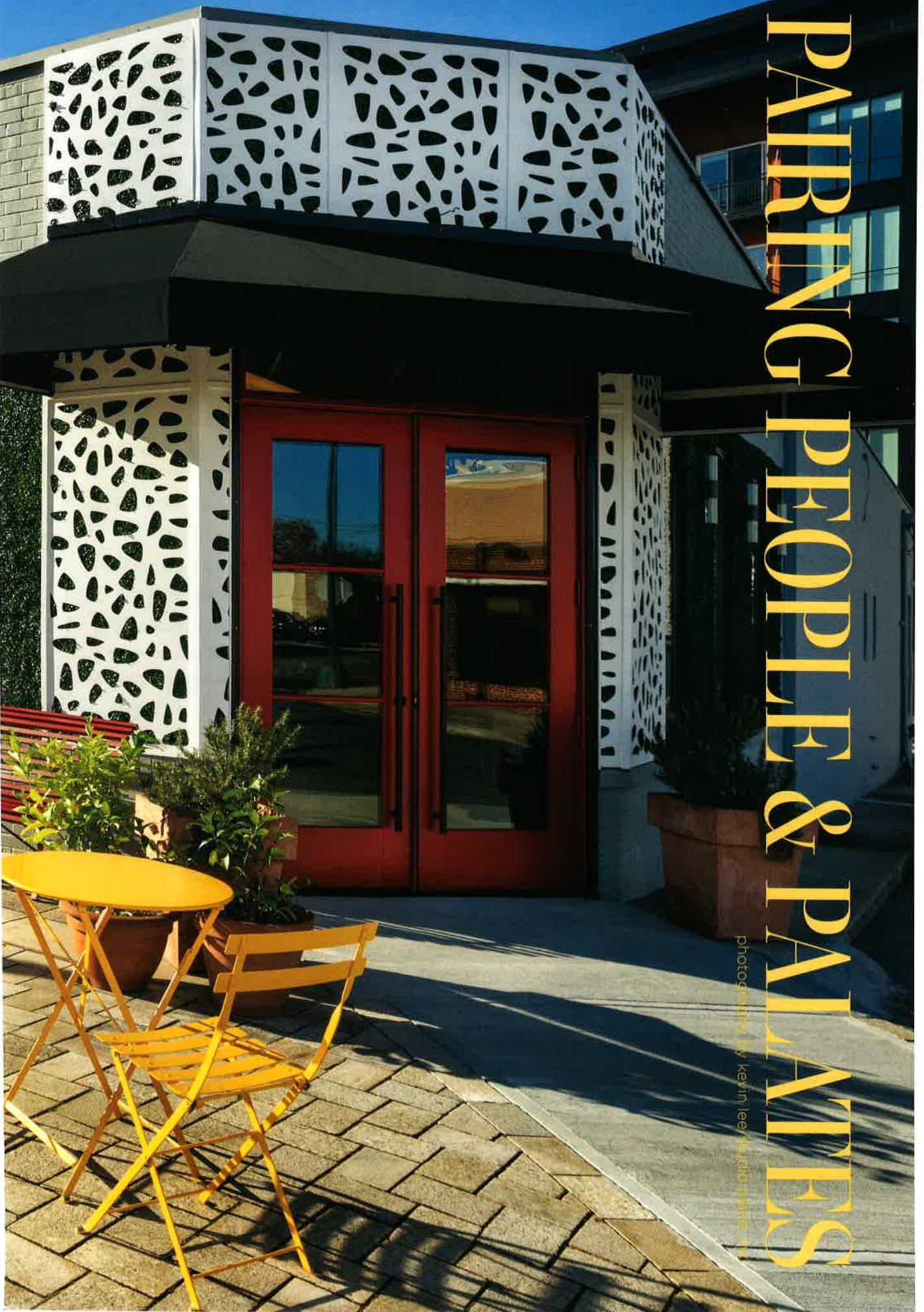


PAIRING PEOPLE & PLACES

photography by kevin lee studio



“We’re here because of our customers.
They are all people we’ve met through
the store and enjoy.”



Despina Demetriades moved to Greensboro from Gastonia in the early 80s to continue her career in hospital staff development and patient education. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs in dry cleaning, wholesale foods and real estate development, she got the itch to start her own business.

It was 1985 when she first wanted to open a wine and cheese shop in Greensboro. Seeking advice, she talked with a local wine distributor. He discouraged the idea. She turned to real estate and pursued a career in residential real estate appraising which spanned 25 years.

Through her best friend, Helen Pappas Peterson, she found Tobacco USA (owned by Helen's brother Jerry). It was a gem of wine shopping, wine education and a place to meet winemakers to taste their wines. Helen's daughter Su Peterson managed the store, curated the wine program, roasted coffee, and did much more.

Interestingly, these three women continued the friendship lineage begun in the 1940s by their parents and grandparents. Despina's grandparents on the Leventis family side and the Pappas family had been friends since they met after emigrating from Greece and Turkey.

Despina could not get the wine shop idea out of her mind. She was a real estate appraiser looking for change. In 1999 she established Zeto Wine Shop downtown while still appraising.

She rented the former Sherwin Williams Paint building from Su's aunt, and Zeto Wines was born. It was extra special knowing that Su's grandfather was the man who built the building.

"That just means I knew it was built very well."

The easy laughter the women share when talking about the beginnings of Zeto wines and specialties is infectious, but Despina will be the first to tell you that building a business wasn't always easy. The one thing she was certain about is the name.

"Zetò is a Greek word meaning 'Live! Long live!' It seemed to be what I grew up with. I learned it at the

Karyae Park in Gastonia where Greeks from the same village, Karyae, have gathered annually to celebrate their heritage and visit friends and family. I have always thought Zeto is a fun word and something you can toast to."

When Zeto opened in 1999 it was with wines and a handful of specialty foods. Within a year as the business began to grow, she realized that to better serve the customers, Zeto needed additional talent and experience. She turned to her friend Su who had left Tobacco USA.

Su was working as an independent wine consultant to restaurants in the United States, educating staff and writing restaurant wine lists. She was also hired as a consultant to facilitate wholesalers in the Caribbean in expanding their U.S. wine selections.

"I called her up and said, 'I need help! Why don't you get back in retail and come over to Zeto?'"

"And I swore I would never get back into retail again, after 15 years...but..." Su ironically reminisces.

Proof that there's truth in the adage: you should never say never. Su did come back and this self-proclaimed, self-directed woman became a consultant to Zeto in the summer of 2000 and a co-owner in 2006.

Their philosophy centers around the idea that good wine is more than just the grapes themselves. Despina says, "It is about wine, but it's also about people that you are with. It's about who makes the wines, who grows the grapes."

Su added, "Back then you didn't have a wine environment and we didn't have the competition that we have today of big box stores and the internet." In fact, some people doubted that the little wine shop in the NoMar (North of Market) section of downtown would last. Twenty years later, they are still here, a true testament to the care and expertise Su and Despina infuse into every part of the operation.

Zeto's outreach goes beyond their building. Their signature event each year is Corks for Kids Path, to raise money and awareness for "Kids Path, a specialized program of Hospice and Palliative Care

of Greensboro.” They are looking forward to the next event on March 6th to continue their support of children coping with serious illness and loss.

“We’re here because our customers are here.” The Zeto co-owners appreciate the ongoing support of their customers and enjoy welcoming new customers into the Zeto family.

The connection is reflected in the art that adorns the store, the specialty foods available, and even their state-of-the-art self-serve wine dispenser.

Always looking for ways to innovate and bring the best wines and service to their customers, Despina remembers the trip that introduced Zeto to self-serving wine dispensers.

“Su went to Italy about 16 years ago and she came back and told me she had seen the neatest thing, stores lined with these machines. You could go up and press a button and pour your own wine.”

Su immediately knew such a product would set Zeto apart and enthusiastically added, “I was excited because I knew it would really give us the opportunity to talk about wine in a non-geeky kind of way.”

Despina still calls the Italian-made Enomatic wine-serving system the “Ferrari of wine dispensers.” In 2007 Zeto had one of the first 100 systems ever installed in the United States.

Su told us that for many consumers, especially those just beginning to enter the world of wine, selection can be intimidating. The machines allow people to taste a wine before buying. Friends can enjoy a glass together inside or outside on the patio.

Speaking of outside, customers do a double take when they first see the newly renovated exterior. It’s something they want to reach out and touch. Su and Despina call it the perfect invitation to come in, browse, and get to know Zeto.

Su explained that they wanted a well-designed modern look that isn’t cold. Marta Mitchell, founder of Marta Mitchell Interior Design, helped them achieve that. Despina was impressed with Marta and her staff, especially that they spent time getting to know Zeto and its vibe in order to conceptualize the

final design. Completed in November 2019, the new look matches the continued energy that makes this corner of Battleground Avenue and Lindsay Street a true destination.

Staying relevant in an ever-changing economy is a challenge, but Zeto is committed to be a long-term staple in the community.

“Retail is a hard business, especially with all the options available,” Su says. “After all, if you do away with independent retail, you lose the personality of a city and all shopping becomes homogenized.”

Despina agrees and knows that what Zeto does best is to create a holistic wine engagement with everyone who comes in.

“We’re able to bring something to our customers through our store that is an experience and not an intimidating one.” Both women pride themselves on being approachable. Su puts customers at ease by reminding them that wine is just a beverage to enjoy with your food and your friends.

Zeto’s excellent customer service radiates from both Su and Despina’s care in selection of the wines they bring in the shop. Su estimates that they taste almost 95% of the wines they carry so they can best guide and advise customers.

Despina says their palates are different. Su prefers earthy wines while she prefers dry wines with more fruit notes than “barnyard” notes.

“That’s a strong point for our shop: a broad range of wines for a continuum of palates.” Despina shares a secret between the two on resolving discrepancies in their palates and wines.

“We have a deal: If [Su] likes it and I don’t, it will come into the shop, but Su sells it.” And vice versa. It’s a deal that serves these two friends well as does their historic family connection.

Four years ago, Su’s aunt agreed to let her buy the building, keeping it in the family for the next generation. What that means for the rest of us is that this store, along with the growing Zeto community, will remain a part of our *MOD Society*. Zeto!