

# BLUEPOINT HOSPITALITY

**Andrea Barnes**

*Cheesemonger and Purchaser*

Throughout history, women have been masters of the craft of cheesemaking, playing a crucial role in the industry. Equally, women have been a strong force behind the artisan cheese movement at restaurants and custom cheese shops, which has taken flight - even more so in the 21st century. One American tastemaker, **Andrea Barnes**, [affectionately dubbed "Red"] has left her native state of New York for Easton, Maryland, using her innate gastronomic talents to create an extensive cheese program for **Bluepoint Hospitality**, specifically at **The Wardroom** and **Bas Rouge**.

Barnes has a natural affinity for cheese that began as a child with the weekly delivery of farmed milk. Being the youngest of six, she was tasked to venture down her home's very steep driveway - that even the milkman would not attempt to drive down in the winter - to fetch the bottles of milk stuck in the snow for the family's breakfast. It wasn't a chore for Barnes, who desired to have the wholesome drink in her hands as fast as possible. Barnes has a pedigree in hospitality as long as a finely aged cheese - she began as a successful actor, acquiring her nickname "Red," because she is fiery and expressive.

Today, Barnes still champions that title - evident by the passion and vibrancy she shares with her restaurant co-workers when speaking about wine and cheese. In her late twenties when everyone else was drinking beer, Barnes began to gain serious interest and knowledge in red wine, especially Burgundy and Bordeaux. Elegant, composed, and loyal, Barnes took pride in the longevity of her role at some of the finest restaurants in New York City - Alison on Dominick Street for seven years, and Chanterelle for nine years. It was at Chanterelle that Barnes was given an important tool - the *soigné* manner, offering the highest level of service to the most formidable guests - that would be forever the foundation for her career within restaurants. These were the golden years, where Barnes experienced establishments exceeding all expectations in hospitality, design, and culture. For a change of scenery and a new challenge, Barnes went West, joining the opening team at the Viceroy Hotel in Los Angeles. Never truly feeling connected and like a stranger in a strange land, she stayed just a year before packing it up and heading back home to the Big Apple.

Returning to New York City, Barnes landed at Babbo as a waiter and began discovering her passion in Italian wines alongside David Lynch. Then she transitioned to Del Posto, where Barnes was the only female captain - shadowing the wine director and assisting guests in making their food and wine selections. An opportunity to work at the popular Monkey Bar off Madison Avenue, helmed by Jeff Klein and Graydon Carter, was a prized position for Barnes as sommelier and *Maître d'*. The dining room had a constant flow of publishing moguls and pillars in cinema. One memorable and rare occurrence for Barnes was overseeing the 70th birthday party for one of the most outstanding movie makers of our time, Martin Scorsese. Later, she went to experience a more intimate setting at Sessanta. Her exceptional palate continued to evolve and earn the respect of others. During this time, Barnes discovered Saxelby Cheesemongers with an incredible focus on American Farmstead Cheese, opening her mind to the complimentary pairings made with not only European wines, but domestic varietals as well. Then out of the blue, Barnes received a telephone call from a fellow sommelier and

friend, Natalie Tapken, who is, coincidentally, a co-worker as the Wine & Beverage Director of Bluepoint Hospitality. Tapken invited Barnes to attend a research trip to Italy. There was no question, and soon Barnes was on her first stop in Palermo, where the microclimate of limes, lemons, olives, grapes, and caper berries are captivating and magical. Reflecting, she thought, "It is no wonder why the Italians and Greeks are so perfect." An epiphany occurred in viewing the sign for Enna, Sicily - she was reminded of a nightly ritual after service at Sessanta. It was customary for her and the team to dine on the perfect cheese – Piacentinu di Enna – made of sheeps milk, saffron, black pepper, and salt. The pairings of wine and cheese became a glorified presence on her palate.

Barnes then gravitated toward an in-depth concentration on expanding her interest in the world of cheeses. The opportunity for Barnes to join the Bluepoint Hospitality team arrived at a pivotal moment. Barnes paves the way for patrons who might not have traveled abroad or tasted a truly fresh cow's milk cheese from Italy. Initially, Bluepoint only offered French and American cheeses – no Spanish or Italian cheeses. Barnes has added these cheeses to the collection, while also maintaining a balance of American [60%] and European Cheeses [40%] – keeping a strong focus on American Cheeses. Barnes remains loyal to the philosophy of Saxelby, taking inspiration from that approach. American Cheeses are from: Vermont, Indiana, Massachusetts, and New York State. For example, this includes a Capriole Goat Cheese from Indiana – family run for over 34 years. With her trusted expertise, Barnes demystifies the vast collection of cheeses for the American palate. Choices may include: **Harbison** from Jasper Hill in Vermont, wrapped in spruce this cow's milk cheese is unctuous and creamy and is perfectly complimented by Chenin blanc; **Cabrales**, from Asturias, Spain, is the bravest of blue cheeses, aged in limestone caves; **Brillat Savarin** - a decadent cow's triple cream, pairing wonderfully with Champagne and strawberries; and the **Tomme Crayeuse** from the Savoie region which shares elegant, delicate and earthy flavors. Pair it with a cherry Mostarda and Gigondas. And savor the **Bleu d'Auvergne** - a very strong blue cheese that is salty in texture with pronounced flavors of mustiness, mushrooms, and barnyard.

Cheese tasting plates are a popular addition at The Wardroom, inspiring diners to explore selections from countries that have mastered the techniques of cheesemaking for centuries. The tastings are accompanied by freshly baked baguettes from Master Baker, Glenn May, and condiments of *House-poached Seckel Pear*, *Muscat Grapes*, *Fig and Aceto Balsamico*, *Dried Fruit and Almond Cake*, and *Honey* from *Piemonte*. Barnes has a lot of humility when it comes to the knowledge she beholds, but her expressive nature lights up when gaining the interest of a customer who is enjoying the highest quality cheese and wine. The Wardroom and Bas Rouge immerse patrons in culinary rituals, customary to European cultures, and not just for special occasions. At Bas Rouge, a wide variety of fifteen cheeses are available to suit all preferences from Goat, Cow, Sheep, Blue, and some Alpine Cheeses. Select choices are elegant and washed rind, but some are most pungent and forward. With delicate touches of house made jams and fresh fruit, the overall flavors are balanced and pleasing to the palate. Both establishments strive to deliver an excellent experience daily with each epicurean encounter. Andrea Barnes certainly lives up to her nickname by bringing her exuberance to every plate she creates for the guest. It truly is a work of art!

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