you're live. So, um...

Janina Doyle 00:09:33 And has something gone wrong ever?

Natalie MacLean 00:09:36 Oh, well, yeah, for sure. Um, so, um, what happens with the, The Social They, they, they take it, they're more integrated with social media than The View, so they will have, um, or they used to have live Twitter comments and other comments from social media on the screen, reacting to whatever was going on on the show. And so I just cold called the editor, pitched her on pairing wine with fast food. And she, she loved that idea for the first segment. And so I thought, well, you know, um, this could go really well or, or I could get shamed on national television because there had been more than a few people on social media, trolls and whatnot, who had told me that that was a ridiculous topic to write about, cause I had written about it before. Um, however, I, I love wine and food pairing. It's the, the thing I focus on in my wine and food online pairing courses, because I think it makes wine more accessible. Anyway, so we got in, uh, you know, we're on the set. It live, you know, there's about a dozen cameras going in and out and there's blinding lights and there's hosts on either side and it's like, I'm, I can melt right now into a puddle of neurosis or I can forget about all that, focus on the audience and try to give them a good time. So, you know, it, it did go well, thank God. They were throwing me questions, you know, pizza, hamburgers, what goes well with all of this, and we're having fun. And you know, I just, as we walked off the stage in the set, I was like, I just let out, like, I felt like a deflated balloon, but in a good way. It was just such a relief, but you know, there have been other times when things have gone wrong, like on CTV news, which is also live, um, I was trying to sabre Champagne. So you know, why not, again, put yourself in a really stressful situation. And it, we had to go to break. And, um, the end part was me trying to sabre this thing, and I had already tried it twice and it wasn't breaking. And the host was saying, well, we believe you, we believe you, it can work. And it was like, oh no. And it, it was literally third time was a charm. Um, the cork went flying. I nearly took out the weatherman, the wine went everywhere. It was like, everywhere. The host and I were sort of dancing and hugging in this spray. And, and then we just went to commercial. It was like, thank God we're out. We're out.

Janina Doyle 00:11:53 Well, I mean the amount of videos of people trying to do sabrage. And you know what, I know how to do it. I am aware. I know it's all about the seam. I know at 45 degree angle, I know that, of course the bottle needs to be very cold. I know that it's better to go along that seam a few times. And then when you kind of feel it, you know, and bash. But you know what, I've never done it. I have never done it, because you know why? Because I don't wanna do it with my own champagne. I don't, in case it goes wrong.

Natalie MacLean 00:12:21 Sure. You've gotta get a cheap bottle.

Janina Doyle 00:12:23 Yeah, I know. I, I should, I need to go and get some Cava or, you know, something that has enough pressure inside. I always say to people don't do with Prosecco. It would be too low. You need the full bars of pressure. But yeah, I should just do it and, and have some fun with it, but there's some, I just, I don't wanna embarrass myself, but yeah, I should practice.

Natalie MacLean 00:12:39 No, it is nerve wracking, even when you're just trying it in the backyard. Um it's but on, on TV it's as live action as TV can get with wine, which is usually, you know, pretty calm, but you know, the, the studio lights were so hot and my hands were shaking. I think that's why it was not working. It was like, oh no, I did this in the backyard and it worked. But anyway, it all, happy ending.

Janina Doyle 00:13:01 We like that. Good. Well, anyway, I aspire. I'm still, I'm waiting for somebody to listen in the UK. So we have, in fact, we have Loose women, which is a bunch of women who are generally a whole mix of different types of celebrities. And they sit normally with coffee, unless they've

got some spirits in there, but there's no wine, but I can't, maybe, maybe I should just be brave, send them a message and be like, do you know who I am?

Natalie MacLean 00:13:29 Do you know what I can do for you?

Janina Doyle 00:13:31 Exactly. I can revolutionize your show. Well, anyway, but have a look, check out Loose women. It's basically, it seems The View and The Social, but actually without any of the wine.

Natalie MacLean 00:13:41 I like the name Loose women. Sounds like they'd be fun group of women.

Janina Doyle 00:13:45 Actually. It, it is, it is very fun. Now let's go to your book. So your first book that you've written is Red, white and drunk all over: a wine soaked journey from grape to glass. Love the name. If, if people are gonna read this book, where are they gonna be taken, quite clearly to Italy, to the spine, the mountains, the hills, I'm sure, right, of Italy, but where, where are they gonna go? What are, what are they gonna learn?

Natalie MacLean 00:14:13 Well, you know, I love the approach of the new journalists. So Truman Capote, Joan Didion, uh, George Plimpton, what they did was they did day in the life of, they tried to immerse themselves in their subject rather than just reporting on the sidelines. So George Plimpton wrote a football book, a book about football, but instead of interviewing all the players, he tried, he did play in the NFL for, I don't know if it was a full season or not, but you just dig down deeper and get those insights and feelings of what it's like to do the thing. So, um, I worked as a, uh, Sommelier in a five diamond restaurant, fancy French restaurant, um, made mistakes, mistakes were made. Um, and, uh, but through that, um, you know, I, I learned and was able to write about what is good restaurant wine service. How do you decipher a restaurant list? So like my mother used to hide the peas in the mashed potatoes, sort of learning, um, was more palatable than just straight up, here's 26 steps on, you know, what good restaurant wine service is. So I, I did a lot of that. I worked in a wine store. I helped, um, Randall Graham who is a great witty winemaker in California, Bonny Doon. Worked with him at the harvest. Um, but it also did all sorts of other things. You know, I traveled to Burgundy and tasted Domaine Romanée-conti and that's not a brag, but even though it sounds like it, um, went down in the cellar with Aubert de Villaine who's the winemaker-owner there. And he made me blind taste from, he, he said, turn around.

Janina Doyle 00:15:49 He made you, you were like, I don't wanna do it. I don't wanna taste your wine.

Natalie MacLean 00:15:52 I know, I was forced. And he said, he said, what if I left you down here? I said, just leave a cork screw. I'll be fine. But uh, he had this wine library and they were all webby bottles. And so he said, turn around. I said, uh, okay. And so he pulled a bottle from the shelf. I didn't know where, and he made me guess, uh, which vintage as, as we tasted. So, um, so like I was trying to, you know, Hmm, should I say, well, the rain's in '46? Definitely not that year. But I, I kind of had a sense from the corner of my eye, not that I was peaking, but that he was going around the middle of the rack. And so, um, when I turned around, I could see that was kind of the 1950, so I just made a stab in the middle, Um, you know, I think it's the fifties and he is looking really pleased, like, oh, I picked a good student and, uh, anyway, I, I actually narrowed it down, but only because of luck, not for any sort of skill. But, but my point to that and the other things that I've done, you know, when I did book readings for this book, they'd say, oh my gosh, you got into, you know, Domaine de la Romanée-conti. And I, and as I

explained to the group, I said, it wasn't me. It was you. It's my readers that I bring with me. That's how I gained entry to all of these places. I, I do not kid myself in terms of, oh, it's it's me and whatever. And you know, to your point, not really royalty, I I'm an elected member of the wine people. They voted me in, or they voted with their confidence. And it's who I bring with me to these experiences that allow me that kind of entry.

Janina Doyle 00:17:28 Yeah. Yeah. You're the chief of wine happiness. That that's the correct title.

Natalie MacLean 00:17:31 Yes. Yes.

Janina Doyle 00:17:32 I, you can tell from a face, I'm just like, oh, just the thought of being, can you imagine being locked down in the cellars of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, like, oh no, what are we going to do whilst we wait?

Natalie MacLean 00:17:46 It's a perfect way to go. And it'd be perfectly preserved. You'd be pickled actually, by the time they got the door open, it was like, oh, so sad, but happy ending.

Janina Doyle 00:17:56 That is amazing. So people are gonna go all the way around, pick up some tips from your journeys and your discoveries. And obviously hopefully kind of feel like they were there as well, which is the closest thing. Most people will not get into the cellar of DRC, will they? So.

Natalie MacLean 00:18:13 That's true. It's not an open winery. It doesn't, it doesn't have a tasting room as do wineries in, you know, England, Canada, the US. So.

Janina Doyle 00:18:21 For obvious reasons. Well then tell me about the second book. So the second book: Unquenchable, as we both are. Unquenchable: a tipsy quest for the world's best bargain wine. So I like this one because we've gone from DRC, which is only tasted by, by a few in the world these days. What are people gonna find in this book? I probably already ruined the surprise by the title, right?

Natalie MacLean 00:18:42 No, no, it's, it's all good. Uh, like definitely. Yeah. This is the antithesis of DRC. I just had enough of all these fine wines. It was like, oh....

Janina Doyle 00:18:51 Oh no, I can't drink cult wines anymore. And fine wines that have been aged for 50 years. Ew, disgusting.

Natalie MacLean 00:18:56 I need to be one with the people again. Um, so, this was what, what the common theme is, is again, between the two books is, I like to seek out really obsessive winemakers. That's actually not a hard thing to do as, you know, wine drinkers, makers, et cetera, were all kind of obsessive types. And so this, um, so I went to Australia and, you know, Provence and all over the place, looking for areas where the value of wine is just off the charts. And often I found it was, if you go south. So what I mean by that is, you know, in Italy, Tuscany, Piedmont, they're very cache brand name, wine regions. But if you go south to Sicily, you know, you can get some incredible values. Same thing in France, from Bordeaux, Burgundy, go down to the Languedoc.

Janina Doyle 00:19:48 Portugal. It's the same, it's true, isn't it? Yeah. Yeah.

Natalie MacLean 00:19:51 Even, even in California, Napa and Sonoma are the brand names, but go down to, you know, Pasa Robles, you're going to get better value. And so, um, so I was looking for that sort of intersection between value and, you know, slightly unhinged, uh, winemakers who would tell me things off script and without close PR guardians. So.

Janina Doyle 00:20:14 An eternal struggle I can imagine, these days.

Natalie MacLean 00:20:15 Exactly. So I, I found them, uh, you know, Wolf Blass in Australia is just, um, he is a, a wild man with a lot of energy. Um, and you know, he has, he has this one wine it's, his labels are pretty much color coded. He was one of the first to do that and make wine a lot more accessible and easy to buy. But he, he has a red label, it's just called the Wolf blast red label. He goes, oh, I call that the leg opener. And I was like, okay, I don't think I need to probe that. Um, and so, but anyway, we just had a marvelous time and you know, Charles Back in Fairview, South Africa, he also makes the line Goats du Roam.

Janina Doyle 00:21:02 Yes. Okay. I was like, why is that name so familiar?

Natalie MacLean 00:21:04 Yep, exactly. So that's a play of Côtes du Rhône. And he had a big standoff with, um, the French wine authorities because they felt he was infringing on copyright. But what he did was he took a busload of his farm workers, vineyard workers down to the French embassy. And he has all these goats on property, made me milk a goat because he thought that would go viral on social media, me kneeling, milking a goat. Anyway, he's full of fun, but he told me this story and he said, it took a boat, a busload of farm workers down to the French embassy. And he goes, I don't know how CNN found out about it, wink, wink, but they showed up and as did a lot of other media and they sang freedom songs, but then they presented the ambassador of the French embassy with a vacuum sealed package of goat droppings. And, um, so he said the French authorities dropped the lawsuits. He goes, but he said to me, I'd appreciate anything you could do stir up that controversy again. It was great PR.

Janina Doyle 00:22:12 Wow. Well, you know, no PR is worse than bad PR as they say, or whatever that saying is. Have you met Charles Smith from Washington?

Natalie MacLean 00:22:21 I have not. I've heard lots of things about him. He, is he in Washington?

Janina Doyle 00:22:25 Yeah. And you would, you would want him for another book. Like he, his hair is big and crazy and big and he, you know, like Sideshow Bob kind of hair from the Simpsons and he is literally wild. Apart from the fact, it, almost his wines the, the voluptuousness of his wines, the roundedness, the power, it's almost, the explosion of fruit. It sums him up, but I'll remember, I won't name the place, but he came to a launch of one of his wines. We're in this restaurant and all of a sudden, we are talking and he's, ohhhhhh, and he goes to run off and he goes and hides behind a really long curtain by some windows. He's behind this curtain. And I follow him and I'm like, why are you behind this curtain? And he's like the owner of this specific restaurant, to give you an idea, it's a very cool, funky kind of restaurant, is walking in. And he's like, the last time I was with him, I didn't wake up for three days and I'll leave it there and let people use their imagination what the hell they got up to?

Natalie MacLean 00:23:27 Wow, wine must have been involved for sure.

Janina Doyle 00:23:30 For sure. So I, I don't know how much he was exaggerating, but he's definitely a little cray cray and, but, but energetic and interesting. And just as you were saying, going to Australia, you know, stories that you can have with him, they'll stick with you forever. So of these bargain wines, have you got a specific region that you really lean towards, or just a few actual specific wines that people listening may want to go out and seek?

Natalie MacLean 00:24:00 Sure. Um, so I loved visiting Sicily. You know, anything with a volcano is just magical. It's the power of the earth. And that anytime you might die, perhaps while you're drinking, I don't know.

Janina Doyle 00:24:12 Nothing like a little bit of danger.

Natalie MacLean 00:24:15 Yeah, exactly. I, I don't know. I think life, death, eating, satiation, you know, sensory, anyway. Um, but I loved visiting Sicily, again, a sun drenched island, south of Italy, and they have so many iconic dishes. I mean, pistachios are everywhere. Seafood is fresh and, and just the wines, you know, I, I, I'm not sure whether volcanic soil makes a huge difference or if it's just a matter of drainage, but, um, there's something about those wines that is special and of the earth and powerful and, uh, yeah, def, I mean, the wines are such great value. I mean, they just, they're a fraction of the cost of other more Northern Italian wines. I mean, the, the label that stands out is Cusumano. Yeah. And the grape is Nero D'Avola, the, the black grape near Avola, I believe the town. Uh, but they're just these luscious, full bodied, smooth reds. Um, they're gorgeous. So that would be one. Another would be, you know, closer to home. Um, well actually I'll save that for later. Um, the Ontario wine. Um, but yeah, no, the Italian wines stand out. Of course I loved Provence. Um, I love Rosé. I drink it year round and, um, just again, it's those sensory memories and I was fortunate, um, to share a glass with Peter Mayle or Mayle, the author of A year in Provence. Um, and we sat down and had Rosé cause that's his absolute favorite. I visited him in his small little, um, town village and you know, we're sitting out in the sun on a bistro deck and it's like, this is just, I wanna stay. And I guess it's, it's the association. I mean the wine itself, I don't know, wouldn't score 97, but the, the experience sure would.

Janina Doyle 00:26:14 So do you think that being down in Provence may be one of your favorite places to have visited or have you got a, have you got a specific winery that sticks in your head that's just brought, that's a 97 out of a hundred?

Natalie MacLean 00:26:27 Ah, winery. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah. I'm trying to think, cause my mind goes to Ontario again, uh, because some of my most favorite experiences are here. So do ask me about that again. But you know, visiting the wineries in Italy was wonderful. I mean Tommasi and....

Janina Doyle 00:26:43 So you love being in Veneto.

Natalie MacLean 00:26:44 Yeah, exactly. Uh, Fattoria dei Barbi.

Janina Doyle 00:26:48 Okay. Oh, well you are talking about all over the place. But yeah, Piedmonte it's one of, for me being in La Morra, in the Barolo region up on the hill, looking down because of the, the amount of vineyards rolling, it's special and, and certainly as well is Tuscany. It's so funny. I remember going from Florence to like just down into the middle of Chianti and somewhere it's probably a few kilometers, like takes an hour because you don't go in a straight line. You like go around and around and around a hill and up and down. And again, all those olive groves and the Cypress trees and little Castles on top of every town, you know, it is it's special, isn't it? Yeah.

Natalie MacLean 00:27:26 It is. And, and it does take a long time, especially when you get lost and you have a German bus driver on a one way road, who's swearing in German at the Italian drivers honking, coming straight at us and trying to back up a busload of people down a tall hill, it was like, oh, that's fun. We need a drink.

Janina Doyle 00:27:48 But definitely a memory. Yes. If they've forgot the wine on board, then it's not so fun. Oh dear. Okay. Well anyway, conclusion for everybody. Do you know what, one: Italy for sure, of all the places I've been to actually in the world is like, I swear every region is just gonna blow your mind, but you'll be fine. Most places where wine grows, there's some beautiful view behind it. Isn't there?

Natalie MacLean 00:28:10 There is. I'm so glad uh, Janina, we don't write about plumbing parts or something. We'd be touring dank wet factories that don't smell so good. We, we are so privileged to go to the most beautiful places on earth.

Janina Doyle 00:28:22 This is so true. Talking of beauty then, what has been the highlight the most beautiful moment of your wine career so far? Because obviously I've got a whole long list of all the awards you've won and all, I'm wondering if that's going to be, oh, obviously after your, your son's birth. Of course that's the highlight, but we're talking wine. Of course.

Natalie MacLean 00:28:41 Right. Well, yes. My, my mind actually didn't go to my son's birth.

Janina Doyle 00:28:48 We'll edit, we'll edit that bit out.

Natalie MacLean 00:28:50 No, no, no. It's all right. Uh, perhaps my first glass of wine after he was born, that was pretty special. Um, cause I had been totally off of it, of course. Um, but yeah, I mean just so many memories come back to me, uh, not because the wine was iconic, but because of who I was with, like the friends, the family, you know, just sharing a wine, a quiet moment. Um, I know that's not that sort of peak experience. I mean, I did feel like there were some special moments like being in New York for the James Beard awards was pretty amazing. Um, because there, for here they're kind of, sort of Food and Wine Oscars, but, cause I had entered based on an article I posted on my own website and I remember after I, I won, um, Jeffrey Steingarten, who's the, I don't know if he's still writing, but he was the food columnist for Vogue magazine in New York. He came up to me and said, who the hell are you and where are you from? He, he was a great, he he's very funny in a grouchy way.

Janina Doyle 00:29:56 He, he owns his grumpiness.

Natalie MacLean 00:29:59 He does. He's very funny. Um, but just new York's magical too. I love New York for the restaurants and for the fast pace. And it's like, I always feel like a country mouse in New York but um, but I love being there cause it's like, ooh, look at those tall buildings and wow, look at all these people, anyway.

Janina Doyle 00:30:17 It's all about just drinking with the right people. Now talking about people. They can go to your website. Actually, you do, you have quite a lot of free online courses. You have the other courses, they can take things more seriously. But a lot of these courses, they're all about people building confidence in choosing wines by themselves, whether it be in a restaurant, whether it be in a wine shop. So have you got a tip or two that you can bring to this podcast right now for somebody who's in a wine shop? How can they narrow down their choice?

Natalie MacLean 00:30:50 Sure. I mean, there's a few strategies. Um, when I worked in a wine shop, that's exactly what I was looking for. How do you, you know, as a consumer, um, not get overwhelmed with this wall of bottles because you know, I think wine as you know, uh, Janina, it's unlike any other consumer product category. I mean, it just, you can try on a dress, you can read the first chapter of a book, but generally you cannot taste the wine before you buy it. At least not legally. So, um, all you've

got is a fluffy squirrel or a castle on the middle distance on the label to go on that's, you know, 80% of people buy wine based on the label. So what can you do to narrow your odds, um, or increase your odds? I should say. So the go south thing is always good for value, um, in terms of the regions. Um, but I also would suggest talking to the store staff, usually they're pretty passionate retail store staff in a wine store and asking them something like, you know, um, I generally like a full bodied Cabernet, and if you know the label or the, the wine name you've had before. Can you recommend something similar? You know, so maybe they'll take you over to a, an Argentine Malbec instead. So it's kind of like the Amazon book buying algorithm, if you like this book, maybe you'll like that book. Um, that's one way to, I think can help. Another thing you can do is buy a case of wine to sort of de-risk the situation. Um, and what I mean by that is, a lot of people go into a liquor store looking for the one perfect bottle to buy. And instead of that, why not again, tap into the store staff or if you're too shy, download an app like mine, um, and say, okay, like I generally like full-bodied reds in this price range. Go for a variety and then experiment and say, okay, well we'll try this one. And if it doesn't work, that's fine. You know? And so maybe you'll find two or three new favorites out of a case of 12, but I think it's worth trying.

Janina Doyle 00:32:52 Do you know, there is all, there's so many grapes in the world isn't there and for the typical consumer there, like, okay, I know my Cab Sav, my Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, so I'll stick with that. And you just think, what about the Gruner Veltliners of the world? You say Sicily, the Nerello mascalese, you know, all these kind of grape varieties that people are like, what the hell? Uh, and they're, they're wonderful, aren't they? So, and you get that when you get these discovery boxes, especially if you get them from a passionate, independent wine retailer where they want to bring you these random goodies that you may have never heard of before. Yeah, absolutely. So if people are tasting wine, they've got their discovery box and they're, they're tasting a glass of Albariño, whatever it is. Have you got a tip for them in terms of enhancing their tasting skills or how they would maybe identify that wine blind compared to a Sauvignon Blanc? Who knows?

Natalie MacLean 00:33:48 Sure. I think, um, that consumers or those who take courses from me think, oh, you just, you know, you, you have magical tasting abilities to describe each wine as it is, but the most powerful thing anyone can do and you obviously don't have to be a professional to do this is taste wine side by side, and the differences will leap out at you. So most consumers have a glass of wine at a time, but if you wanna learn about wine, taste a flight of wine, or like four or five or however many, um, side by side, like get a, a, you know, a flight of all different New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, or take Sauvignon Blanc from different countries, New Zealand and the Loire and Canada and so on. And you'll be amazed at how much you'll pick up just because you're going side by side and going back and forth among them. And that's what I do in my courses is, and then people think, oh my gosh, I really can see the difference. I, I really do see that I'm getting more, you know, herbal notes there. And this is one's more floral because they're up against each other. And I think that's one of the best things you can do. And I know that sometimes I think, wow, how am I gonna open four, five bottles? But there are devices that can preserve wine these days. On my podcast, you showed the Coravin, which is an excellent device. There's also like the Repour, the thing you can put in, just a little cap that will absorb all the oxygen out of a bottle, or get together friends, do a potluck, everybody brings a bottle and then you all taste together or so that you can taste a variety of wines or take my course.

Janina Doyle 00:35:25 Or take your course, your course looks fantastic. And I think actually that is really interesting. Like I was thinking about, you know, what would you recommend for somebody who was planning, maybe a wine tasting at home, but I think you've hit the nail on the head doing these kind

of flights. And funny enough, literally, what day are we today? So on Sunday I am doing a little blind tasting for my Mum. So she loves two grape varieties, one, she loves surprise, surprise, Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. She loves the aromatics and concentration and all that kind of passion fruit and all this intense pungent exotic fruits and grassy notes. Now, when we last spoke, I mentioned Bacchus, the grape variety from England. And it is, if you, the closest thing to it, could well be Marlborough, New Zealand, Sauvignon Blanc. And so what I've decided to do, cause she loves the two is, I've bought two bottles of Bacchus and I've bought two bottles of, ah, I lie, I changed. I bought one Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and then I've bought a Touraine Sauvignon Blanc. So we talked about very good value wines. For anyone who doesn't know, Touraine is quite a large region, but it's in the Loire valley, slightly, uh, west from Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé, the places where they make the, the super premium Sauvignon Blancs. But Touraine itself tends to be the most exotic and pungent and aromatic of all the Sauvignon Blancs in the Loire valley. So sometimes it can get, uh, mixed up in a blind tasting with Marlborough New Zealand, Sauvignon Blanc. So to play around with it all, I want them to guess which two are Bacchus, which one is the Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and which one is the French Sauvignon Blanc. And of course, ideally be able to see them all different, but at the same time actually realize that there are quite a few similarities. So it kind of brings them together cause I think that's quite fun as well and confusing. But hey. You know.

Natalie MacLean 00:37:26 Oh that's brilliant. Great idea.

Janina Doyle 00:37:27 Yeah. So anyway, so then we go, everyone either get a flight of one grape variety all around the world, find two varieties that have maybe similarities like Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc could be, or another one, both with amazing acidity and both can take a lot of oak, but also be without oak. And for me I'm always looking for a bit of quince or a bit of beeswax or a honey note with a Chenin, to try and differentiate it. But I still, I muck it up all the time. I'm terrible at blind tasting.

Natalie MacLean 00:37:58 What a great idea. Oh, but those are great ideas to set them up. You know, you learn a lot.

Janina Doyle 00:38:02 Absolutely. Well, there you go, everyone. Now, if we are tasting from wine glasses, I love Zalto. Obviously here it costs 40 pound of glass. It's not like you can buy too many of them. And of course it's tragic when you smash them. Um, do you have a favorite wine glass?

Natalie MacLean 00:38:19 Zalto. Sorry. I'd like to have a range, but you know, I do love them. I, I wish I were on commission. I'm not, but um, you know, I've got the, uh, the, the universal here and then the, I call the, the big ass glass for Pinot noir but I just love them because they're so light. And just so, I don't know, there's something about them. What, why do you think so many of us love these glasses as opposed to, I mean there's many good brands, Riedel, Spiegelau and so on.

Janina Doyle 00:38:48 Well, I also have, and I talk a lot, uh, with people about I've got Gabriel Glas, which is the hand blown golden edition. I've got that. And I, I really like that as well. I think Zalto, it just, it's so light. So the feel of it on your mouth is just beautiful. And when you hold it, you feel like you're holding nothing. I really think it probably is one of the lightest glasses out there, but at the same time I've seen them kind of move it to show that it actually can bend and not break. And not that I really wanna risk doing that. Yeah. They, because they say, look, they're not as easy to break as you think. And...

Natalie MacLean 00:39:20 I, I'm not sure. I believe that. I've gone through so many. Oh no.

Janina Doyle 00:39:24 But there are probably other factory, well, you shouldn't call them factories, handmade places that producing these wonderful glasses but Zalto has got it right and has got the marketing behind it probably. So there's got to be a few others, but we just, you just know that you're getting that quality every time aren't you with Zalto.

Natalie MacLean 00:39:43 Yeah. I love them. I just, yeah. Anyway.

Janina Doyle 00:39:45 Another thing you love. You talk about pairing. because a lot of your education is pairing food and wine together. One of your courses is actually on cheeses. I think you've paired 25 cheeses with wine, which is just amazing. So for anyone who says, oh, I'm just gonna get a bottle of red and cheese. Like no, no, no. It's it could be far, far more interesting than that. Um, have you got a favorite specific cheese and wine pairing that you want to tell people, you are allowed a few.

Natalie MacLean 00:40:10 I have a few. Yeah I do. So, um, I love experimenting with different types of rinds. Um, the exterior of the cheese. So you get rinds that are edible. Um, and one of my favorites is a Merlot washed rind. Oh. And of course it's gonna go beautifully with a Merlot but of other, other reds too, it doesn't have to be Merlot. It could be a Malbec or a Cabernet or something like that. Another classic that's easy to find is like a oozing creamy Brie that's warm and just lava flowing over like a crusty bagette, and then you can do two things. You can either cut through the fat. So can contrast with a Gruner Veltliner or a zesty white or a Sauvignon Blanc, there's lots of acidity or you can ooze into it and go like with like, like a buttery, uh, Chardonnay with that creamy Brie. And then the, the last one, I always love to explore weird cheeses. Like Mimolette, I don't know if you've had that one, Janina?

Janina Doyle 00:41:12 No. Mimolette, no.

Natalie MacLean 00:41:14 Well it's it's it tastes somewhat like cheddar, it's nuttier, but the backstory is gonna sound gross, but it's actually good. Little mites eat away at the cheese and they produce the flavors in the cheese. And, um, and, and so it's got all of this sort of, you know, those little, um, when you bite into mature cheddar, it's got those little, not rocks, but little, um, its yeah...

Janina Doyle 00:41:42 It's it's yeah, crunchy, almost crunchy.

Natalie MacLean 00:41:45 Mm-hmm, crunchy bits. It's like the, the protein or the amino acids or whatever. And those are little tiny explosions of flavor. You're not eating the mites. But it's got, got these gorgeous flavors as it ages. And I just love like a Syrah that's also aged and got the smokey flavor. So you wrap that smoke into these sort of nutty flavors of the cheese and it's, it's gorgeous. And so people love exploring these different flavors, but also with any food, including cheese, one really great thing to do. And it's simple, is take a taste of the wine first, always taste your wine first, then take a bite of the cheese, then go back to the wine and you'll be amazed at how your perception of that wine changes.

Janina Doyle 00:42:32 Perfect tip. I love that. Now, to finish off on the pairing and book theme of this episode, as you, of course are into writing, I've got three books for you, which actually I picked because they're also films. So people will actually understand what it is. So the three books, and I want you to tell me the perfect wine, they should be drinking in your opinion, to go with the book. So if somebody is

reading Game of Thrones by George R. R. Martin, if he'll ever finish the last book. But anyway, if you are reading that book, what would you drink with Game of Thrones?

Natalie MacLean 00:43:10 Well, they do have their own line of wines, but I would go for something more full bodied than what they produce, the name brand wines. Um, something like an Italian Amarone, it's full bodied.

Janina Doyle 00:43:22 Mmmm, it's really intense.

Natalie MacLean 00:43:25 Yeah. It's intense like the show it's layered. It's got lots of flavor. It also has a bitter finish. Now it's a pleasant bitter finish, but for fans of the books yeah. For the fans of the books who did not like the ending and Amarone is best because it kind of ends bitterly. Like we want a little bit of a remake there, but anyway, so yes, that's what I would go with.

Janina Doyle 00:43:46 Love that. This is what I just love the, this is why I wanted to ask you this. Okay. Right. Slight change. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll.

Natalie MacLean 00:43:54 Oh, I love that book. I love that book. And you know, my favorite part is when Alice sees that bottle and it says, drink me. It's like, that's my life too except I'm in Wineland. I'm not in Wonderland anyway. Um, so I would go with something much more light and playful and delightful. Um, I would go with a Riesling. Uh, an off-dry Riesling because it would pair beautifully with all of the crustless sandwiches and dainty at the Mad Hatter's tea party.

Janina Doyle 00:44:25 Oh, do you know what? Alice in Wonderland everything. I should do like an Alice in Wonderland themed podcast, like an episode and just see how I can, yeah.

Natalie MacLean 00:44:33 So we could do all the food pairings too. Like, you know, take a look at what was served at that tea party. Delightful

Janina Doyle 00:44:39 And I'll just act as the Mad Hatter. I think that's a role that would suit me well.

Natalie MacLean 00:44:44 Exactly, exactly.

Janina Doyle 00:44:46 Now for the lovers, The Notebook by Nicholas Sparks.

Natalie MacLean 00:44:51 All right. Well, I was gonna suggest something goopy, but um, I'm not a romantic now. I'm kidding. Uh, I've been through a divorce, so I'm hardened. Um, but I would go with no I am kidding. It's all right. It's it's all happy ever after. Um, but of course we have to go with Pinot Noir, The heartbreak grape, right? Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Classic. Pinot noir of course is called the heartbreak grape because it's so difficult to make and it's, you know, it, it's sensitive to everything. Rain, um, mildew, pests, voices above a whisper in the vineyard. It seems it's just really sensitive and cranky, but when it works, it's beautiful. It's a sublime wine. It's my go-to wine to drink personally. And um, so I would definitely go with that.

Janina Doyle 00:45:40 And it has elegance. It has beauty. Yeah. It's and it can be all different shades in a way, depending on if you get it right or wrong. So I...

Natalie MacLean 00:45:47 Exactly so 50 shades of Grey or whatever.

Janina Doyle 00:45:49 Oh no, no, no. Did not bring that book in, did not bring that book in, you can't bring that up. Oh, oh my God. Amazing. Right. To finish up on this. I just want you to tell everybody what your website is so they can go to that. And they'll also find your podcast on there, online wine courses, your blogs, your articles, they, where they can get the books from. So what is the website?

Natalie MacLean 00:46:10 Thank you so much. Um, uh, so it's it's Nataliemaclean.com. It's my name N A T A L I E M A C L E A N. Nataliemaclean.com. And yeah, you can get connected there to the Unreserved wine talk podcast, my online food and wine pairing courses, the books and everything else, so.

Janina Doyle 00:46:28 Many many more. Everything you've ever wanted

Natalie MacLean 00:46:30 And more.

Janina Doyle 00:46:35 Now next week is part two with the very amusing and interesting Natalie. And we're gonna be taking things closer to home. Well, Natalie's home. We are off to Canada with a big focus on the Ontario wine region and ice wine. Now to finish this episode and in dedication to our love of wine and books, I have the ideal quote to finish off with and it's by Molière, who was a French playwright. And he said:

“Great is the fortune of he who possesses a good bottle, a good book, and a good friend.”

Thank you to everyone who has tuned into this episode. If you haven't subscribed to the podcast yet, make sure you do so you don't miss any new episodes. Please like the podcast, share it with your wine loving friends and leave me a comment. Especially if you are listening on apple podcasts. May I wish you all a week filled with all the good things in life, we know what that is, and perhaps a few miracles thrown in as well. You know, what's coming next week and so until then, cheers to you.