

ASI MAGAZINE

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**MARC ALMERT, PAULINE VICARD,
DR JAMIE GOODE**
Defining Fine Wine?

FINE *Wine*



ANDRÉ MACK, REX LEUNG
The Rise of Sommeliers
as Influencers





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Welcome!



*William Wouters,
President ASI*

Fine Wine in a Modern Age

We are constantly eschewing the image of sommeliers as pompous, arrogant purveyors of ‘fine wine.’ Twenty-five years ago, our top restaurant wine lists were a veritable cliché of the same Bordeaux, Burgundy producers with a scattering of well-known wines from Italy, Germany and a few other regions. Now, I am happy to report that many of our top sommeliers take a less formulaic approach, relying more on personal judgement, their food, and most importantly their customer to guide them in selecting the wines that grace their wine lists. What guides their selections has morphed as well. Remember the days when one person’s opinion, outweighed almost everything else?

In this edition of ASI Magazine, we ask what is fine wine and explore its service? We ask the question, can there be a singular definition of fine wine? And if there is, does it matter? We invited three individuals that bring different perspectives to discuss, and to debate, this very question. **Dr Jamie Goode** is a well-respected wine writer (

), judge and wine personality.

Pauline Vicard is the co-owner, co-founder of Areni Global, a ‘fine wine’ think tank that is attempting to create a global accepted definition of the term. Finally, **Marc Almert**, our 2019 ASI Best Sommelier of the World, and head sommelier of Switzerland’s renowned *Baur au Lac & Baur au Lac Vins*, has his own unique viewpoint on the subject.

A clear theme throughout this edition is the need to separate fine, no matter how you define, from luxury. Sommeliers are on the leading edge of fine wine service, but as you’ll read in this edition what is fine to some is not fine to all, and what is fine is almost certainly not necessarily luxurious, or expensive.

How does sustainability play a role in a modern definition of fine wine? As we watch, often in horror, the often-catastrophic weather that has a regular byproduct of climate change, many sommeliers are placing greater emphasis on listing sustainable, environmental consciously produced wines on their lists. Should sustainability be part of our rationale for listing wines.

Who influences these decisions?

We ask our global network of sommeliers for who influences them. We also posed this questions to a group of elite sommeliers including André Mack, author of *A Black’s Sheep’s Guide to Life-Changing Wines*, founder of Maison Noir, and former sommelier at prestigious restaurants include Per Se and The French Laundry. Joining Rex Leung, head sommelier at Hong Kong’s ZS Hospitality Group and others to share their thoughts.

I hope you enjoy this edition of ASI Magazine, as much I do, and remember to share it with your colleagues and friends.



Revel



**WINE OF
MOLDOVA**
A LEGEND ALIVE

IN THE DELICACY OF FETEASCA REGALA

Feteasca Regala is a semi-aromatic grape variety born from a natural crossbreed of Feteasca Alba and Grasa de Cotnari. With a captivating aroma that melds floral and grapefruit notes complemented by hints of fresh pear and citrus, it surprises the palate with a fuller and more textured taste than its parent varieties suggest. Wines produced from Fetească Regală vary from medium-bodied when aged in stainless steel to full-bodied with barrel aging, characterized by their intense aromas and exceptional aging potential, thanks to the fine tannins in the grape skin.

TASTE



AROMAS AND FLAVOURS



Embrace

THE ALLURE OF RARA NEAGRA

Hailing from the Geto-Dacian era, Rara Neagra is an age-old grape variety with deep roots in southeastern Romania and the present-day Republic of Moldova. With its relatively pale hue, Rara Neagra wines entice with delicate tannins and a spicy berry profile, finding a perfect home on Moldova's sun-kissed southern slopes. Beyond its aromatic allure of rosehip flower, red currant, and wild blackberries, Rara Neagra's inherent high acidity makes it a perfect choice for crafting exceptional rosé and unique young, fruity, and fresh red wines.

TASTE



AROMAS AND FLAVOURS



Guest Editors

MARC ALMERT, PAULINE VICARD, DR JAMIE GOODE



Marc Almert (Photo: Sven German)

A DISCUSSION WITH...

Marc Almert, Pauline Vicard and Dr Jamie Goode

A Sommelier's Insight on Fine Wine With Marc Almert, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2019

Marc Almert's journey into the world of wine was fueled by an insatiable curiosity and a simple question: Why do some wines taste better than others? Initially aspiring to be a hotel director, Marc pivoted his career path to become a sommelier, captivated by the ever-changing complexities of wine. His pursuit of knowledge didn't stop at books; it involved immersive experiences, from engaging conversations with winegrowers to extensive travel and rigorous training. Competing in sommelier contests offered Marc invaluable feedback, elevating his skills, and understanding of the craft. His dedication culminated in a crowning achievement: winning the ASI Best Sommelier of the World Competition in 2019 at just 27 years old, making him one of the youngest champions in the organisation's history.

The competition was no small feat, attracting 66 sommeliers from 63 countries. For Marc, the win was both an honor and a humbling experience, affirming his place in a lineage of great sommeliers. His story is a testament to the power of curiosity, dedication, and the relentless pursuit of mastery in one's chosen field. We asked Marc to give his sights into the evolving perception of fine wine.

“I think our perception of fine wine is very much founded not only on what critics say, but also what happens with prices after release.”

ASI: What is your definition of fine wine?

Marc Almert (MA): I think it depends if you are directing the question to my heart, or to my brain. If it's directed to my brain, I think fine wine is anything which is considered to be a fine wine by the broader wine community. Such as wines you would see at auction, collectible wines, wines at a slightly higher price point, that are iconic for the region they come from. From my heart's perspective, I think fine wine is anything or any wine that gives you pleasure, and it's typical for its origin, for its varietal. These can be very premium wines, but it can also be a very well, and authentically, made entry level wine.

ASI: Has the definition changed over time?

MA: I think it has changed over time and will continue to change. If you go with the more classic definition of a fine wine being a collectible wine of a certain high price point of which there's a limited amount around and there's more demand for it. Then there's availability, then I think we will see more and more regions jumping into the game. For example, if you look at all the fine wine being produced now in China... or if you think of UK sparkling wines, which weren't really in existence 20 years ago. If we go back to the China example, they weren't really a key player of the wine trade until maybe 15 or 20 years ago. Now that's dramatically changed. We see a similar change coming up in India, which is also a country with a huge population.

Of course, not all that population drinks alcohol, but a quite significant amount does. I think we will see more and more buyers from these countries entering the fine wine business, which I'm afraid will lead to further price increases, like we currently see in Burgundy, being applied to more areas of the wine world.

ASI: How important is it to be recognised as fine wine? Do we need to recognise it?

MA: Maybe I would substitute the adjective fine for interesting or commercially important wine or commercially relevant wine. I'll give you a current example. I'm based in Zurich, Switzerland, and Switzerland is a very historic wine producing country, but more than 99 per cent of what's produced here is drunk within the country. As such, the international wine press doesn't really pay that much attention to Swiss wine. And that changed quite dramatically a couple of months ago, when Parker gave 100 points for the first time to Swiss wine, which in fact, was a sweet wine, of which I think only 54 bottles were

produced, half bottles at that. They were all sold at that moment, if not all prior to when that 100-point score came out. After the 'score', the winemaker was interviewed by everyone, not only the wine press, but also local newspapers and national television, resulting in huge hype not only for this producer, but also Swiss wine in general. The winemaker said, it isn't the first time they received 100 points. They used to get it from Wine Spectator but since they didn't have a US distributor no one cared. In saying this, I think our perception of fine wine is very much founded not only on what critics say, but also what happens with prices after release. There are many famous examples of Burgundy being not that expensive when you buy them at the winery, but once they get to the secondary market, the prices explode. In summation, I think it's a mix of critic scores, and price developments in the secondary market. Add in media attention including wine influencers and broader media that defines what fine wine or wine that interests the globe communities.



Photo: Jean Bernard

ASI: It is probably fair to say outward perception in that in your daily work life you sell a lot of classic 'fine wine' but it feels like in your soul there are a lot of wines that you would probably consider fine that maybe aren't known to the wider world. Is there a danger of labeling fine wine as limited allocation, 100-Point Parker wines?

MA: I totally agree. I always say you don't need somebody to tell you that Pétrus is a great wine. We saw two vintages of Pétrus poured in the finals in Paris at the last competition, and the reactions of the contestants. It's an outstanding wine and a wine I'm happy to carry on my list and in our wine shops, but you don't really need a sommelier to discover that Pétrus is amazing, as with all those other wines that are in that price range. What you need is somebody to tell you about the different trends in the wine world, about upcoming regions, and about grapes you haven't heard of, even though they may have been around a long time. I always say we're a bit like the pigs looking for truffles. We are the ones in the wine world trying to find the new things. Of course, coming from a classical base, knowing all the classics very well is important, but at the same time keeping an open mind and an open palate for anything that's new or exciting is just as important. That is how we really help our guests have a great experience in our restaurants.

ASI: Do you think some ways sommeliers are editing the definition of fine wine or the future definition in a way?

MA: Definitely. I think we're part of the editing team. I don't think we're the only editors. I think a key part also comes to anyone who's buying wine. For example, Heidi Mäkinen MW, who is also involved with ASI, only buys sustainable wines and wines that have a certain organic certification for her distribution company. I think we will see much more of

"I always say we're a bit like the pigs looking for truffles."



Photo: David Biedert

that buying power coming into play. Keeping that in mind that we must be realistic about our scope and our reach. The biggest wine buyers are still the supermarkets and that's the case in nearly every wine consuming country. Not



generalising too much, but most supermarkets, they still make their key buying decision based on price and not certifications or production philosophy. I think as a sommelier you should keep who you are buying from in mind, and how the wine is packaged. For example, I recently read an article about Jancis Robinson sending back bottles of samples when they are packaged in heavy glass bottles. I think, in general, that she's taking a stance against heavy glass bottles which is great, because this is the kind of issue we need to raise as buyers, as journalists, and as sommeliers creating wine lists.

ASI: How important is it as a sommelier to balance personal definition of fine wine with customer expectations?

MA: I think it's important to understand what kind of restaurant or what kind of food and beverage outlet you're creating a wine programme for. Even here at Baur au Lac. We are just one hotel, not a group of hotels, but we have different styles of restaurants within the hotel. For example, the wine list I created for our terraces, which can have a few hundred guests on a sunny day, needs to be more geared towards wines that sell themselves. As such, we have concentrated on well-known appellations, and producers making wine in a more classic style. Whereas our Michelin 2-star restaurant where we have at least two sommeliers working per shift, serving just 30 to 40 guests, there's much more tableside conversation. In this environment you can really tailor the wine choice, and include some off the beaten track wines, because you can converse with the guests. What are they looking for tonight? What's the occasion that brought them in tonight? I think it is dependent where you are working and how you present your list.

In general, in Zurich, or Switzerland for that matter, the definition of

fine wine probably would still be very classic, because it's also still a hub for many great producers from Bordeaux and Burgundy. From a European perspective, I think the reshaping, redefinition of fine wine probably is happening mostly in London and Vienna, because this is where you see the most diverse wine programmes, in terms of wine styles, with a mix of classic and more modern definitions. Whereas for example, Copenhagen, you see a shift towards a very modern definition, which then almost always equates to natural wine.

ASI: With climate change and the rise of gifted producers in non-traditional regions should we reconsider how fine wine is linked to appellation?

MA: That's a super complex question. Let's look at different wine regions. If we start with wine regions outside of Europe, such as South Africa or Australia, for example, it's quite common to purchase grapes from different regions. Of course, they also have many great single vineyard wines, but on the other hand many of their iconic wines are made from grapes sourced from different places to make a blend. I think the most classic example of this would be Penfolds Grange from Australia, a multi-district blend, which is often recognised as the top wine of Australia. I think there are different concepts you could put into play here. I think the sense of place is still very important, especially because it's an honest, romantic idea of knowing where your wine is coming from, and it's not in any way industrial. I think that's what we're always trying to aim for whether that is true or not. In this way I think the rules of appellations remains relevant.

I think the key question is, will the same appellations remain relevant, especially with the same grapes? I'll give you two examples for that. We all know that Bordeaux has now

legalised many grapes, which are associated with warmer climates, such as Italy or Portugal. They are preparing for climate change, knowing Merlot, if you look at the example of vineyard classifications in Germany, which used to be a cool climate region, many of these vineyard classifications were started between the 17th and 19th centuries. At the time the south facing vineyards were always the grand crus because those were the ones you could rely on to ripen, mature well every year. Now, some of the locations almost have too much heat for delicate grapes, like Riesling. People are looking to western and eastern facing sites or even the north facing sites. I think we'll have to change some of the Grosses Gewächse, Grosse Lage vineyards. I think that's a discussion we need to have with many, many areas. I think the shifting of grapes will be a key issue in the next decade and do we stick to the grand crus we have? I'm sure not many producers will want to give that title of those away. Or do we open the doors for new grand crus coming in?

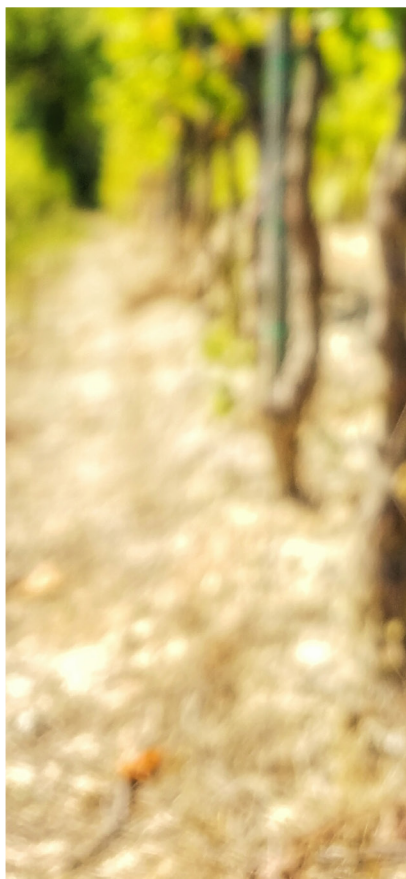
ASI: Can fine wine be widely distributed or be in high production?

MA: I think it goes back to the concept of are you looking at fine wine as a clear witness of its origin. So really just from one vineyard, which then has a finite amount you can produce from that vineyard if you're looking at quality wine production, at least? Or are you open to multi district blends? Michelle Rolland is in the process of launching the first multi-country blend, called Pangea. I think it's dependent on how you define for yourself as a wine buyer, as a wine consumer as a wine lover, what fine wine is to you. If it's linked to sense of place, then definitely it cannot be scaled. If it's linked to great winemaking and great quality, perhaps with other criteria coming in like sustainability, organic wine

growing, then theoretically you can scale and probably more so than before because the wine world is becoming further south, and further north, depending which hemisphere you're in.

ASI: On a lighter note, tell us a wine style that you think represents fine wine but maybe is well known as such to the broader wine loving community.

MA: I definitely have to go for Switzerland because everyone tells me Swiss wine is expensive, which is true in the entry level simply because labour costs are high here and we only have steep manually harvested vineyards, but I recently was on a workshop where Swiss wine makers were discussing if they're allowed to dare if their top Pinot can be sold for more than 100 euros retail price. I think we all know enough examples of Pinot Noir above 100 euros so that's quite a sweet conversation for them to be having. In conclusion I recommend for people to try Swiss Pinot Noir.





JAPAN
SAKE AND SHOCHU
MAKERS
ASSOCIATION



On October 1st, Japan celebrates Sake Day.

Japanese sake has evolved into a category enjoyed worldwide.

October 1 is Sake Day, a busy time of year for sake breweries as they begin to make sake from the newly harvested rice. In the sake industry, there is a period called the brewing year. The annual production volume is generally measured in terms of the brewing year (BY), which reflects the production period, rather than the CY or FY. Currently, the period is from July 1 to June 30, but it used to be from October 1, the current Sake Day, to the end of September of the following year.

In 1978, the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association (JSS) designated October 1 as Sake Day to renew the desire to pass on Japan's national drink, sake, to future generations and to deepen the love and understanding of sake further. The Japanese word "Kampai," which has recently become well-known overseas, is a wish for people to unite their hearts with sake.

Currently, **"Traditional knowledge and skills of sake-making with koji mold in Japan"** has been submitted for registration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Following Japanese cuisine, this registration of sake-making skills is expected to increase the recognition of this special beverage further. Although there is still a misconception around the world that sake is to be confused with spirits or that it is to be drunk extremely hot, many people are captivated by sake once they have tasted it. The JSS will continue its efforts to increase the number of sake lovers by providing the world with correct knowledge of sake and its appeal.



Pauline Vicard

Defining 'Fine Wine' With Pauline Vicard, co-founder Areni Global

Pauline Vicard grew up in a vine growing family in Burgundy, but not one that farmed the prestigious slopes of the Côte de Beaune or Côte de Nuits. Her family was based near Pouilly-Fuissé at a time when this part of Burgundy wasn't particularly revered. Her parent's business was also not focused on 'fine wine' production but rather on producing bulk wine for négociants. Vicard describes her parents as "good winemakers but not great wine sellers. They didn't really know the business side of the wine business."

As such, Vicard's parents struggled to make the business sustainable in an ever-changing wine landscape. This struggle forced Vicard to think seriously about continuing in the family business, and ultimately it was a reason why she didn't. "I know firsthand how difficult it is. Although it can appear to be very poetic, romantic to be a winemaker and to work in the vineyard all day long, the way we were farming in Burgundy, as a small team, meant you were working from the beginning to end of the day, with only about five days of holidays during the year. Of course, I'm not dismissing my origin. I like wine with a capital 'W'. I like the community of wine. I like learning about wine. And that's something that you can't really do when you're tied into your vineyard 360 days a year."

"I like wine with a capital 'W'. I like the community of wine. I like learning about wine."

At the time, Vicard explains her parents couldn't adapt to a world that was changing too quickly for them. In a generation, the role of the vigneron has moved from simply being a good winemaker and viticulturist of course to someone that also had to manage the wine cellar, find distributors, manage a website, and manage a team that is more than just your family. As she says "when you scale it up, you need to employ people. Your job changes drastically. I don't think they had the skills; they were not equipped."

Understanding how and why the wine world is changing captured Vicard's attention and intellectual curiosity. After her school, and time working in wine market research, Vicard became formulating ideas of how to understand this evolution and change. It eventually led her, along with Nicole Rolet, a former financier and think tank operator, and now owner of Chêne Blue, an eco-couture wine label, to open Areni Global. Areni Global is a rarity as fine wine think tank. Vicard says of the business "we look at how the world is changing, and how those changes impact both the production and the distribution of fine wine. We study geopolitics and trade, tech and digital societal change, and of course, environmental change. And we take a very 360-degree point of view, starting from a very global perspective, and then we narrow it down to the ecosystem of fine wine."

ASI: What is 'fine wine'? Do we need a globally recognised definition?

Pauline Vicard (PV): I will answer the second question first, because the reason we decided to focus on fine wine was not because we dismiss the rest. We believe that when you sit at the top of the pyramid, you have more responsibilities. You must lead the way in front of the important global changes that are coming. The people involved in the ecosystem of fine wine have more resources. As such they need to lead by example. However, you choose to define it, fine wine sits at the top of the pyramid.

There's another reason why I personally believe that we need a definition for fine wine is that there's when you look at what threatens our ecosystem, there

"We look at how the world is changing, and how those changes impact both the production and the distribution of fine wine."



Pouilly Fuissé

is one which is environmental, of course, namely climate change. It's a very big threat, it's a very important one. In this case, the ecosystem is doing a lot, at every level. There are lots of different actions that allow one to be helpful, at least at the individual level, on this front, even if not at the collective one. The second threat to the world of fine wine is the regulatory attitude of government towards alcohol. We might be able to produce wine, as we will have adapted to climate change, but we might not be able to sell it if fine wine has lost its social licence to operate. We really want to defend this. We want to argue that fine wine is not the same as alcohol, and to do so we must be able to articulate it. This why we actually spend quite a lot of time trying to define fine wine.

In the end I don't think it must be an internationally recognised definition but what matters is the conversation that we have around it... reflecting on what it (fine wine) means for the consumer, or the trade, or global society, or the regulatory environment. In a way it can never be defined as it is a cultural concept.

ASI: Will this concept of 'fine wine' change over time?

PV: The context in which we understand it will change. How we understand excellence and greatness is changing. The way we have worked since the inception of Areni, is to conduct between 100 and 150 interviews a year on what 'fine wine' is to that individual. We ask the trade, but also collectors and consumers to explain what it means to them. Every two years, we summarise this in a white paper. This January we released the fourth edition of the white paper. Originally we had three criteria, but today we have five criteria, that defines fine wine. In a couple years perhaps, we'll have more. Fine wine is a shifting definition.



“In the end I don't think it must be an internationally recognised definition but what matters is the conversation that we have around it...”

Areni's Fine Wine Criteria

1. **Objective Quality** - There must be some objective quality. People in the trade are quite accustomed to assessing complexity, length, intensity, balance, harmony, and capacity to age. The latter is an important one. You can have a young, fine wine, but it must have that capacity to age.
2. **Emotions** - The one is a bit more subjective. We all have had, I hope, those moments with a wine... that epiphany when you have a wine and you can remember, even years down the road...who you had it with, what you were doing, what the wine tasted like. The emotions associated with the wine are embedded in your body. That's a very big differentiator between good wine and fine wine. There are loads of good, even great wine out there, but it is that capacity to provoke emotion that makes a wine fine.
3. **A Fine Winemaker** - The third one is open to debate as part of the definition of fine wine. It's the existence of a fine winemaker behind the wine. We say this because that's

something that all fine wines share. There must be intent. Fine wine doesn't happen by mistake. There has to be someone with idea of making the something the best it can be, whatever their definition of greatness is... whatever their style is, whatever the price is, whatever the region is, there has to be a winemaker who really wants to do their best.

ASI: You mentioned 5 criteria. What are criteria 4 and 5?

PV: You'll have to read about those in our next white paper (or keep reading this article).

ASI: If we are working towards a global understanding of fine wine, how does individual perception of fine wine play into it, or does it? Emotion is an especially personal thing.

PV: It can always be personal, but at the end of the day, when you put everything together there is the objective, the capacity to provoke emotion, and intent. There's not

that many wines that can achieve this. I might tell you, for example, a certain wine doesn't make me emotional, so you it wouldn't be a fine wine for me. That said, in the global scheme of things, the wine's capacity to provoke emotion to many people will classify it as a fine wine.

ASI: How are sommeliers helping to shape and evolve this definition? Is the modern sommeliers support of natural winemaking and sustainable viticulture playing a role in changing what is perceived as fine wine?

PV: Not too long ago everyone that worked in the fine wine space would have the same wine list with the same fine wine because there was a big consensus. And now, of course, the definition is more diverse.

I think it will help the conversation if I mention the last two criteria we added. The first one is sustainability, which we know means a lot of different things to different people. The reason we





“You can’t have a final age, if you don’t have a long-term vision, which in today’s world means that you must be sustainable in the way you farm.”

chose to add it is because fine wine must have a long-term vision. Fine wine has needed a constant and that’s time. You can’t have a final age, if you don’t have a long-term vision, which in today’s world means that you must be sustainable in the way you farm. You also must have social sustainability and financial sustainability as well, which is often dismissed. The last one that we added this year is reputation. The wine needs to be recognised and have reputation.

ASI: The last point is controversial. Do you need a certain critical mass to be considered fine? There are lots of high-quality producers that make wines that never get outside their local communities.

PV: This point was hotly debated, and there were two distinct camps. The trade strongly argued that it’s intrinsic, even if nobody knows about you. Others felt it’s just like art, if nobody puts a value on you, then you can’t really be part of the category. The reason why we chose to have it in the definition is because when we asked the consumers, there was no doubt for consumers that fine wine comes from a region that has reputation, or from a producer that has reputation.

ASI: The obvious question is how do judge who must recognise it?

PV: We actually spent a lot of time trying to analyse who’s responsible for who gives you the final end status. Jamie Goode and Elaine Chukan Brown came up with a term, the community of taste. This community is not one single person, or it’s not one single profession, like sommeliers alone, that will be responsible for the fine wine status. We identified eight groups of people starting with producers, it all starts from them. Distributors and retailers are also very important. We also had what we call the outsiders. People that come to winemaking, for example, as a second career, from a different region, or from a different industry. They look at our world in a different way and then make a lot of the changes that are happening. And of course, there are the collectors. Some of the recent movements on the fine wine market have been almost single handedly shaped by a group, you know, by some collectors directly.

Again, if you look at the size of that community in the old days, it used to be very restricted. It used to be, you know, a handful of journalists, if not just one. That is until the end of the Parker era. It also used to include just handful of Michelin

3-Star restaurants, sommeliers. To be recognised, you had to be on those wine lists. Of course, with changes they are still founding members of the community of taste, but the community is just one voice anymore.

ASI: What role does place and appellation play?

PV: In our definition we don't talk about place. I didn't want to use a word that was understood differently by everyone. What we have is the intent of the winemaker that wants to do the best they can. And usually, if not, almost always, it comes with the best they could in their land. As such the sense of place is almost natural for them. I've never heard a fine winemaker not talking about the place. But the way they talk about it, and the importance it takes and how they work with that place is very much different. If you want to understand 'terroir', as I do, it is a combination of climate, soil, and human beings and those human beings are the people that make the wine, but also the people that drink the wine. I believe strongly of the market influence in winemaking.

In terms of appellation, I believe the collective approach is still very relevant. Whatever regulatory context that has people come together to ignite a dynamic regional image and reputation; I believe is very important for the consumer. The region must be well known. It's very important to work collectively in terms of marketing regions. If you're not working as a group, the only way to get there (reputation) is if you have an unlimited marketing, budget for yourself. As an analogy, if your pen fails, you don't really care about the people that are around you. You can market your wine the way you want if you have the budget.

ASI: Can a wine made from multi-regional blend, for example, or sold in a supermarket be fine? Penfolds, for example. Can it be fine?

PV: I believe that place is important. But again, some people choose to express greatness in different ways. It's just like vintage. You can have great wines that are vintage and great wines that are non-vintage. We chose not to specify it (place) to allow more personal expression of greatness, and to allow some evolution in that perception of greatness. Take Penfolds for example. It is like all luxury brands. They have entry level which even they don't consider as luxury or fine, and they have their ultra premium that can be considered fine wine. If you want to be very intellectual about it, you can debate the difference between fine wine and luxury wine and try to understand and corner what's the difference between them. That's something that we've done as well, but we can keep that for another discussion.



A DISCUSSION WITH...

Marc Almert, Pauline Vicard and Dr Jamie Goode

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Dr Jamie Goode

Fine Wine: are we trying to define the undefinable? And why?

With Dr Jamie
Goode

Dr Jamie Goode is a United Kingdom-based wine writer, critic, and wine judge. He took a circuitous path to wine, starting with a PhD in plant biology, before working as a book editor before eventually launching his first foray into wine with the hugely popular

He has appeared on numerous television programmes in the United Kingdom, is a co-chair of the International Wine Challenge and winner of many awards for his work in the field.

ASI: What's your definition of 'fine wine'?

Dr Jamie Goode (JG): I like Hugh Johnson's definition: it's wine that's worth talking about. Most of the other definitions I've seen are incomplete or downright silly. I think we are seeing a change where fine wine used to be limited to just a few wine regions, but now is being made in all sorts of places. You could say that in the past fine wine was really the sort of stuff that posh wine merchants used to sell to their private customers, who would then cellar it. Way back, it was the wine of the wealthy elite, as opposed to wine that was just a commodity. But the wine world is much more nuanced and complex these days.

ASI: Will this definition evolve?

JG: Attempts to define fine wine are fraught with difficulty. Many of the people anxious to define it are people who want a slice of the action. When you start considering individual wines, it shows how difficult it is to come up with a definition that's of any use. So classed growth Medoc wines? These are obvious candidates for fine wine. But in every vintage? What about Burgundy? DRC (Domaine de la Romanée-Conti) is a yes, obviously. Grand Cru wines: yes, but are all of them? What about premier cru or village level? We have Bourgogne Blanc from certain producers selling at hundreds of Euros a bottle. But is Bourgogne Blanc fine wine? What about Beaujolais? Barolo, yes.

But what about supermarket Barolo? And Langhe Nebbiolo? What about Rioja, or Ribera del Duero? And what does Australia's fine wine dimension look like?

A more sensible filter would be by producer. Is the producer trying to make an authentic, terroir-based wine? Are they making something serious? Every region has its top producers, and it seems tighter to use producer reputation rather than appellation as the criterion. But how do we deal with natural wine?

Perhaps even better is using the route to market as the criterion. Is this wine something that is carried by the sorts of retailers and restaurants that sell 'fine wine'? A lot depends here on the reason for wanting to define 'fine wine'!

ASI: So provenance doesn't play a factor into your definition of fine wine? How about appellation?

JG: Provenance is largely meaningless in defining fine wine.

Appellations do serve a purpose and are useful. Without them, regional identity would have been lost in many places. But they aren't perfect. Overall, they do more good than they do harm.

ASI: What separates fine wine from luxury wine?

JG: A wine can be fine and not a luxury wine. The luxury market and fine wine overlap quite a bit, but not completely. Artisanal wines from Tenerife producers like Envinata or Suertes del Marques are fine wines by any sensible definition, but they are not luxury. Moët Ice and Armand de Brignac Champagnes are luxury products, but they aren't fine wines.

ASI: Do you believe fine wine must be recognised to be labelled as such?

JG: It's the community of judgement, made by people who know enough about wine to take

part in this, that decides what is good in terms of wine, and that includes what is fine. We talk together, taste together, and come to some sort of loose conclusion.

As far as who that is, it's anyone in the wine trade who has sufficient experience, interest and a palate that works. We get to talk and taste, and then we discuss. Ask anyone who's spent time in a region who are the best producers, and they'll provide you with a list of the top five that will look pretty similar to the lists of others who have spent time there. Some people have more influence than others, of course: they have built up a tribe or following. But it's not just one person who decides.

ASI: What are sommelier's role with respect to fine wine?

JG: Any attempt to define 'fine wine' tightly is doomed to failure. Sommeliers only have a responsibility to offer customers wines that will please them, and even delight them... the only people super keen to define 'fine' and new entrants who want a slice of the action. They'll engineer a definition that lets them into the club, and then try and exclude winegrowers making thrilling authentic and natural wines.

“But the wine world is much more nuanced and complex these days.”

The Rise of Sommeliers as Influencers

With André Mack and Rex Leung



André Mack is one of the world's most recognisable and likeable sommeliers. Mack's transition from the life of desk job working as an investment services profession to the world of Sommelierie. He began as a sommelier in San Antonio, where he delighted in introducing guests to lesser-known regions and wines. His journey led to recognition as the Best Young Sommelier in America, and he eventually became the Head Sommelier at Thomas Keller's renowned French Laundry. In 2007, his dream of winemaking came true with Mouton Noir Wines. Today, he continues to craft exceptional wines and curate for Club W. Mack also established Get Fraiche Cru, a design firm, and is married to author Phoebe Damrosch. His achievements have been celebrated in top publications, and he's known for his wine education initiatives at prestigious food and wine events, but most of all for his accessible, welcoming persona.

Rex Leung has come a long way in a short amount of time. Leung is now the Head Sommelier of ZS Hospitality which includes the prestigious Hansik Goo and Whey. However, a little more than a decade ago he took his first steps in the hospitality world as a food runner. With a little more than decade in the food and beverage industry and just seven years as a sommelier, he's worked in various prestigious restaurants in Hong Kong including Amber and COBO House. Rex's passion for wine drives his commitment to continuous learning. His vision encompasses both classic fine wines and vibrant low-intervention, natural wines.



André Mack

ASI: There was a time when a very small list of people – and arguably one person, Robert Parker – were uber-influential in the wine world. Do you think the role of the critic has diminished over time? Or perhaps is there simply a growing community of wine influencers that includes social media personalities, sommeliers, producers etc. As such the role of the critic is now just one voice instead of the only voice.

André Mack (AM): The wine industry has evolved over the years. Whereas once a few prominent critics, like Robert Parker, largely dictated wine trends, today the landscape is much more democratic. Thanks to the internet and social media, a plethora of voices, from bloggers and influencers to everyday consumers, are now sharing their views on wine. This shift has led to a broader range of opinions, introduced wines to a wider audience, balanced the power dynamics in the industry, and welcomed diverse perspectives. In essence, the wine world has transformed into a space where many voices coexist, rather than one where only a few dominate.

Rex Leung (RL): I would say indeed critics are no longer the only voice especially when you consider how social media plays a role in everyone's life. There are loads

of Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), Facebook pages out there which may reach 10 thousand or more followers. Critics are now, not the only people who can influence wine trends.

That said, there is always a difference between critics and influencers. It is just like I play football for fun, but I will never teach Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo how to play. Influencers shall have their right to share about their own thoughts, but they could never replace Robert Parker, Allen Meadow, Peter Liem, Antonio Galloni etcetera. These are professionals. As someone working in the profession, I will always respect critics comments, not just the scoring system, but the content of each wines tasted.

ASI: Do you think the point system still has merit? Or is that an old way of trying to quantify something that is unquantifiable?

AM: The traditional point system in the wine industry, while still holding merit and being valuable to many, is facing a transformation. Many of today's new wine drinkers are shifting their trust and focus from numeric ratings to the recommendations of friends, influencers, and online communities. The rapid pace of change in how wine is discussed and recommended underscores the evolving dynamics of the industry, hinting that while the point system has its place, its relevance is being continually reshaped by modern consumption patterns and preferences.

RL: To answer this question, I would suggest thinking about looking at the question from a different angle. In the world of fine wine from classic, well-known regions such as Bordeaux, Burgundy, Barolo, Barbaresco etc., scoring systems might not be a proper way to conclude performances of the final products. Scoring system

“This shift has led to a broader range of opinions, introduced wines to a wider audience, balanced the power dynamics in the industry, and welcomed diverse perspectives.”

– André Mack

involves loads of human factors and personal preferences. Scoring systems also make some products less 'attainable' since they have the power to drive up prices, sometimes crazily.

However, for some lesser-known regions and producers, scoring systems can assist them to market their wines. Especially when guests might not be open minded on involving conversation with sommeliers to explore the possibilities out of well-known regions and/or producers. If there is a 95-point scoring Verdejo from Rueda, which might cost less than 90 euros, and there is a bottle of Sancerre which might be priced in excess of 130 euros on a Michelin star restaurant wine list, the score might make some guests willing to explore something new.

Personally, I am not against the scoring system. When I try to explore some new products from regions or producers that I never tried or heard of before, scoring systems would be a factor into my decision whether to try them or not, but I would also say that it is not just about the digit itself. The content of the critic's review is also important.

ASI: In an article by Robert Joseph in Meininger's he says, "sommeliers have another underestimated superpower: their global network." Would you agree that the interconnectivity of sommeliers give them a particular influence in the wine world?

AM: I've always viewed sommeliers as trendsetters. They've consistently acted as gatekeepers of the industry, and we've witnessed this over the years with trends like grower Champagne, Grüner Veltliner, orange wines, and many others. Thanks to social networking and the internet, it's become easier for sommeliers to connect with their counterparts worldwide. Coupled with their annual travels to various

"Without sommeliers' foundation of knowledge and ability to describe and promote these unicorns from less well-known regions properly they might just remain unicorns that no one has caught."

– Rex Leung

wine regions and the world's finest restaurants, this has solidified their influence on global wine trends.

RL: I totally agree. Thanks to ASI, I had the honour to participate in ASI Bootcamp in Malaysia and volunteer at the ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest earlier this year in Paris. The colleagues I have met at these past events are extraordinary. We should not underestimate the value of the network. It can't be quantified, but in my opinion, it is priceless. A simple social media post might cost nothing, but sometimes its influence is global.

ASI: Do you think sommeliers are also helping to shape what consumers perceive as fine wine?

AM: Yes, sommeliers and wine influencers are truly reshaping what people value in wine, such as sustainability, natural wine, and the like. It's been well-known for many years that word of mouth is incredibly powerful. We are living in an era where there are multiple voices, not just one, and witnessing this evolution is remarkable. It might feel a bit lawless at times, but just as YouTube, once primarily known for cat videos in its early days, has evolved, so too will the wine industry. After all, the cream

always rises to the top, and now YouTube stands as the second most-used search engine.

RL: As a frontline sommelier, I would say it is 50/50. Guests are still keen on Bourgogne and Bordeaux in Asia, but during COVID, trends switched a bit. Guests became less willing to spend a lot on a bottle but still desiring something nice. As a reaction, I expanded the wine list to include different regions and countries. I used to have a lot of classic examples of fine wines, but as result of COVID I expanded my selections from Germany, Austria, Washington, Oregon, Argentina,



Rex Leung

Chile, and even Georgia. Regular guests are now always expecting me to offer something surprising, which makes the job more challenging and fun.

On the other hand, thanks to social media again, we have more access to those 'unicorn wines'. Wines like Richard Leroy from Loire, Bell Hill from Canterbury, Cayuse from Walla Walla Valley, etc. Although their prices have been going up quite steeply, more guests are aware of them and are willing to try out something that they had never seen before. Without sommeliers' foundation of knowledge and ability to describe and promote these unicorns from less well-known regions properly they might just remain unicorns that no one has caught. Now at least we can harness them and invite our guests to enjoy them.

ASI: Do you think one of the great advantages of being a sommelier is the ability to craft recommendations based not only on personal judgement but also on relationships to, and conversations with, another human being?

AM: My wine journey has always been about the person on the other side of the table, and I believe that's the primary reason people find my approach and presentation relatable. Much of this perspective I owe to my wine training with Thomas Keller. His philosophy on wine was always rooted in conversation. In the restaurant, we never had a set wine pairing for the daily-changing menus. Instead, it was about engaging in a conversation with guests about their likes and dislikes. Based on that, we would select wines that we believed would best complement their dish. I've always carried this philosophy with me, aiming to "meet people where they're at."

RL: Sommeliers are salesmen, historians, geologists, and the best storytellers. From an employer's perspective how we differentiate one sommelier from another is the sales report. On one hand, we always love to include something special on our wine lists to demonstrate our uniqueness, but the most important thing is making sure we have the ability to sell those wines. To minimise the risk of having a slow-moving item list, a sommelier's ability to interact with guests is critical. I always believe that there is no perfect pairing nor perfect wines. But understanding guests' experiences and dining vibes can define whether the special bottles are worthy or not. It's all about cultivating relationships and conversations.

ASI: On a lighter side, are there sommeliers in the world that influence you, and your wine purchasing decisions. If so who?

AM: Certainly, I have a close circle of wine professionals and sommeliers with whom I regularly gather to geek out over producers and regions. One of the most impactful lessons from my time with Thomas Keller was his philosophy: "Work to impress the people you work

side-by-side with, and you'll astound anyone who comes through the front doors." The idea is that no one is as invested in what you're doing as your peers. That shared passion and dedication are the reasons you all work together. Earning their respect and admiration is truly meaningful.

RL: For me it is not a particular person but instead Noble Rot from London. Noble Rot is group of three restaurants in London and an online wine publication. Their wine lists feature a mixture of classic regions and next trends. I discovered my selections were quite similar with their wine lists a few years ago. I then started following them on social media. I would be excited if I found out if any of my new items and their listings, recommendations were the same. When I am out of my own ideas, I often check out their lists for inspiration.



Behind the Gate: who influences sommeliers, gatekeepers of the wine world

Sommeliers are the gatekeepers of the wine world, curating selections that can make or break a dining experience. But who influences their buying decisions? A myriad of factors come into play, from the recommendations of well-known influencers, wine critics and industry trends to customer preferences and regional availability. Additionally, sommeliers often rely on relationships with trusted vineyards and distributors, other sommeliers, as well as their own expertise and palate. Seasonal menus, food pairings, and even the restaurant's brand identity can also sway choices. Ultimately, the sommelier's role is a balancing act, harmonising multiple influences to create a compelling wine list.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Behind the Gate: who influences sommeliers, gatekeepers of the wine world



We asked who influences you?

Madeline Puckette
Wine Folly



Jancis Robinson



Marc Almert
ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2019, Baur au Lac



André Hueston Mack
Maison Noir



Konstantin Baum MW
Baum Selection



Pascaline Lepeltier
Chambers, chëpika



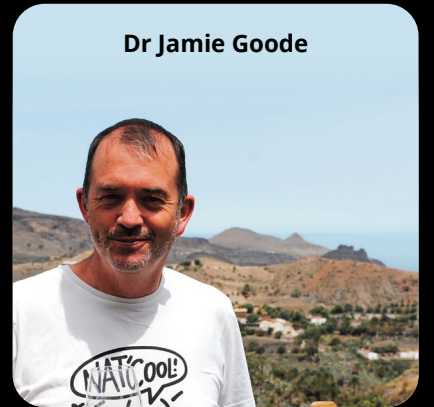
Mariano Braga



Chris and Anika



Dr Jamie Goode



Toni Askitis
asktoni



FEATURE ARTICLE

Behind the Gate: who influences sommeliers, gatekeepers of the wine world



ASI Bootcamp: Americas Bound

With Piotr Kamecki and Gaby Pozo

The Association de la Sommellerie, known for its dedication to spreading the gospel of Sommellerie to all corners of the planet is set to embark on an exciting journey to Ecuador this November.

This picturesque South American country, with its diverse landscapes, rich culinary history, and burgeoning sommelier scene, has been chosen as the backdrop for a sommelier bootcamp like no other. ASI Bootcamp Americas, set to take place next month in Quito, promises to be a unique blend of education and exploration, offering sommeliers the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of wine, beer, food, service and more while immersing themselves in Ecuador's rich wine culture. In this article, we asked **Piotr Kamecki**, ASI Vice-President of Europe and ASI Bootcamp organiser, and **Gabriela (Gaby) Pozo**, President of the Ecuadorian Sommelier Association, to share their thoughts on the upcoming event.



Piotr Kamecki

“It is important for ASI to actively involve the local sommeliers who belong to the association, which has the organisational resources to prepare a good event.”

– Piotr Kamecki



Ecuador Ceviche

ASI: Why did you and your sommelier association want to host an ASI Bootcamp?

Gaby Pozo (GP): I think Ecuador is a bit unknown in the world of gastronomy, so we decided to take this opportunity to showcase Ecuador through an exploration of our four regions: coastal, highlands, Amazon and Galápagos.

ASI: Piotr, what about Ecuador made you decide it would be a good location for the ASI’s first Americas Bootcamp?

Piotr Kamecki (PK): Ecuador was chosen to host the Bootcamp for several reasons. The most important was the enthusiasm of Gaby and the Ecuadorian Sommeliers Association and the dedication of the entire Ecuadorian team to organise it there. It is important for ASI to actively involve the local sommeliers who belong to the association, which has the organisational resources to prepare a good event. Another reason was the ASI dream to highlight a country from South America and to give a chance to a country that previously has not had the chance to host an ASI event. Finally, there is a very practical reason. As an ASI Board we must be fiscally responsible, which meant hosting an ASI Bootcamp in the US or Canada, near impossible at this time. Ecuador presented a more financially viable option.

ASI: In terms of Ecuadorian food, drink, what are you most excited to showcase at Bootcamp?

GP: Ecuador is a country that is very rich in natural resources. We are

the main exporters of fine aroma cacao, and the product of cacao, in fact, started in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Chocolate will definitely be a big part of what Ecuador presents during Bootcamp. In terms of drinks, craft beer is an essential part of Ecuador’s food and drink scene. Ecuador is home to a vast amount of freshwater derived from runoff from our high elevation volcanoes. This plays a role in the character of the beers from here. We will also be showcasing Ecuadorian water in its natural form, but also with respect to liquors such as Miske, Ecuadorian coffee, Ecuadorian Vermouth and Ecuadorian gin made with botanicals sourced from the Amazon.

ASI: This will be the third Bootcamp. How has Bootcamp changed and evolved since the first iteration in Poland?

PK: It is similar in concept to the Bootcamps we held in Poland and Malaysia. We always prefer lecturers from the region in which the Bootcamp is organised, both from ASI and experts, well-known personalities from outside our association. We want to give the same scenario for each edition. That said, there will be some updates and edit for our next European edition.



Gabriela (Gaby) Pozo

ASI: What are some of the highlights, featured Master Classes at the upcoming Bootcamp in Ecuador?

PK: We certainly infused some of my favourite topics into the programme, including a discussion by Michelle Bouffard (*Tasting Climate Change*) on climate changes and its effect on wines and trends. "We also have Nathan Keffer, a Master Brewer and beer judge, hosting a class on trends in the beer industry, and beers used in gastronomy."

As far as the tutors, we bring together both ASI experts and opinion leaders from the world of wine, beverages and gastronomy. This allows us to offer Bootcamp participants a cross-section of topics from service to in-depth knowledge of wines and beverages, as well as trends and the impact of the changing climate on our work and our lives.

ASI: What lasting memories would you like attendees to leave with?

GP: I think they will never forget about our gastronomic offering, our hospitality and service, and in addition they will leave with tons of fine aroma chocolates in their bags.

ASI Bootcamp Ecuador Tutors:

Sören Polonius, Co-Director: ASI Exams & Education Committee

Marc Almert, ASI Gold Excellence, 2019 ASI Best Sommelier of the World

Veronique Rivest, 2012 ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas, Runner-up 2013 ASI Best Sommelier of the World

Pascaline Lepeltier, MS, Fourth Place 2023 ASI Best Sommelier of the World, 2018 Best Sommelier of France

Michelle Bouffard, DipWSET, Founder Tasting Climate Change

Emily Wines, MS, Chair Court of Master Sommeliers Americas

Andreas Matthidis, DipWSET, President: Greek Sommeliers Association, Member: ASI Exam and Education Committee

Nathan Keffer, Master Brewer, Beer Judge

Julian Diaz, Chef, Bartender, Sommelier and Restaurateur

"I think they will never forget about our gastronomic offering, our hospitality and service, and in addition they will leave with tons of fine aroma chocolates in their bags."

– Gabriela (Gaby) Pozo

W. & J.
GRAHAM'S
ESTABLISHED 1820
PORT

Graham's Port introduces its signature Six Grapes Reserve Port in an impressive 3 litre bottle, released exclusively for the On Trade.

Released exclusively for the On Trade, the 3 litre bottle offers a host of advantages to restaurants seeking to enhance their offerings and create unforgettable experiences for their guests, the Six Grapes 3 litre bottle is designed to captivate guests, add theatre and elevate the dining experience.

Grahams continues to build on its offering in the On Trade with interesting formats and food pairing suggestions to bring visibility and excitement to the category. The versatility of Graham's Six Grapes ruby port in pairing makes it a perfect companion for a range of culinary delights. From dark chocolate-based desserts to mature cheeses and desserts featuring red forest fruits, Six Grapes complements a diverse array of dishes. Its rich layers also harmonise beautifully with savory fare, including rich cream sauces, smoky flavors, and earthy umami combinations such as roasted meats.

Originating in the 19th century, the Six Grapes symbolises a tradition of excellence. Graham's winemakers used grape symbols to denote the quality of each barrel, with Six Grapes being the epitome of complexity, structure, and balance, earmarked for Vintage Port.

By the early 1900s, Graham's began bottling selected wine from these barrels, giving birth to the iconic Six Grapes Reserve Port, which remains a testament to the brand's heritage. Sourced from Graham's four estates and blended by Graham's Master Blender, Charles Symington, Six Grapes consistently delivers a seductive perfume of ripe plums and cherries, complemented by a well-structured palate and a long, lingering finish. This attention to detail ensures that each sip embodies the unwavering commitment to quality and craftsmanship that defines Graham's Port.



Make Me a Match

Harmonising Heritage:

The Global Art of Pairing Vintage Wines

Pairing vintage wines with wine doesn't have to rely on the classics. Increasingly sommeliers are seeking vintage wine from the diverse corners of the wine world to pair with food. It is a captivating journey that combines the nuanced flavours of aged wine paired with a sommelier's and their chef's creativity. Regardless of the wine provenance the key lies in finding the harmonious balance between wine and dish. We asked four sommeliers from around the globe to provide pairings based on vintage wines from their home countries.

The Sommelier

Laurie Cooper

DipWSET, SASA Level 2 Certified Sommelier, Moët et Chandon Best Young Sommelier 2019

The Wine

2009 Keet First Verse

The Pairing

72-hour braised short rib

In terms of aged South African wines, it is the Bordeaux blends, particularly from Stellenbosch, that still reign as the most 'collectable' and investable wines for long term ageing. I recently enjoyed a bottle of 2009 Keet First Verse, their maiden vintage. This vintage comprises of 32 per cent Cabernet Franc, 26 per cent Merlot, 21 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon, 11 per cent Malbec and 10 per cent Petit Verdot, all sourced from Stellenbosch. The richness and concentration of a great vintage was perfectly matched by mature tannins and structure. Ripe, supple dark fruits were layered with notes of spice, dried herbs and flavours resulting from French oak barrique ageing. It was still showing plenty of primary



Laurie Cooper



MAKE ME A MATCH:

Harmonising Heritage: The Global Art of Pairing Vintage Wines

fruit with tertiary notes of cedar and forest floor coming through on the wine.

The wine was perfectly paired with 72-hour braised beef short ribs, smoked aubergine, heirloom tomato and olives. The richness of the beef matched the depth of flavour in the wine whilst the aubergine enhanced its smoky and more earthy qualities. A pop of acidity from the tomato and the saltiness of the olives further supported the pairing.

The Sommelier

Marc Pinto

Head Sommelier, 50 Seconds Martin Berasategui

The Wine

1969 Viúva Gomes Collares Reserva Tinto

The Pairing

Arroz de Pato

Nestled along the Atlantic coast, vineyards in Colares boast unique sandy soils where vines grow directly in the sand, and are own rooted. The distinctiveness of the Colares terroir is well-regarded among wine connoisseurs. The region is renowned for its red wines made from the rare Ramisco grape varietal. These wines offer an ethereal experience, lifting your senses with their natural freshness while grounding you with their aromatic depth.

For an unparalleled tasting journey, I recommend the 1969 Viúva Gomes Collares Reserva Tinto. Pair it with a



Arroz de Pato

traditional Portuguese dish known as Arroz de Pato, or duck rice with oven-roasted sausages. This dish is a staple in Portuguese cuisine, likely originating from Braga. I suggest the wine will enhance the flavours of the dish as aged Ramisco, such as this, offers aromatic notes of raisin, cherry, dried herbs, smoky nuances, and spices.

It's crucial to note that the wine's vibrant acidity serves as a bridge between the duck's richness and the rice's starchiness. This balance allows the fine, mineral-rich tannins of the 1969 vintage to complement the duck meat's subtle sweetness with just the right touch of bitterness.

When the liquid and solid elements of this pairing harmonise, your palate ascends to a new level of culinary bliss. In essence, you'll have journeyed through the flavors of Portugal without ever leaving your seat.



Marc Pinto



The Deal on Decanting: Sommelier coach Sören Polonius shares his tips



Sören Polonius

Sören Polonius is a well-known figure in the world of Sommellerie, currently serving as the Wine Director at the prestigious Adam/Albin group of restaurants in Sweden, and co-director of the ASI Education & Exam Committees. Polonius brings a wealth of experience and expertise to curate exceptional wine lists that perfectly complement the culinary offerings at these renowned establishments. Beyond his role with Adam/Albin, Soren is also the founder of "Swesomm," the Swedish national sommelier team. His visionary leadership and dedication have not only elevated the art of wine service but have also played a pivotal role in nurturing and promoting sommelier talent on a national scale in Sweden.

ASI: As sommeliers, particularly young sommeliers, the idea of decanting an expensive vintage wine can be intimidating. Do you have tips for mentally preparing oneself for the task?

Sören Polonius (SP): You should always have respect for every bottle you open. There's a winemaker who put an effort into making that wine good, and sometimes great.

With that said, I recommend trying not to think about the price of the bottle, or how unique it is. That tends to make you nervous when opening the bottle, and being nervous is seldom a good thing. When it comes down to the task, it's just another bottle that you open. Of course, you should always be careful if it demands extra careful handling.

ASI: As a young sommelier did you ever feel anxious about decanting a vintage wine?

SP: I remember decanting my first bottle Mouton Rothschild 1945 when I was 7 years old... just kidding. Joking aside, I have decanted so many bottles by now, that the process is now deeply rooted in my muscle memory. Of course, there's always some bottles that I tend to be a bit 'extra careful' about, especially if it is from an older vintage. You don't always know how it's been stored, so you might be a bit worried of popping the cork too early.

ASI: Do you have any relatable memories of serving an "exclusive", "prestige" older wine?

SP: Last month I was asked to open, decant, and serve immediately a bottle of Château Haut-Brion 1961. The shoulder was low, and I could see the cork had sunken down a bit even before the foil was cut. The cork had seen better days. I quickly realised that I needed to pay attention to details. I took my everyday wine opener and carefully inspected the condition of the cork, seeing if it had some elasticity, was dry as the Sahara, or had the texture of "modeling clay". After that, I slowly started to work on the cork, very gently removing it. I managed to pull the cork fully intact. After quickly assessing if the wine was okay, I performed a quick but gentle decant into a vase-like shaped decanter, to avoid oxygenating the wine too much. I served it immediately.

ASI: When decanting a vintage wine do you adjust the speed of the decantation?

SP: Yes, if you have a mature wine, do it carefully, so as not to harm the fragile wine. If it's a young wine, you use a bit "splashier" pour, in order to wake up the wine and aerate it. Of course, don't go crazy, and risk breaking the decanter or spilling the wine.



Durand Corkscrew

ASI: In the context of serving vintage wines do you recommend sommeliers have different decanter shapes, styles available, or is the best decanter the one that feels most comfortable to you?

SP: I would recommend having a couple of different decanters to work with. They are amazing tools that can change the face of the wine you serve depending on the shape and time in the decanter. If you have a lot of young wines and you need to aerate them, rather than decant to remove sediment, I would recommend a "Barolo decanter", having a wide

surface that exposes the surface of the wine rapidly with oxygen. If

"You should always have respect for every bottle you open. There's a winemaker who put an effort into making that wine good, and sometimes great."

1961 Château Haut-Brion



you have a lot of mature wines that you need to be careful to not "over aerate" the wines, a decanter that looks like a vase with straight sides and a narrow diameter, works in this case.

ASI: Beyond following the ASI Guidelines, are there any other pro tips to ensure the perfect decant?

SP: There's a small detail that I have seen a lot of sommeliers miss when they decant a bottle of wine, and that is understanding the shape of the bottle. There are always some "pros & cons" one needs to consider when decanting different wines in different bottles. A Bordeaux-shaped bottle always has this "clucking" sound when you start to pour the wine, that's the air coming into the bottle, and hitting the wine back into the bottle disturbing the sediment, so it must be done slowly at the start. It takes a short while before you have a free path for the air into the bottle and wine pours without any sounds and the bottle can be tilted at a tad bit steeper angle. This might be a bit stressful if you are standing on a stage in a Best Sommelier of the World contest, for example, only having five minutes to do the service. The upside is that the sediment

can be collected in the shoulder of the bottle.

When decanting a Burgundy bottle with a soft shoulder, the "clucking" sound and "backlash" of wine in the bottle stops earlier. You get a free path of oxygen earlier, and it goes quicker. The downside is that you don't have a good shoulder to collect the sediment in.

If you have an old flûte such as very old Spätburgunder from Germany the "clucking" stops almost immediately, but there is no shoulder to stop the sediment whatsoever. Of course, there's not likely to be much heavy sediment in a Spätburgunder any way. It's all about pros and cons.

Here's another trick from the coach. If you somehow manage to push down the cork into the bottle, use a "plastic ribbon", the same as when you wrap a gift, to retrieve it. Make a knot with the two loose ends. Put the "loop" down the neck of the bottle, making sure that you trap the cork, and then pull it up. Elegant, not really. Does it work? Like a charm.

ASI: How do you feel about using other tools such as Rabbit Pura, Port strainers to assist in decanting vintage wine?

SP: I am not a big fan of using the Rabbit Pura or a Port strainer, but sometimes you need to work with the tools. Especially if you have bottles with opaque glass, such as Port wine bottles. That said there are other tools I use. I have a love story with my Durand opener. I couldn't do my job without it. When I travel, I usually have one in my hand luggage, and I have never been stopped in the security checks. However, I forgot it on a trip to Slovenia and I had to go 'MacGyver' and used a pair of tweezers and a toothbrush to open a bottle of wine. As they say, "necessity is the mother of invention".



Si | **SommelierS** INTERNATIONAL

Because you don't change a winning team, SommelierS International is organising its traditional champagne tasting on October 23 at Reims town hall, in the company of winegrowers, Champagne Houses, cooperatives and professional tasters. An event which will bring together 35 houses and producers around more than 200 vintages, and a caviar discovery workshop.

On this occasion will be present **Philippe Faure-Brac**, Best Sommelier of the World, Best Sommelier of France and Meilleur Ouvrier de France honoris causa, **Fabrice Sommier**, president of the Union de la Sommellerie Française, Meilleur Ouvrier de France and Master of Port and **Xavier Thuizat**, Best Sommelier of France and Meilleur Ouvrier de France, who will present **Raimonds Tomsons**, Best Sommelier Europe & Africa and Best Sommelier of the World 2023, with the gift offered by the UDSF in honor of his new title.

Programme:

9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.	Champagne tasting in the company of winegrowers, Champagne houses and cooperatives, the writing of 2-3 tasting comments which will appear in the magazine.
12:30 p.m. – 12:45 p.m.	Presentation of the gift offered by the UDSF to Raimonds Tomsons.
1 p.m. – 3 p.m.	Free gourmet lunch.

Are you a member of the UDSF, wine merchant, restaurateur, buyer, importer or even a wine influencer?
Don't hesitate to register for the event:

In the meantime, find
our new issue

on news stands or on
our website

In this new issue, you will follow, among others, Raimonds Tomsons in the vineyards of Bordeaux and Provence, then set off to discover little-known producers in Vietnam and Luxembourg. You will also find our 2023 Wine Fair file and the report from our tasting at the Intercontinental Bordeaux Grand Hôtel. Spirits are not left out, with a unique tasting of sake, shochu and umeshu, in partnership with the Kura Master competition. The opportunity to dive into the fascinating world of these traditional Japanese drinks. A unique tasting not to be missed.



Anecdotes from a Sommelier Veteran

With Henri Chapon MS

Henri Chapon MS, DipWSET has had a more than three decades long career serving at some of England and France's most prestigious restaurants. One of those restaurants was the Michelin 2-Star Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, in Oxfordshire, England, alongside Chef Raymond Blanc.

On one evening Chapon recalls he was working in the lounge, greeting guests, and discussing their wine selections for the evening. However, one table of two went straight to the restaurant without stopping in the lounge. The couple asked their sommelier, whom Chapon remembers as being Ronan Sayburn MS that evening, to decant a bottle of Mas de Damas Gassac. A wine the couple planned to enjoy later with their main courses. All was in order as Ronan decanted the wine, keeping the decanter aside until the table was ready to be served their main plates. The guest tasted the wine and declared it to be corked. Chapon says "as was customary, we graciously removed the wine and tasted it in the back. None of the sommeliers working that night, myself included, thought it was corked. Even Chef Raymond tasted it and declared it in good condition. Not knowing who we are dealing with, I asked the guest if the wine was subtly corked or obvious. Once he said it was 'definitely corked', I knew we should suggest another wine for fear that it was the tannic style of the wine, that the guest may not be enjoying."

"When it comes to fine wine service, tactfulness is a skill that Chapon believes great sommeliers must possess."



As it turns out, the customer in question was a critic. Chapon wasn't aware of him at the time, so he called his good friend Gérard Basset, who confirmed the guest was indeed a critic and writer. Although the wine writer took the bottle of wine in question under the pretense of having it 'lab tested', he decided to forego the procedure, later writing about the experience in an article in Sainsbury Magazine. In it saying in response to the lab testing 'he did not need to pay money for something he already knew to be true.' Thankfully, this calling out didn't sit well with other writers as Chapon recalls. Another gave him the opportunity to retort in Harpers Wine & Spirit Trade News. It gave Chapon the opportunity to respond and provide readers the rationale behind how sommeliers deal with difficult situations. In the end Chapon learned that even diplomacy and etiquette doesn't always suffice when someone's ego is bruised.

When it comes to fine wine service, tactfulness is a skill that Chapon believes great sommeliers must possess. When a client whom Chapon presumes was in the company of a 'friend', instead of his wife as normal, ordered a bottle of white Bordeaux, pointing to the 1967 Château d'Yquem on the list, Chapon was quick to praise his selection of the iconic sweet wine. The guest retorted "but it's not too sweet." Quick to protect his client's image, Chapon nodded and replied "of course, but as you know the 67 vintage was an exception." A bottle of Ygrec, the dry wine of the property, was brought to the table for his client and companion to enjoy. Even if meant £1,000 less in sales, it was the right course of action.

He's also learned not to judge a book by their cover, or make presumptions, as he had two young women order a £1,000 plus bottle

"Sometimes judging a book by its cover also applies to wine labels."



of Château Haut-Brion for lunch, and at the opposite end witnessed the Queen Mother's assistant's refusal to spend more than £25 on a bottle of Claret on behalf of the royal.

As for the most precious wines he has served. It was the two bottles of 1983 Romanée-Conti. The Romanée-Conti was ordered at a restaurant he was working at in Monaco around 1991. The party was in fact interested in a third but had to settle for a bottle of La Tâche from the same vintage, as those were there last two bottles of the prized wine. The move to La Tâche according to Chapon "was fortuitous, as not only was it significantly less expensive, but it was also drinking better." Sometimes judging a book by its cover also applies to wine labels.



Somm Perspectives

It's fine to me...
is it fine to you?

Exploring deeper the elusiveness of fine wine, we asked two working sommeliers, each from a different continent to explore deeper what it means to them.

Manuel Negrete is the Wine Director at Wine Bar by Concours Mondial de Bruxelles. Originally from Mexico City, he obtained the title of sommelier at the tender age of 21. After working on the agent side, and joining ASI's marketing team in 2019, he joined the Wine Bar by Concours Mondial de Bruxelles team as Wine Director, in 2020. He represented Mexico at the ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas Competition in 2022, is a contributor to Reforma Newspaper, an ambassador to Star Wine List and a judge at the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles.

@mexican.somm

Lê Hoàng Khánh Vi is a passionate sommelier, the founder of NOB Natural Wine Bar, and currently Vice-President of Vietnam's Saigon Sommelier Association (SSA), owns a Master's degree in Wine Tourism. The diploma is awarded by three prestigious universities in Europe including the University of Bordeaux (France), University of Porto (Portugal) and University of Rovira I Virgili (Spain).

@nob_natural_owl_corner



Manuel Negrete

ASI: What is your definition of fine wine?

Lê Hoàng Khánh Vi (LHKV): For me, “fine wine” equates to a wine of purity... a wine that is taken care of from the vineyard through the winemaking. The wine would show respect to nature, offer authentic characteristics of the terroir where the wine comes from and typicity. The flavour and taste of this wine should also show beautiful structure, texture, depth, and length.

Manuel Negrete (MN): I classify fine wines in two categories: the first are those that due to their historical fame become part of the sommelier's bucket list, those that you must try at least once in your life, and which are usually icons of the production area they represent, having behind them the weight of several decades and sometimes centuries of prestige.

The other category is all that wine that exceeds expectations, that not only fulfills what the information on the label promises, but the one that can sincerely surprise you and that in many occasions, you feel that you have paid less money than what the quality of the product has given you.

ASI: Historically we have associated ‘fine wine’ with wines from specific, notable wine regions such as Burgundy, Bordeaux, Mosel etc. Do you think this

connection to place is still relevant or has the definition of fine wine as it connects to places changed as the wine landscaped has broadened?

LHKV: To me, the connection to place of ‘fine wine’ is still relevant as wines are made from grapes; therefore, ‘fine wine’ should connect to the place the grapes grow and express the terroir, landscape of its origin. However, the place is broadening and is not just limited to several regions as the world of wine is continuously moving and changing. We can't stick our mind into some historical regions as mentioned, we should be open to think about other areas, even small, new wine regions such as Mallorca, Sicily, New York State, Ningxia, Yamanashi, and others.

MN: Of course, it still has a lot to do with it and there are several examples of labels that will never lose being named the object of desire. However, I have found really amazing labels in countries less associated with such icons, such as incredible rosés from Moldova, delicate and very complex Koshu in Japan, as well as a super Crémant from Wallonia in Belgium, to name a few. I think that on many occasions, fine wine is related to red wines, and lately I have had more and better surprises with whites and rosés.

ASI: Is how the vines are managed relevant to your definition of fine wine?

LHKV: Definitely yes, the way vines are managed are absolutely relevant to what I think is ‘fine wine’. For me, a ‘fine wine’ is a wine of purity that reflects a taste of its terroir.

Applying organic, biodynamic or sustainable farming methods preserves the soil quality, environment, et cetera. When grapes are grown in natural conditions the expected return is typicity, a taste of terroir reflective of the vine's origin.

“Good wine is born in the vineyard, but extraordinary wine is the product of knowing how to do the best with that spectacular fruit.”

– Manuel Negrete

Moreover, with the global warming, the ways of cultivating and making wines are crucial to consider about the planet. We need to reduce chemical additions, replacing them by other environment friendly practices. Organic, biodynamic, and sustainable methods should be encouraged everywhere.

MN: Yes and no, because clearly, we must be grateful for the extra effort that the producer puts into providing a wine that is much more loyal to the area from which it comes. However, there are many wines that are produced in areas where it is not so easy to utilise organic or biodynamic practices simply because of the type of climate they have and I do not think that this detracts from the opportunity to produce spectacular wines, simply because the buyer will not see a label that it is an organic wine or has a Demeter emblem on the back label.

I have always said, I like wine; if the producer is biodynamic, minimal intervention, organic or none of the above, as long as the final product is good, I will be able to recommend it. The only thing that bothers me is that suddenly they want to sell and aspire or glorify producers who have a clear hygiene problem in their winery, and they want to sell it to me as "natural wine is like that".

On the other hand, there are producers who make their wine with practices considered organic and even biodynamic and never declare it, because they do not even mind paying for the certification and those who buy their wines (me included) know them for making spectacular wines.

ASI: Can a wine be fine if made using conventional methods? Or in large volumes?

HKV: Undoubtedly winemaking is extremely important for the final result as unsuitable decisions can destroy even very high-quality grapes. Growing vines using organic, biodynamic methods and making wine using natural or conventional methods is the choice of the winemaker based on various factors that differentiate among other wineries. We cannot easily conclude: this method can be surely made 'fine wine' and that method is certainly not without specific information; however, the conventional method in general may contain more chemical additives than other methods and for that it is supposed to not keep the original flavor and taste of the grape and the terroir as "fine wine" is expected to be. In order to have 'fine wine' there needs to be a lot of effort both in the vineyard and the winemaking. As such it would be hard to take care of every step and paying attention to the very details required to ensure a wine of such quality. For these reasons, I would say it is possible but it would be truly difficult to make 'fine wine' in large volumes.

"For me, "fine wine" equates to a wine of purity... a wine that is taken care of from the vineyard through the winemaking."

– Lê Hoàng Khánh Vi

MN: Yes, of course, good wine is born in the vineyard, but extraordinary wine is the product of knowing how to do the best with that spectacular fruit, and extracting the best of its essence, providing the final touches in the cellar so that the consumer feels that he or she is drinking a true work of art. In terms of volume, it depends on what you call high volumes, however I believe the ability to create the finest wines depends on the location the grape comes from, whether it is an entire hill, or several hills, whether the best expression comes from one single plot, or if you are creating it from the mixture of grapes that come from different locations and the result is wonderful. It's hard to say. Romanée Conti is created from a plot smaller than 2 hectares, Chateau Lafite comes from a vineyard bigger than 100 hectares, the Scharzhofberger vineyard is almost 30 hectares, so, it depends.



Lê Hoàng Khánh Vi

Member Association Spotlight

Sommeliers Australia:

Elevating Sommellerie in Australia

MEMBER ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT



sommeliers
australia

Sommeliers Australia has become one of the world's most dynamic and progressive sommelier associations. The association formed in August 2007, the result of a visionary amalgamation, bringing together state-based associations from New South Wales and Victoria. Subsequently, the success of this union led to further and the subsequent expansions which saw the birth of state chapters in Queensland and Western Australia, with other states quickly following suit, solidifying Sommeliers Australia status as a truly national association.

Sommeliers Australia: Elevating Sommellerie in Australia

A Collective Effort

At the helm of this association is a dedicated group of professionals who are passionate about wine and hospitality. The board is comprised of longtime President Sarah Andrew, Vice-President Bridget Raffal, Treasurer Louella Mathews, Wiremu Andrews, David Murphy, Liam O'Brien, and Tim O'Donnell.

Sommeliers Australia operates as a not-for-profit hospitality industry association, driven by the collective efforts of their volunteer board. Their primary mission is to champion the education of Australian sommeliers and wine professionals. The association's overarching objective is to provide members and the broader hospitality industry with pertinent education and career development opportunities.

Measuring Success: Engagement and Impact

Success for Sommeliers Australia is not merely measured by numbers but by the depth of their engagement with stakeholders. This engagement encompasses members, partners, venues, and the wine industry at large. It serves as the bedrock upon which they build their capacity to support education and upskilling for their members and the broader wine and hospitality industries.

Educational Empowerment

Education forms the heart of Sommeliers Australia's mission. Their commitment to developing and delivering education opportunities extends not only to their members but also to everyone involved in the hospitality and drinks industries. Their focus is on enhancing the tasting, communication, education, and business skills of their Professional

members, which in turn extends to educating their enthusiastic members.

The association actively conducts in-person and online education sessions. These take various forms, including tastings, masterclasses, and more. These sessions offer members and non-members alike the invaluable opportunity to learn from experts, share their knowledge, and network with peers and industry professionals. Sommeliers Australia's educational content aligns seamlessly with programs offered by organisations like the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) and the Court of Master Sommeliers (CMS). This enables candidates enrolled in these programs to access additional avenues for expanding their knowledge and skills. Members also benefit from the association's ability to offer ASI certification, ranging from Certification 1 to Diploma. Additionally, they collaborate with partners to provide scholarships and immersion opportunities, further enriching the educational landscape.

The Road Ahead: Diversity, Inclusivity, and International Bonds

Sommeliers Australia's journey is far from over. Their unwavering commitment lies in continually providing education and career development opportunities for their members. A significant focus for the future is breaking down barriers to diversity and inclusivity within the industry. The association aspires to be a leading example, demonstrating that diversity and inclusion should be integral aspects of how hospitality and wine industry organisations operate.

Looking forward, Sommeliers Australia anticipates hosting

its triennial Best Sommelier of Australia competition in 2024. This event aims to attract sommeliers not only from Australia but also from across the ASI Asia Pacific region, fostering stronger regional ties and offering local talent the invaluable opportunity to engage with and learn from their peers.

An Example for Others

Sommeliers Australia's journey, which began in 2007, has been marked by unwavering commitment to education, a dedication to enhancing the wine industry, and a vision of inclusivity and diversity. As they forge ahead, their impact on Sommelierie and hospitality in Australia continues to grow, touching the lives and careers of countless professionals in the field. Theirs is an example for other sommelier associations around the world to aspire to. ASI looks forward to supporting Sommeliers Australia and others accomplishing their goals.



Sarah and Brigitte

Member News

Lithuania Crowns New Champion

Ignatij Semionov, a sommelier at SOMM Wine Bar in Vilnius, has recently been crowned Lithuania's Best Sommelier. The accolade was awarded at the prestigious "Best Sommelier of Lithuania" contest, a competition that gathers the country's top wine experts to showcase their skills. Semionov's victory is a testament to his deep knowledge of wines, exceptional palate, and outstanding customer service skills. This win not only elevates his status within Lithuania's wine community but also puts SOMM Wine Bar on the map as a destination for wine aficionados. Congratulations to Ignatij Semionov for this well-deserved recognition.



Ignatij Semionov

Jean-Vincent Ridon is South Africa's Best

The South African Sommeliers Association (SASA) recently announced Jean-Vincent Ridon of Sommelier's Academy as the winner of the Best Sommelier of South Africa 2023. The prestigious event was held at Hazendal Wine Estate and coincided with the Star Wine List of the Year South Africa awards. Laurie Cooper of Abingdon Wine Estate in KwaZulu-Natal clinched the runner-up spot, while Tapiwa Jamu of Ivory Manor Boutique Hotel in Pretoria took third place. The competition showcased the exceptional talent and expertise of South Africa's leading sommeliers, further elevating the country's wine industry.



Jean-Vincent Ridon



Han Yew Kong

New Champion, New Day for Malaysian Sommeliers

The Malaysia Best Sommelier Championship 2023 concluded with Mr. Han Yew Kong of Galaxy Entertainment Group taking home the Champion trophy. Hosted by Parkroyal Collection Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, the event saw a record number of female participants and welcomed back Malaysian sommeliers working abroad. The two-day competition featured rigorous tasks, including blind tastings and wine service. Mr. Han Yew Kong also won the Cepas de Chile Trophy, further solidifying his expertise. The event was overseen by a panel of esteemed judges, making it a landmark occasion in the world of Malaysian sommeliers.



Mihai Ciucur is the Best Sommelier of Romania

The Association of Sommeliers in Romania recently hosted the 16th annual SOMELERIA TROPHY 2023 – A.S.R., crowning Mihai Ciucur as Romania's Best Sommelier. The esteemed competition was overseen by Giuseppe Vaccarini, former ASI President and current President of ASPI, along with Andreas Matthidis and Mihai Druta, Presidents of the Greek and Moldovan Sommeliers Associations, respectively. The event took place on September 4-5, 2023, and saw strong performances from runners-up Plesa Marius, Catalin Ghita, and Jankó András László. This year's contest continues to elevate the profile of Romanian sommeliers on the international stage.

Canada Launches SOMM U as Part of Best Sommelier of Canada Contest

The Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers (CAPS) announces the launch of SOMM U (), an 2-day event filled with Master Classes and tastings to coincide with its Best Sommelier of Canada contest. The sommelier university and Best Sommelier of Canada contest will take place in Halifax under the direction of ASI Magazine editor and former CAPS President Mark DeWolf and include a number of high-profile educators.

SOMM.U
by CAPS UNIVERSITY



**Best Sommelier of
Canada 2023**

HALIFAX

The background of the poster is a scenic landscape of rolling green hills in Ecuador, with some small houses and trees scattered across the slopes. In the distance, there are more hills partially shrouded in mist or low clouds. The sky is bright with some light clouds. A large white rounded rectangle is centered on the image, containing the event title and dates.

ASI BOOT CAMP

AMERICAS

ECUADOR 2023

OCT 29 - NOV 1