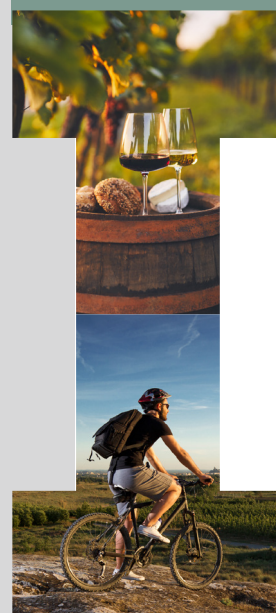


ASI MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 2024
ISSUE #18



NOTABLE SOMMELIERS OF 2024

Mark Guillaudeu, Mikk Parre,
Maika Yamamoto



RISING STARS OF SOMMELLERIE

Ryoga Nakamura, Jonathan
Gouveia, Lukas Wiegman



YEAR IN REVIEW



ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas 2025

Feb 17-21 | Sonoma, California

ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas

Feb 17-21, 2025
Sonoma, California



ASI Partners



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MOLDOVA
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MAKERS
ASSOCIATION



Stölzle Lausitz
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Welcome!



*William Wouters,
President ASI*

Reflecting on a Year of Success and Growth in Sommellerie

As 2024 draws to a close, I would like to take a moment to reflect on what has been a remarkably successful year for our association. Together, we have celebrated our profession, strengthened our network, and laid the groundwork for an even brighter future for sommellerie worldwide. That future is bright thanks to the exceptional talents of sommeliers across the globe.

Our three guest editors represent a new generation of young yet experienced sommeliers who are pushing our profession to new heights. I encourage you to read their columns. **Mark Guillaudeu**, a determined sommelier from the USA, is seeking to capture the title of the world's best at the upcoming ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the World in Lisbon, Portugal. Then there is the newly minted ASI Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa, and Middle East, **Mikk Parre**. Finally, we celebrate the inspirational story of **Maika Yamamoto**, a highly talented Japanese sommelier. All three have recently attained the prestigious ASI Diploma Gold.

As we look forward, we also celebrate the past year. We began with our General Assembly in the stunning Principality of Monaco. This pivotal gathering allowed us not only to review our strategic



ASI Bootcamp, Sevilla, Spain

goals but also to solidify our vision for the future. The discussions and decisions made during this assembly have guided our efforts throughout the year, ensuring we remain steadfast in our mission to elevate and promote the art of sommellerie.

Supporting this success has been the nurturing of established relationships and the development of new ones. While a few partners were unable to renew their contracts with us, we were fortunate to welcome new ones whom we believe will become longstanding members of our ASI family. Perlage, a producer of fine mineral water, the Vinhos Verdes Demarcated Region, and Stölzle Lausitz were all warmly welcomed

this past year. These partnerships not only support our initiatives but also highlight the trust and recognition ASI has earned within the industry.

While fostering these new relationships, we have continued to build upon existing ones with the likes of AdVini, Graham's, the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association, Wines of Moldova, Wines of Portugal, SommelierS International, Laguiole, and Vinexposium. Their continued support has enabled us to build programmes, host contests, expand our communications reach, and achieve so much more. Thanks to Vinexposium, we were once again able to showcase our sommeliers at Wine Paris. This unique

opportunity not only allowed us to connect with existing partners but also introduced the global wine community to our association. Similarly, our new relationship with GuildSomm provides sommeliers with enhanced access to educational content. Combined with updates to our ASI Guidelines, this ensures our global community has the tools and opportunities to achieve higher standards in sommellerie.

As we grow, the effectiveness of our committees becomes increasingly important. Our Bylaws, Diversity, and Ethics & Compliance Committees ensure we operate with transparent practices and uphold the highest ethical standards for ourselves, our member associations, and the sommeliers within them. Our Marketing Committee continues to expand our presence via social media, while ASI Magazine has now reached more than 300,000 readers since its inception, connecting with more sommeliers with each issue.

Much of this progress has been achieved through online meetings, but certain initiatives required in-person collaboration. The Exam and Education Committee met in Porto to refine our educational resources and certification processes. Their tireless work ensures that ASI certifications, such as the ASI Diploma, remain the gold standard for sommeliers worldwide. Meanwhile, the Sommeliers Contest Committee convened in Bordeaux to strategise for future contests. These committees, composed of dedicated professionals, are the backbone of ASI's mission to nurture talent and maintain the highest standards in our profession.

Events remain central to our work. One of this year's standout initiatives was the ASI Bootcamp held in Sevilla, Spain. This immersive programme brought together sommeliers from diverse

backgrounds to enhance their skills, deepen their knowledge, and foster a sense of community. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, and we are committed to expanding this initiative in the coming years.

The year culminated with the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, held in Belgrade, Serbia. This contest

showcased the extraordinary talent and dedication of sommeliers, reminding us of the excellence that defines our community. Congratulations to our three finalists—**Martynas Pravilonis**, **Pascaline Lepeltier**, and the winner, **Mikk Parre**—along with all the competitors. They inspire us all with their expertise and passion.

As we look to 2025, the excitement continues with the upcoming ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas in Sonoma, California. Preparations are well underway, and we are confident that this event will be another triumph, celebrating the skill and diversity of sommeliers across the Americas.

In closing, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all our members, partners, and volunteers who have contributed to ASI's success this year. Your dedication and enthusiasm drive our mission forward, ensuring that sommellerie continues to thrive as a respected and dynamic profession.

Wishing you all a joyous holiday season and a prosperous New Year. Let us continue to raise our glasses in celebration of the art and craft of sommellerie.

"This unique opportunity not only allowed us to connect with existing partners but also introduced the global wine community to our association."



In My Glass



Mark DeWolf

Mark DeWolf, Content Manager ASI

Editor, ASI Magazine

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Tis the Season for Wines of Emotion

As winter settles in across the northern hemisphere, my choice of beverages naturally shifts to those that evoke deeper emotional connections. It's a reflective time of year—a season for embracing family and friends. Regardless of culture or beliefs, the holidays universally encourage us to nurture relationships, express gratitude, and cherish the ones we love. When we gather, it's not just about the food and wine; it's about how these choices make us feel, creating lasting memories long after the plates are cleared.

For me, those emotional moments often centre on wine. As the year draws to a close, I find myself revisiting wines that touched both my palate and my heart—whether for their intrinsic qualities or the memories tied to sharing them.

Take, for instance, my visit to Cantina Moros in Guagnano, a small town within the Salice Salentino DOP. The family behind the winery had just sold two of their other wineries, leaving them with only this tiny gem—a single hectare of vines. Despite their losses, the father and daughter duo forged ahead with resilience and passion. Their 2018 vintage, predominantly Negroamaro with a touch of Malvasia Nera, was far more than just a wine—it was an experience. It delivered ripe Puglian sun-kissed flavours with unexpected freshness and structure, but also carried a

nostalgic hint of black liquorice cigar candy from my childhood in Canada. This wine is one I long to share with my mother, over a long holiday chat reminiscing about years gone by.

While family is our foundation, as we age, friendships become equally vital. Few friendships have enriched my life as much as the one I share with **William Wouters**, President of ASI, and his wife, **Filipa Pato**. Our bond feels more like siblings than colleagues. This year, I had the joy of welcoming their family to my home in Nova Scotia, and their wine, the Filipa Pato & William Wouters Nossa Calcário Bical, felt like an extension of that kinship.

"I find myself revisiting wines that touched both my palate and my heart."



Moros Winery

Its saline, oyster-shell aromas, reminiscent of the ocean surrounding my home, make it the perfect pairing for a local seafood tower shared with friends.

Over the past few years, I've learned to treasure these connections. For much of my career, I unintentionally allowed friendships to take a backseat to work. Now, I've come to realise that time spent with close friends offers rewards far beyond material success or on-paper accolades. Wines shared with these friends invariably carry meaning that transcends the glass. This past year, a trip to Piemonte and Liguria with friends provided another unforgettable experience. One companion, a true aficionado of indigenous Italian varietals, introduced me to Vignetti Massa Derthona, Walter Massa's legendary expression of Timorasso. Massa's work has revived this grape, now a rising star among Piedmontese growers. Its mesmerisingly complex nose, with honeyed fruit, exotic spices, and a mineral (yes, I'll use the contentious word!) core, combined with a richness and freshness that was utterly captivating.

Yet, it wasn't just the wine—it was the friendship that made the moment unforgettable.

A bottle of wine shared over a lovingly prepared meal is an invitation to slow down, savour, and connect. It transforms an ordinary evening into something extraordinary—a reminder of why we gather. This holiday season, I encourage you to go beyond the flavours. Seek wines that evoke emotion and tell a story, pairing them with dishes that carry meaning and warmth, and most importantly enjoy them with a loved one or great friend.

Let your holiday table become a canvas for stories of connection and joy. After all, isn't that what this season is truly about?

Cheers

Mark DeWolf



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Demarcated Region since 1908

VINHOS VERDES

But of course! The classic Vinhos Verdes are usually young and fruity, but aged Vinhos Verdes have structure and gain complexity over time. Try them and you'll see!



Guest Editors



Mark Guillaudeu MS

Religion, Meditation and Sommellerie

With Mark Guillaudeu MS, ASI Gold Diploma

Mark Guillaudeu's journey into the world of wine began serendipitously during his graduate studies in Tibetan Buddhism. Transitioning from academia to hospitality, he quickly advanced from Washington, DC to San Francisco, landing at the acclaimed two Michelin-starred Commis.

Mark has subsequently achieved the title ASI Diploma Gold and his passion, expertise, and leadership now shine at New York's illustrious Eleven Madison Park, where he continues to set new standards in the world of wine and hospitality.

ASI: Taking a step back in time. Did you ever see sommellerie as your vocation?

Mark Guillaudeu (MG): No, not at all. My family didn't have any food or alcohol traditions. In fact, my mom's pregnancies caused severe digestive issues, so she avoided heavily seasoned food. Food in our home was more about sustenance than enjoyment. I never had fish growing up, for example. It was a lot of plain chicken and rice. Food was really just nourishment. My dad had negative experiences with alcohol and never drank. So, I came into adulthood with a blank slate.

"It became a source of curiosity for me, as I explored different textures, spices, and global cuisines."

Mark earned his WSET Diploma in 2016, a milestone that marked the start of an impressive ascent in the wine industry. In 2019, he was named one of *Food & Wine Magazine's* "Best New Sommeliers," the same year he entered the prestigious Master of Wine programme. His competitive spirit and dedication led to remarkable achievements, culminating in his victory as "Best Sommelier USA" in June 2022.

In February 2023, Mark represented the USA at the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the World in Paris, making history as the first American to reach the semi-finals of this demanding global competition. Following this achievement, he joined the team at the Wrigley Mansion, where he further distinguished himself by earning the Master Sommelier Diploma in September of the same year.

ASI: Do you think the very lack of flavour in your diet growing up heightened your awareness of flavours in adulthood?

MG: Absolutely. It became a source of curiosity for me, as I explored different textures, spices, and global cuisines. I planted a garden after grad school and began learning to cook with what I grew. That was my gateway into food. My first foray into the industry was at Cleens Garden Market in D.C., which focused on local and sustainable products. When the opening beverage manager left abruptly, I stepped in. With a week of research and reading, I was ready to dive in. And here I am.

ASI: A lot of top sommeliers of the world have fascinating educational backgrounds, yourself included. What did you study in university and why?

MG: I double-majored in religion, focusing on Hebrew scripture, and minored in philosophy with a concentration in logic. (Of the decision to pursue religious studies) initially, it was personal. I grew up Catholic and leaned into it as a form of rebellion. Over time my studies evolved into an academic exploration of how belief systems shape individuals and communities. My graduate studies were on the history of religions, specifically Tibetan Buddhism. My research compared the pedagogical methods of Thomas Aquinas in Catholicism and Tsongkhapa in Tibetan Buddhism. Both developed rigorous debate-based methods for teaching their respective traditions. It fascinated me how two figures, living 3,000 miles apart, developed similar systems to integrate older texts into their contemporary frameworks. They both independently arrived at the same pedagogical method, which is memorisation of vast quantities of text in service of rigorous formal debate.

ASI: Have your studies in any way helped you in your current career?

MG: My interest extended to meditative practices like Tummo. Tummo, the art of inner fire, is an ancient technique often associated with breathing and visualisation. While Wim Hof has popularised and modernised it, his approach strips away much of its spiritual essence, presenting it as a series of techniques rather than a deeply rooted practice. For example, studies on participants injected with noxious bacteria have shown how these methods allow the body to eliminate harmful agents through precise breathing and visualisation protocols.

As a Catholic, my interest was twofold: first, if this phenomenon aligns with the natural order, there must be a scientific explanation. Understanding the mechanisms behind these techniques could lead to reverse-engineering meditative practices to achieve specific biological results. This is why I chose to study at a university with a strong neuroscience department, only to find myself overwhelmed by the complexities and politics of academia.

Being a Catholic in a Buddhist studies programme posed unique challenges. Many professors in Buddhist studies, often ex-Christians, lacked interest in genuine religious dialogue. Meanwhile, some in Catholic circles viewed my involvement as insincere or subversive. These dynamics made me rethink a long-term career in religious studies. However, the interdisciplinary nature of academic religious studies was invaluable. It required understanding anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and philosophy to see the broader picture. This perspective greatly influenced my hospitality and beverage career. Early on, my niche was being the “wine guy” who also excelled at sake or cocktails. This cross-disciplinary approach, born

from my academic training, became the cornerstone of my success.

ASI: Speaking of a broad understanding, you have worked within various beverages categories. I understand you are currently working towards becoming a Certified Cicerone. How has this dedication to various beverages shaped, or supported, your career development?

MG: It's been invaluable. Why hire two when you can hire one? Fermentation is a universal process, intertwined with culture and history. I've always said, like, if there's only two things on the planet that pretty much every culture throughout all of history has had, and there's some form of fermentation and some form of worship. Not coincidentally, those two things oftentimes entwine not just in Christian ritual, but in other rituals around the world as well.

I've never limited myself to studying just wine, exploring the connections between fermentation, temperature, and aromatic character. For example, in a recent tasting group, I used the term "yeast derived floral aromas," sparking questions about its meaning. I explained that yeast can produce floral aromas, as evident in Ginjo sake, which derives its floral notes purely from starch and yeast. This connection between fermentation and aroma also applies to wine. A Chardonnay fermented at 45°F (7 °C) might share aromatic similarities with Ginjo sake—a clear link between fermentation temperature and character.

This broader perspective has informed my work, such as running a tapache fermentation for a non-alcoholic programme. I discovered that fermenting it at 65°F (18 °C) in storage yielded vastly different results than at 50°F (10 °C) in the cellar. These experiences illustrate what I mean by "going wide"—recognising how microorganisms

and their behaviors shape most beverages. As brewers say, "We work for the yeast," and sommeliers often overlook this fundamental truth.

The sommelier field, at times, seems to surrender to the overwhelming breadth of knowledge required, allowing others to specialise in areas like olive oil, coffee, or even cannabis. For me, the role of a sommelier isn't limited to wine or beverages—it's about understanding fermentation itself. Historically, the field has embraced tea, coffee, cheese, and even tobacco, showing that sommeliers are not just beverage professionals but fermentation specialists. Our job is the curation of fermentation, connecting these diverse products through the shared science of their creation. This broader approach enriches our understanding and elevates the role of the sommelier.

ASI: As sommeliers, especially those attaining certifications and competing are often required to focus on the minutia of detail. Has your academic background supported your study skills?

MG: Certain ideas from different religions I studied always resonated with me. For example, reading Augustine's Confessions, I learned that he became renowned for having memorised the Bible entirely, front to back. This mastery allowed him to write with unparalleled force within his tradition, embedding its foundational text deeply into his mind. Similarly, in Tibetan traditions, certain lamas are able to dictate vast volumes of work from memory, driven by a belief that if they don't preserve these texts, they might be lost forever.

Another parallel comes from Islam, where the hafiz, or "guardian," plays a central role. A hafiz is someone



"For me, that meant not just finishing the Master Sommelier certification but exploring what it truly meant to excel in that field—and relentlessly pursuing it."

who has memorised the entire Qur'an, internalising it completely. This figure is not only a preserver of the text but also a revered member of their community, safeguarding its spiritual foundation through their memory and being. This recurring trope—total dedication to mastering and internalising foundational knowledge—deeply inspires me. In my own studies, whether delving into detailed research or pursuing deeper understanding, I've aspired to embody this concept of a sommelier hafiz, a guardian of knowledge in my field.

ASI: You've attained some incredible titles in your career. What motivates you to continually pursue attaining more certifications and titles?

MG: One of the great drivers of human progress throughout history stems from a primal instinct—a part of the limbic brain harking back to the monkey on the tree thinking, Can I make that jump? Let's try. That fundamental can I? propels invention, progress, and refinement. It's why what was once hailed as the greatest recorded performance of Chopin is now

studied as an example of what not to do. It's why the seemingly unbreakable four-minute mile record fell repeatedly in the years after it was first broken. Pushing the envelope, going further—that's the human drive.

For me, this sense of exploration and challenge was mirrored in my own journey. In college, I bounced between disciplines—starting as a pre-med student double-majoring in biology and religion. Personal experiences turned me away from medicine, and I dabbled in other areas: Army ROTC, linguistics, and more. I discovered a knack for languages, but nothing felt like it.

When I eventually found wine and beverage, I faced the realisation that I couldn't keep bouncing from one thing to another. I needed to prove to myself that I could commit. For me, that meant not just finishing the Master Sommelier certification but exploring what it truly meant to excel in that field—and relentlessly pursuing it. In hindsight, perhaps it was simply being in my 20s, but the drive to commit and push boundaries has shaped everything I do.

Ultimately, they're only useful valuable in so far as they are a tool to focus you towards achieving something better than what you've done in the past. Beyond that, the titles and I hope I'm not being too bold when I say this, are worthless. They're only useful as tools towards driving yourself to be better than you were the day before.

ASI: How do you translate all this knowledge into the service, guest experience side of what you do?

MG: I had a bit of theatre experience in high school and early college, which helped me in some ways. I love learning and sharing knowledge, and I've always prioritised teaching, even early in my career, by leading tasting groups. For me, a major realisation came after I left grad school and stopped being Catholic. I'd spent years watching people debate endlessly, often in pointless and petty ways. I learned that debates rarely change minds; even if you present sound reasoning and evidence, people often cling to their beliefs. This lack of openness to change can be frustrating, which is why I appreciate tech sheets. For instance, if someone insists a wine is bone dry, I can point to the lab report for clarity.

In fine dining, I see an opportunity to cultivate mindfulness. By pairing exceptional food and wine, I aim to create moments so compelling that even those without training in awareness or mindfulness are fully engaged. These experiences can plant the seed for a better way of being. I focus on crafting

BSOW Written Semifinals

sharp, precise pairings, and while I sometimes miss the mark, that's how you grow.

At the restaurant (Eleven Madison Park), my approach has been to let the pairings speak for themselves. I'll present a dish and wine, give a brief explanation, and step back. Once guests experience the pairing, I return to discuss their reactions and tell the story. The argument is in the experience itself, not the spiel, history, or charm. Designing a tasting menu in a fine dining setting feels, in a way, like preaching—but it's the friendliest form of it. Through these moments, I strive to share a more mindful and engaged perspective with my guests.

ASI: Looking ahead, where do you see yourself in 10 years?

MG: I wish to teach. Seamus Heaney has a beautiful collection, his last before he passed, called *Human Chain*. One poem reflects on a photo album of his grandparents, describing love as "steady gazing not at each other, but in the same direction." For me, this resonates deeply. Right now, I'm not at a place where I can fully dedicate myself to teaching that concept—teaching the process of focused care and refinement.

I've gained so much through this journey: the process of attention to detail, engaging fully

with my senses, and using that as a means of self-refinement. Whether in service, blind tasting, or competition, the true gift I hope to teach is not a body of knowledge but the processes that lead to self-improvement. The goal is finding something that demands enough care and attention to sharpen and refine you—making you more precise, open, kind, and intentional. It's about cultivating a perspective where the act of doing itself becomes transformative.

I dream of combining hospitality and Buddhist studies into a pedagogy. Imagine mornings of Buddhist studies paired with afternoons in hospitality—helping working professionals refine themselves through mindful practice. Sharing these ideas at work and with guests is fulfilling but teaching it explicitly would be a meaningful next step in my career.

The process required for the MS, for example, forces you to confront and refine your rough edges. While I wouldn't wish the intensity on anyone, I believe everyone needs a challenge that pushes them to grow. Is pursuing the MS worth it to master beverages? No. It's worth it because of what it forces you to do to yourself. You emerge sharper, more deliberate, and better equipped for life. That, I believe, is the real value of the process.

From Passion to Triumph:

Mikk Parre's journey to becoming ASI's Best Sommelier Europe, Africa, and the Middle East



Mikk Parre

Mikk Parre is an accomplished hospitality professional with over a decade of experience in the food and beverage industry. Having honed his skills in a variety of establishments—ranging from casual eateries and wine bars to Michelin-starred restaurants—Mikk has also excelled as a sommelier, team leader, and restaurant manager.

Known for his insatiable curiosity and passion for lifelong learning, Parre combines a meticulous approach to his craft with an unshakably positive outlook. His ability to remain composed and professional under pressure has made them a standout in the demanding world of fine dining and hospitality.

Parre has achieved remarkable accolades, earning the title of Best Sommelier of Estonia in 2022 and 2023, as well as Best Sommelier of the Baltics in 2022. Parre holds the prestigious ASI Gold Sommelier Diploma and the highly respected Certified Sommelier certificate from the Court of Master Sommeliers.

In 2024, his dedication, expertise, and passion culminated in his crowning achievement: winning the ASI Contest Best Sommelier Europe, Africa, and the Middle East title, cementing his status as one of the most exceptional sommeliers of his generation. We asked him about his journey to become one of the world's most celebrated sommeliers.



"For this contest, I had a study plan, and kept track of what I was doing, but I also allowed time for family and personal life. It's important to stay grounded and not let the stress take over."

ASI: How and why did you become a sommelier?

Mikk Parre (MP): Like many other sommeliers, I stumbled into the role by accident. When I started this field, it was just pure interest. I started working in a restaurant and developed a growing passion for wine, food, and the entire culture of hospitality. It was fascinating, and over time, I found myself immersed in this world.

ASI: Was there a moment when you decided to take this passion and pursue becoming the Best Sommelier in Estonia? Or was it a gradual journey?

MP: I started competing at a low level mainly as a way to practice for exams at our local sommelier school. The turning point for me was the ASI Bootcamp in Poland in 2021. It opened my eyes to the larger sommelier community worldwide and inspired me to aim higher. It wasn't about being the best initially; it was about learning and growing.

ASI: Do you think being from Estonia is an advantage or a disadvantage in your journey?

MP: It's a bit of both. Growing up in a non-wine-producing country forces you to learn about a broad spectrum of wines from all over the world. You don't focus solely on local wines, as might happen in regions with a strong winemaking tradition such as Austria and France. In that way, I think the broader perspective we're forced to adopt is an advantage.

ASI: How did you approach preparing for the recent ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa, and Middle contest? Was it a strict regimen or something more balanced?

MP: Preparation for me has always been about balance. After participating in the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the World in Paris last year, I learned of taking a more relaxed approach to preparation. For this contest, I had a study plan, and kept track of what I was doing, but I also allowed time for family and personal life. It's important to stay grounded and not let the stress take over. Some days you don't get to study because you spend time with loved one. It's very important to keep a good balance in life.

ASI: Does having a strong sommelier community in the Baltic, where there seems to be a strong sense of mentorship and collaboration, important to your success?

MP: First of all, Raimonds (Raimonds Tomsons, reigning ASI Best Sommelier of the World) has, of course, been a very big inspiration and a very much someone to look up to. Beyond that, the sommelier community here is small but close-knit. For instance, we have the Baltic



Mikk Parre winning ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa, and the Middle East



Sommelier Grand Prix, where sommeliers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania compete and support each other. Frequent competitions give us more experience than sommeliers from larger countries who might compete less often.

ASI: You've also earned the ASI Gold Diploma. How do you see certifications like this contributing to your career?

MP: Certifications can be a great way to drive personal growth. While they don't directly correlate to success in competitions, they keep you learning and evolving. Sommellerie is a dynamic field, and staying up to date is essential.

ASI: Were you intimidated sharing the final stage with renowned figures like Pascaline Lepeltier and Martynas Pravolonis?

MP: Firstly, Pascaline and Martynas are great people. I have immense respect for both. We might compete against each other, but there's a shared camaraderie. Even a competition setting like this, we are all part of a close tight nit community. Before the finals, Pascaline wished me good luck. That's the spirit of this profession. At the end of the day (even with it being a competition) we are going to go out after, have a beer, and have a nice chat. That's the way it works.

ASI: Now that you've won this title, is the ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest your next goal?

MP: It's certainly on the horizon, but I'm taking some time to let this achievement sink in. Preparing for a competition of that scale requires a long-term commitment, and I'll start planning soon. For now, I'm enjoying the moment.

ASI: As someone who has achieved so much, what advice would you give to young sommeliers from smaller markets who aspire to follow in your footsteps?

MP: Find your community. Whether locally or online, connect with like-minded people to exchange ideas and grow together. Also, always keep an open mind. The wine world is vast, and great opportunities often come from unexpected places.

ASI: Lastly, how did you celebrate your victory? Was there a special bottle?

MP: My girlfriend surprised me with a simple breakfast paired with a Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 2007 Champagne. It was a humble yet perfect way to celebrate.



"Sommellerie is a dynamic field, and staying up to date is essential."



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A Rising Star of Sommellerie and an Advocate for Women in Wine

With Maika Yamamoto

Maika Yamamoto discovered her passion for wine while working as a pâtissier, captivated by the intricate pairing of food and alcohol during a visit to a restaurant. Inspired to explore this harmony further, she set her sights on becoming a sommelier.

In January 2021, Maika joined the prestigious Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo, where she quickly distinguished herself in the field. Despite being a certified sommelier for just two years, her talent and dedication shone brightly when she won first place in the Pommery Sommelier Concours 2023, with her colleague Hiroki Ikeda securing second place.

Recently, Maika achieved the esteemed ASI Diploma Gold, solidifying her position as one of the rising stars in the world of sommellerie. Known for her exceptional palate and ability to craft unforgettable pairings, she continues to elevate the art of wine and dining.



Maika Yamamoto

ASI: How did your work as a pastry chef aid you in becoming a sommelier?

Maika Yamamoto (MY): The experience has been invaluable for me because having knowledge of both the service and kitchen sides is a great strength. As a sommelier, I need to understand food to create wine pairings and wine lists. Interestingly, there is a notable difference between learning about food as a chef versus as a server, just as there is a difference between learning about wine as a winemaker versus as a sommelier.

I graduated from a confectionery school, where I learned the "basic science" of making pastries. In retrospect, I realise I have a significant advantage because I understand cooking from a theoretical perspective. I am convinced this is exactly why my background as a chef has been so helpful to me.

If you know wine theory, your tasting comments will be much more convincing. The ability to think theoretically was especially important for me when I was a chef. Understanding the theory behind food allows me to recognise the types of flavours and aromas produced and the chef's intention behind incorporating specific cooking methods and ingredients. For example, by looking at a recipe, you can often determine how the chef

"It is a great advantage for someone with kitchen experience to select wines that align with the ingredients, aromas, and textures the chef is trying to highlight."



wants the customer to experience the dish, simply by understanding why they use certain ingredients.

When pairing wines, there are many directions you can take. However, it is a great advantage for someone with kitchen experience to select wines that align with the ingredients, aromas, and textures the chef is trying to highlight.

ASI: How has achieving the Court of Master Sommeliers Advanced Sommelier certification and ASI Diploma Gold furthered your career as a sommelier?

MY: It is important for me to expand my sphere of activity from multiple angles to take the next step in my career. Obtaining certifications is, of course, a way to improve myself and refine my knowledge, but it also holds significant value in demonstrating my "current position as a sommelier" from a global perspective.

Since acquiring the certification, I have been approached by customers from all over the world, and I feel it has fostered a

strong sense of trust. Additionally, pursuing international certifications allows me to interact with sommeliers from around the world, exchange information, and deepen our collective knowledge. This has enabled me to become part of a broader, more interconnected community within the industry than ever before.

ASI: Are you seeking other certifications or titles?

MY: I am aiming to become a Master Sommelier, and I aspire to win titles such as the Best Sommelier of Japan. I have discovered that competitions are a battle against myself. Since participating in the national competition in Japan in 2023, I've realised I have many areas to work on.

At the same time, I've come to understand that if I am going to do this, I need to commit to reaching the top. I believe the view from the top is different. Even though I finished second or third, I wouldn't have been able to see that view. This is why I have a strong passion to push myself to reach the top.

ASI: Have there been sommeliers in Japan or elsewhere that have contributed to your growth?

MY: One person who has influenced me is my boss, Mr Akihiko Nosaka, who was named Best Sommelier of Japan in 2023. When I decided to become a sommelier, I aimed to work in a place where top sommeliers were. This is why I started working at the Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo, where I am currently employed.

At the time, I was a server, and he taught me the basics and the mindset of a sommelier, even though I didn't know my right from my left. I would say he has been like a father figure on my journey as a sommelier—not only in terms of knowledge and skills but also in human qualities and humility.

Another sommelier I admire is Pascaline Lepeltier. I have not met her yet, but I feel she is a woman with a truly strong "core." She is a role model for me when thinking about pursuing a career as a woman in this field.

"I would like to become a sommelier who can respond flexibly to global trends and demands by improving my international perspective."

ASI: You were just one of a few women to graduate as ASI Diploma Gold. Do you feel like you are an inspiration for other women?

MY: My career as a sommelier is still short compared to many others in the field. Therefore, I often find myself hesitant to settle on a single answer, always thinking deeply and constantly re-evaluating my conclusions. Because of this, I'm committed to improving myself, with the hope of becoming a model for others.

Honestly, I was surprised to receive the ASI Diploma Gold, and if my achievement can be of any help or inspiration to someone, I would be truly honoured. One thing that makes me especially happy is seeing some of my female colleagues at my company become interested in the sommelier profession. It would be a privilege to offer opportunities for other female sommeliers to grow and achieve milestones such as graduating with the ASI Diploma.

ASI: What advice would you give to other young sommeliers looking to make their mark in the industry?

MY: Keep challenging yourself. This is not just advice for others but a reminder for myself. One of my favourite sayings is, "Life is short, but art is long." The word "art" originally came from the Latin word for study. Both learning and art are the results of human activity.

If you want to leave something behind in this industry, you must focus on something that will last beyond your short life. Sommeliers may not create tangible objects,



but I believe the act of challenging oneself is also an art. If you stop challenging yourself, it marks the end.

I believe that the way to leave behind your own art is to make your time more meaningful and intense than anyone else's—and, of course, to enjoy your journey as a sommelier along the way!

ASI: Are there any new projects, personal goals, or areas in wine you're particularly excited to explore as you continue your journey?

MY: I can't express it in exact words yet, but one of my visions is to increase the professional value of female sommeliers. I don't distinguish between women and men, but it is true that women face turning points in their lives, and many women leave the profession because of these challenges. However, I am convinced that being

a sommelier is a profession that suits women, just like the broader hospitality industry. Additionally, women's trends often become significant drivers of beverage consumption. My personal ambition is to increase the number of women sommeliers around the world and create an environment where we can support and grow with each other.

Another goal of mine is to develop an international perspective. As someone from Japan, I find it interesting that Japanese products are becoming quite popular abroad. However, I didn't fully realise this until this year, which I admit is a bit shameful for a sommelier working in Japan.

Therefore, I would like to become a sommelier who can respond flexibly to global trends and demands by improving my international perspective.

Celebrating Regional Achievements in 2024

As 2024 draws to a close, the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI) reflects on an extraordinary year of growth and achievement across its global regions. From Europe to Asia, the Americas, and Africa and the Middle East, the efforts of ASI's regional vice-presidents and their respective associations have been instrumental in fostering excellence, collaboration, and innovation within the sommelier profession.

In this article, we highlight reports from ASI's regional Vice-presidents as they share their successes and milestones from the past year. From hosting prestigious competitions and advancing professional standards to welcoming new member countries and overcoming regional challenges, these accomplishments underscore the unwavering dedication and passion that define the ASI community. Join us as we celebrate a year of milestones and look ahead to a promising future for the sommelier profession worldwide.



A Landmark Year for Sommellerie in Europe

Piotr Kamecki, Vice-president Europe

For anyone who thought 2024 might pale in comparison to the monumental achievements of 2023, marked by the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the World in Paris, they were thoroughly mistaken. 2024 was another landmark year for sommellerie in Europe. Despite the challenges faced globally, the spotlight shone brightly on our profession, as we proudly hosted three significant ASI events that showcased its vibrancy and depth. The year began in February with the ASI General Assembly in the breathtaking setting of Monaco. This event, hosted by the Monegasque Association of Sommeliers under the leadership of its charismatic president Dominique Milardi, brought together our global ASI family of sommeliers and partners. Through networking events and meaningful discussions, the assembly served as a platform for shaping the future of ASI and the profession. It also offered a chance to celebrate the enduring camaraderie that defines our community—an apt prelude to an active year of events.

The momentum continued in September with the highly anticipated ASI Bootcamp in Seville, where aspiring sommeliers immersed themselves in advanced training and valuable networking opportunities. It has been a privilege to witness Bootcamp's evolution into a cornerstone of ASI's educational commitment. This year's Bootcamp was no exception, as the future of sommellerie eagerly absorbed the wisdom and expertise shared by esteemed tutors and educators. Our joy was later tempered by the heartbreaking tragedy of devastating floods in the region. My thoughts go out to all those affected, and I wish them strength and resilience during the recovery.

Finally, the year culminated in November with the Best Sommelier Europe, Africa, and the Middle East competition held in Serbia. This prestigious event united the finest talents from across continents, underscoring the growing influence of sommellerie and the shared passion for excellence. The competition was thrilling, with Estonia's Mikk Parre emerging victorious

in a closely contested final. Beyond the competition itself, what truly stood out this year was the spirit of friendship, humility, and compassion displayed by the three finalists and all those who participated.

These milestones cement 2024 as a defining year, highlighting Europe's pivotal role in fostering global collaboration and elevating professional standards. With such accomplishments behind us, I eagerly anticipate another successful year in 2025.



Advancing the Sommelier Profession in Asia

Saiko Tamura-Soga, Vice-president Asia

This year has been another exciting and productive one for national sommelier associations across the region. From organising national competitions to hosting various professional development activities, each national association has worked diligently to promote the sommelier profession in their respective countries. The bi-monthly meetings with presidents of national associations have provided an excellent platform for sharing ideas, fostering collaboration, and discussing innovative ways to grow the community. These regular exchanges have been instrumental in driving progress and aligning goals for the future of the sommelier profession.

Many national sommelier associations successfully organised their national Best Sommelier competitions. These events not only showcase local talent but also help strengthen regional connections. The inclusion of guest competitors and judges from other countries has fostered an environment of learning and mutual respect, offering invaluable opportunities to exchange ideas, broaden knowledge, and develop lasting professional relationships. Such initiatives not only enhance individual skills but also contribute to the collective growth of the sommelier community.

It has also been encouraging to see more associations now conducting ASI certification exams regularly and consistently. This steady progress reflects a growing commitment to raising professional standards and fostering a culture of excellence. These exams are critical for developing sommeliers' skills and boosting their credibility, paving the way for sustainable growth and greater recognition of the profession across the region.

Looking ahead, next year holds even greater promise for the sommelier community in Asia. Two major ASI events are planned: the ASI Bootcamp and the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Asia & Pacific competition. These much-anticipated gatherings will provide unparalleled opportunities for learning, networking, and showcasing the immense talent this region has to offer on the global stage.

This year has undoubtedly laid a strong foundation for future progress. With the efforts and enthusiasm demonstrated by all involved, the sommelier profession in this region is poised for remarkable advancements in the years to come.



Spreading the Message of Sommellerie

Michèle Aström Chantôme, Vice-President Africa & Middle East

The year 2024 is a milestone for the Africa & Middle East zone. It may seem anecdotal to some from the outside, but getting the ASLIB, Association des Sommeliers du Liban, to join the ASI College of Postulants is a victory for me! Indeed, for the first time in its long history, ASI welcomes a Middle Eastern country. And this despite all the problems that trouble this region of the world.

This reinforces my goal of establishing sommellerie in countries where the very word "sommelier" is not even part of the vocabulary. This is exactly what I experienced in the 90s when I approached Eastern and Northern European countries to encourage the creation of sommelier associations. With an important advantage these days: in addition to international competitions, the ASI offers exams at various levels and a bootcamp each year on a different continent. These are evaluation and training opportunities for aspiring sommeliers who do not have a hotel school in their country. Lebanon and Morocco have used the ASI Certification exam, adding practical tests, to select their candidates, for example.

So, I was happy and proud to be able to support the representatives of our five associations (Morocco, South Africa, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Lebanon) at the recent contest in Belgrade, while dreaming of the next competition aimed exclusively at Africa and the Middle East, in 2027. While the Israeli application process has been halted due to an extremely complicated situation, the United Arab Emirates, Congo, Nigeria and Kenya should soon be ready to join the College of ASI applicants, Inch'Allah!



A Year of Growth and Excitement for the Americas in Sommellerie

Matias Prezioso, Vice-president Americas

This has been a highly positive year for the Americas. At the Annual General Assembly held in Monaco, Peru joined the ASI community as a country within the "college of applicants", while Ecuador was confirmed as a full member. These developments underscore the growing presence and influence of the Americas within the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI).

Additionally, many countries in the Americas hosted their national competitions this year to select their candidate for the ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas 2025, set to take place in February next year in California, United States. These national contests not only highlight the region's commitment to excellence but also serve to elevate the standards of sommellerie across the continent.

Another exciting piece of news is the extension of invitations to the continental competition to three "wildcard" countries that are not yet members of ASI. This initiative will provide these nations with the opportunity to be represented on an international stage and begin integrating into the ASI community, fostering connections and growth within the global sommelier network.

As we look ahead to 2025, we do so with great enthusiasm. The year will commence with the ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas competition, bringing together countries from across the Americas in a spirited contest for the prestigious continental title. This promises to be an inspiring showcase of talent, skill, and passion, further cementing the importance of the Americas within the world of sommellerie.

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Spotlight on Sonoma:

ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas 2025

With Doug Frost MW, MS and Ana Sofia Oliveira

As anticipation builds for the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas, scheduled to take place from 17-21 February 2025 in Sonoma, California, excitement is palpable among sommeliers, organisers, and sponsors alike. This highly regarded competition not only celebrates excellence in sommellerie across the Americas but also provides invaluable opportunities for networking and showcasing the wine industry's finest.



Ana Sofia Oliveira

"Contests are a real privilege to be with the best of the best sommeliers of a specific region of the world."

– Ana Sofia Oliveira

Ana Sofia Oliveira, ASI Partnerships Manager, emphasises the unparalleled value these contests offer to both participants and partners. "Contests are a real privilege to be with the best of the best sommeliers of a specific region of the world," she explained. "It is also hugely important for our partners to understand how much effort sommeliers put into these contests—the preparation involved, but also all the work developed by the local national association as well as ASI to make all this happen. It is one thing to read about how a contest takes place; it is quite another to be there and feel all the emotions it brings."

Oliveira also highlighted the networking potential for ASI's partners, noting the presence of influential figures in the industry. "ASI Partners support our activities all year long, and these contests are a more real experience and a fantastic opportunity to show their products to the sommeliers, the ASI Board members, as well as the different Committee members, all very influential in their own countries. The fact that so many of our Partners are long-term ones shows that they find it extremely beneficial, and we couldn't feel happier and more satisfied about it."

Regarding the selection of the USA as the host country, ASI President William Wouters remarked, "The US has long been the missing link that would make ASI a truly global community. When Doug Frost and his team created BUSA, that final link in the chain was complete. This marks a great opportunity to celebrate this marriage."

Doug Frost of BUSA (Best USA Sommelier Association) shared insights into the decision to choose California, and specifically Sonoma County, as the location for the contest: "Sonoma County is an ideal setting, with more than 425 wineries across 18 wine regions and 19 AVAs (American Viticultural Areas), and a more diverse group of wines, grapes, and styles than virtually any other American wine region. Visitors will be enthralled by the vineyards and wineries surrounding them."

For BUSA, hosting the competition is also a step towards greater visibility and recognition for sommeliers within the US. "Though the Best USA Sommelier Association has been around since 2018, we are still a very young organisation," Frost explained. "By bringing the competition to the US, we seek to elevate both the great sommeliers in our midst and to show the rest of the country the tremendous skills embodied by other nations' sommeliers."

The USA's hopes of winning the title on home turf lie on the shoulders of US candidate Mark Guillaudeu (see interview, page 9). Frost acknowledged the significance of tailored preparation: "As a Master Sommelier, Mark may be as knowledgeable and skilled as virtually anyone in the field of competitors. Nonetheless, ASI competitions, like all such endeavours, can focus upon certain particular benchmarks, tendencies, and spotlights. We are making sure that Mark studies past competitions



to see where he can improve his own work."

For Frost, ASI competitions serve as a crucial platform for professional growth. "ASI competitions offer the country's top sommeliers an opportunity to measure themselves alongside, and to learn from, the rest of the sommellerie in the Americas. There is no other event in which professionals in the Western Hemisphere can meet on an equal footing and network together."

The competition's international scope also broadens the perspectives of US sommeliers. "The unique opportunity of the ASI is that each country has a chance to manifest its own standards and culture, not only in wine but also in beverage and beverage service," Frost explained. "By hosting this event, we hope to inspire a deeper global perspective of the wine world among US sommeliers."

The competition in Sonoma promises an array of enriching activities for competitors and guests alike. Frost revealed a diverse lineup of masterclasses, including sessions on regenerative organic viticulture, terroirs of California, wines of the Pacific Northwest, and spirits such as Japanese sake and shochu. Additional topics include the



Vinhos Verdes Demarcated Region of Portugal, Rías Baixas, and the Cabernet Collective of Paso Robles, among others.

"Being in close proximity to some of the country's greatest wineries and winemakers, we will bring some of those great minds to the competition to lead seminars, luncheons, and tastings," Frost noted. These events aim to offer an unparalleled educational experience for competitors and attendees alike.

As the countdown begins for the ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas contest in Sonoma, the event stands poised to elevate the profession of sommellerie across the Americas while showcasing the unparalleled beauty and diversity of Sonoma's wine country. Whether through rigorous competition, masterclasses, or networking opportunities, this event promises to leave an indelible mark on the world of wine.



Doug Frost MW, MS

"By hosting this event, we hope to inspire a deeper global perspective of the wine world among US sommeliers."

– Doug Frost MW, MS

Rising Stars of Sommellerie:

The Next Generation Shaping the Future

In the dynamic world of sommellerie, the baton is being passed to a new generation of professionals redefining excellence and innovation in the field. These young sommeliers, many in their 30s or younger, bring fresh perspectives, boundless energy, and an unyielding passion for wine, spirits, and service. Across the globe, they are excelling in traditional sommellerie and exploring new avenues to elevate the profession, making them true rising stars to watch. We have identified 15 young sommeliers shaping the future of sommellerie.



Ryoga Nakamura, Japan

Ryoga, currently the Assistant Head Sommelier at L'OSIER, a three-Michelin-starred French restaurant in Tokyo, is set to move to Denmark to start work at Alchemist, the celebrated restaurant in Copenhagen. Unlike most Japanese sommeliers, Ryoga confidently declares his ambition to one day become the ASI Best Sommelier of the World. He placed third in the most recent Best Sommelier of Japan competition.



Suraj GC, New Zealand

Originally from Nepal, after obtaining permanent residency in New Zealand, Suraj won the title of Best Sommelier of New Zealand. He attended the ASI Bootcamp in Malaysia and is currently Head Sommelier for the Park Hyatt Hotel in Auckland's Wynyard Quarter.



Thi Dung Tram, Vietnam

This year, Tram won the inaugural Best Sommelier of Vietnam competition. She has worked at some of the finest restaurants in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and is currently Sommelier and Restaurant Manager at Chapter Dining in Hanoi's Old Quarter.



Harnil Mathur, India

Harnil Mathur is Head Sommelier at Black Sheep Restaurants (Hong Kong). Born in Gujarat, India, where alcohol is prohibited, Harnil overcame cultural barriers to excel in the wine industry. He became India's youngest Certified Sommelier at 20, achieved the Advanced Sommelier Certification at 24, and is the only Indian to hold the ASI Gold-level Sommelier Diploma. A graduate of the Burgundy School of Business with an MBA in Wine & Spirits Business, he specialises in Burgundy wines. An experienced wine judge and educator, Harnil is currently preparing for the Master Sommelier Certification exams.



Jonathan Gouveia, Denmark

Despite being in his twenties, Jonathan Gouveia has already accomplished a great deal. The former sommelier at Formel B in Copenhagen and now Wine Director of Madklubben, Jonathan won the Nordic Sommelier Championship 2023 and placed fourth in the ASI Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa and the Middle East 2024.



Tomasz Żak, Poland

Żak, sommelier at Warsaw's Kontakt wine bar and bistro, lives by the motto "it's earned, not given." In constant pursuit of perfection, Żak won the title of Best Polish Sommelier 2023 (after placing second in 2022) and represented Poland in the recent ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa and Middle East 2024 ompetition, where he placed fifth.



Kristijan Harjač, Croatia

At only 27, Harjač was the youngest competitor in the recent ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Harjač has earned the ASI Diploma Gold, became a Certified Sommelier through the Court of Master Sommeliers, and won the title of Best Sommelier of Croatia 2023 after placing second in 2022.



Francesco Cosci, Italy

Cosci brings an international perspective to sommellerie, with roots in Italy and experience in the United Kingdom and France. He is currently Head Sommelier at *Restaurant Les Climats* in Paris. Semifinalist ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa and Middle East 2024.



Lukas Wiegman, Netherlands

Wiegman is a sommelier, entrepreneur, and educator. Currently co-owner of NOTK in Rotterdam, he has worked at highly lauded restaurants in Australia, including Dinner by Heston and Attica Restaurant in Melbourne, as well as prestigious dining destinations in Rotterdam. Semifinalist ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa and Middle East 2024.



Jonathan Eichholz, USA

Eichholz boasts numerous accolades, including experience at Michelin-starred establishments such as Aquavit and The Modern. In 2023, he earned the title of Master Sommelier. Career highlights include winning the 2019 Best Young Sommelier in America competition (Chaine des Rotisseurs). He is also a Certified Cicerone, reflecting his expertise in beer as well as wine.



Wallace Neves, Brazil

Wallace Neves is a graduate of the Brazilian Association of Sommeliers Rio de Janeiro section, Sommelier Master Old World Countries and Regions by the Brazilian Association of Sommeliers Rio Grande do Sul Section, and holds an Advanced Wine Certificate by the International Sommelier Guild and WSET Level 3 Award in Wines. He worked previously as Executive Sommelier at the Sheraton Rio Hotel and Resort. He currently lives in Minas Gerais, where he is Head Sommelier for the Bigmais Supermercados and Wine Hunter chain of wine importers in Brazil. He won the title of Best Sommelier in Brazil in 2022.



Camila Cerezo Pawlak, Argentina

Pawlak is a dedicated sommelier with extensive experience in gastronomy and wine service. She has worked for events and top establishments such as Los Galgos, Restó SCA, and Anchoita. Her passion for nature, sustainable practices, and zero-waste concepts, inspired her move to Argentina's far corners. She now manages the service at RUDA Cocina in Gualtallary's renowned wine region, alongside her partner, chef Gastón Trama.



Eneida Fuentes, Mexico

Fuentes is one of the best young sommeliers in Mexico. Known for being a charismatic and humble person, she has nevertheless made her way into the upper echelons of sommellerie. Best known as having been a sommelier at Pujol, Eneida now dedicates her days to advising restaurants, creating wine and beverage programmes, as well as training staff and creating VIP in-home experiences, amongst many other things. Fuentes was recently selected to be a judge for the Concours Mondial de Bruxelles. Eneida can be found traveling between Guadalajara (in central Mexico) and Madrid thanks to her co-ownership of wine bars called Gastón, with locations in both cities.



George Young, South Africa

Young, a sommelier at Vergenoegd Löw Wine Estate in Stellenbosch, was recently declared the winner of the Best Young Sommelier of South Africa 2024. Born and raised in Hoedspruit, Limpopo, he holds WSET Level 3 certification and a diploma from the Cape Wine Academy.



Abdelkrim ElGarrai, Morocco

Abdelkrim ElGarrai is the Restaurants Director and Head Sommelier at Palais Ronsard, Relais & Châteaux, in Marrakech. Growing up as the son of hoteliers, he developed a deep passion for gastronomy and hospitality. With experience at Mandarin Oriental and Royal Mansour, Abdelkrim combines expertise and storytelling to create exceptional dining experiences, showcasing both global and Moroccan viticulture.



FROM MOLDOVA WITH FIZZ: *add a new spark to your winter holidays*

In recent years, Moldova's sparkling wines are capturing the attention of sommeliers and wine enthusiasts worldwide, combining the richness of tradition with innovative winemaking techniques. Although Moldova is renowned for its still wines, local wineries have heavily invested in sparkling wine production, adopting classic winemaking methods that have propelled these wines onto the international stage.



Sparkling wine production in Moldova began several decades ago, but it has only recently begun to gain significant traction in international markets. Over the last 10 years, exports of sparkling wine have almost doubled in value, reflecting a rising global appreciation for Moldovan craftsmanship. Today, 40 local wineries have invested heavily in both classic and modern production methods, placing an emphasis on quality and attention to detail. The *traditionnelle* method, celebrated for its refinement and elegance, is widely practiced by Moldovan wineries, alongside the Marinotti method, which is preferred for fresher, fruitier wines. Through these techniques, Moldova has broadened its portfolio and earned recognition for the quality and variety of its wines.

By harnessing indigenous grape varieties such as Feteasca Albă, Feteasca Regală, Viorica or Floricica, as well as international varieties like Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, local winemakers create sparkling wines that stand out with their complex aromas and a balanced acidity, ideal for special occasions. These wines reveal notes of white fruits, delicate floral undertones, and a distinct freshness that became a hallmark of Moldovan sparkling wine.

Moldovan sparkling wines have achieved significant international recognition. In 2024, at the prestigious Effervescents du Monde competition, Moldova secured 27 medals—17 gold and 10 silver—doubling their previous year medal count. Notably, one Moldovan sparkling wine ranked among the Top 10 Best Sparkling Wines globally, underscoring the country's excellence in winemaking. Over the past five years, esteemed Moldovan wineries such as Cricova, Purcari, Vinaria din Vale, Asconi, and Radacini have been recognized among the top 10 sparkling wines at Effervescents du Monde. A standout achievement in 2024 was Radacini's Métier Brut Nature being awarded the prestigious title of World's Best Cabernet at the Concours International des Cabernets in Anse, France.

This accolade further solidifies Moldova's reputation as a producer of high-quality sparkling wines capable of competing on the global stage. Sparkling wines bring a unique elegance and versatility to holiday celebrations, pairing beautifully from appetizers to dessert. This season, elevate your wine list and surprise your guests with the unexpected brilliance of Moldovan sparkling wines—perfect for making any holiday gathering unforgettable.

Make Me a Match

Holiday Memories with the ASI Marketing Team

The holiday season is a time to reflect, to gather, and to indulge in the cherished traditions that bring us together. For ASI's Marketing Committee, this time of year holds a special place in their hearts—not just for the exceptional food and wine but for the memories these moments create. We reached out to the team to share their fondest holiday food and drink memories, uncovering stories that range from Kazakh New Year celebrations to intimate French-Portuguese feasts, and everything in between. Through these tales, we celebrate the diversity of holiday traditions and the universal joy of raising a glass with those we hold dear.

MAKE ME A MATCH!

Holiday Memories with the ASI Marketing Team



At Home for the Holidays with Nina Basset

ASI Marketing Committee Co-ordinator

"Having spent a lifetime in hospitality, working on the lead-up to the festivities and on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Eve for more years than I can remember, finally, having sold my last hotel in 2020, I was excited by the prospect of celebrating Christmas actually on the day, and not a week later when a day off was finally available.

Thus, for the past few years, Christmas has become a very special occasion at home, with family and friends filling the house with laughter and bonhomie. Whilst the tradition is to eat turkey, I don't like it, so we start with seafood. Living on the East Coast of the UK, we have an abundance of delicious fish and seafood to choose from. Then we have beef Wellington instead of turkey, complete with a table laden with fresh winter vegetables and the obligatory Christmas pudding, which I think is delicious and very liberally flambéed in brandy.

We raid the cellar and choose to drink some of Gerard's nicest bottles—he would approve of us doing so, believing that great wines need to be shared with friends on any occasion, but especially on special days.

So, this year it will be a selection including Pol Roger Champagne, a Basset Christmas tradition, always served with smoked salmon and scrambled eggs at breakfast time. Then whites from Burgundy, a mix of New World reds and hearty Bordeaux, a sticky wine with the blue cheese, and a deliciously rich and unctuous Jerez or Madeira with the Christmas pudding. Then, a brisk dog walk in the fresh air to walk it all off!"



Ring in the New Year Kazakh-Style

With Xeniya Volosnikova, ASI Marketing & Communication

"New Year is the biggest holiday in Kazakhstan! Usually, the whole family comes together for a hearty meal on New Year's Eve. For me, it is plov (also known as palau or pilaf in Central Asia) that immediately brings back memories of a festive family gathering.

Plov is traditionally made with Basmati rice and lamb but can be substituted with beef or chicken. I often call it a Kazakh paella. The spices in plov—ground cumin, coriander seeds, a pinch of saffron—create this amazing aroma and taste profile that can't be confused with anything else. In some recipes, you can also add chickpeas or barberries.

Most people would go for a red wine pairing, but I personally always advise pairing plov with a Riesling from Arba Winery (a local winery near Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan). I'd even go for their Reserve Riesling, which spends some time in acacia wood and is also made from riper grapes. The wine has full body, great length, and complexity that balance perfectly with the rich and aromatic plov! Happy holidays!"

Memories of Nanny

With Mark DeWolf, ASI Content Manager, Editor

"If I think of my earliest memories of the holiday season, it is of time spent at my maternal grandmother's (we called her Nanny) home in the tiny hamlet of Merigomish, Nova Scotia. Merigomish is hardly even a hamlet. It's more of a small, random collection of rustic homes sitting halfway between nowhere and no place.

New Year's Eve was spent playing board games in the kitchen with aromas of pinewood smoke filling the room, and the warmth of the wood oven keeping us snug despite the howling winds outside. On the same stove that warmed the house, there was invariably a boiled dinner. I'd be lying if I said the fond memories of stringy beef and waterlogged boiled vegetables offered the same nostalgia as the aromas of the fire.

While I can leave the memories of boiled dinner behind me, Merigomish has never really left my holiday celebrations. Those calm waters are also home to some of the most succulent oysters in the world. Now, New Year's Eve is thankfully devoid of chewy beef and filled with glasses of local Brut sparkling wine paired with the meaty, saline-rich flavours of Merigomish oysters."



Remembering an Exceptional Feast

With Michèle Aström Chantôme, ASI Vice-president Middle East & Africa, Marketing Committee Translator

"As a general rule, I don't really appreciate carillon festivities. Partying because you have to party is a concept I've never been keen on. I prefer to celebrate when and where I choose! Except Christmas for the kids... That's a must.

But for New Year's Eve (31st December), when you don't feel guilty about indulging in exceptional food and drinks with friends, it's a different matter.

I fondly remember a New Year's Eve in Stockholm with my Swedish "family," Ia and Per Montan, in the '90s. After a magnum of Dom Ruinart as an aperitif, we tasted löjrom, the Swedish caviar (bleak roe), of incomparable finesse, with my favourite Norwegian aquavit, Linie, as well as a magnificent gravadlax. Then, a terrine of foie gras mi-cuit, which I had prepared by Jean-Claude Ferrero in Paris, complemented by a complex Phélan-Ségur.

I'm not even going to mention the cheeses by Hervé Mons and the wonderful desserts that rounded off this exceptional meal... Just a special mention for the Romeo y Julieta, Cedros n°3, with a Hennessy XO... And, of course, the exceptional atmosphere in the beautiful Gustavian décor of this Stockholm apartment with close friends in total communion and in a positive frame of mind to attack the New Year. How could it be otherwise after all these delights?"





Embrace a French Sense of Indulgence

With Ana Sofia Oliveira, ASI Partnership Manager

"I was born in Paris to Portuguese parents, so our family traditions were an intriguing blend of influences from both countries. That said, I must admit the French customs tended to dominate, particularly during Christmas and New Year's celebrations. New Year's Eve at home was never a grand affair. With no extended family in France, it was just my parents, my brother, and me—quiet and intimate rather than festive. In contrast, Christmas Eve left a much stronger impression on me, especially when it came to food.

Portuguese Christmas traditions often centre around humble dishes, referred to as 'poor food,' while the French revel in indulgent, luxurious fare. Our family embraced the French approach during Christmas Eve. The table would be adorned with oysters (which I disliked as a child but have grown to love), smoked salmon, blinis, and foie gras, naturally paired with a glass of Sauternes.

For dessert, my mother brought a touch of her Portuguese heritage with filhoses, delicious fried pumpkin pastries traditional to her region. Thankfully, she spared us the classic Portuguese main dish of boiled codfish and cabbage, which, while beloved in Portugal, was never a feature of our festive table!"



Mexican Holiday Traditions

With Manuel Negrete, Marketing Committee Translator

During the New Year's Eve season, it is very common for families in Mexico to enjoy a series of iconic dishes such as stuffed turkey, baked pork loin, bacalao a la vizcaína or even romeritos con mole (a dish made with amaranth sprouts and the famous mole from Puebla).

There is a strong tradition of serving beer at holiday occasions. One of the most anticipated seasonal beers in Mexico is Nochebuena (which translates to Christmas Eve). Nochebuena is a Bock style beer that is especially enjoyable given it is only available for a few weeks a year, adding to it a sense of nostalgia and longing, along with its rich toasty flavours and long finish.

Another popular custom is to celebrate with cider. Given the strong heritage of Spanish customs, Mexicans have long favoured cider during the holidays. In Mexico we have some very high-quality ciders produced in Puebla. They are known for their light sweetness, tremendous aroma and freshness, and low alcohol content. They are frequently served at many holiday meals such as Christmas and New Year's Eve. In my family, during the holidays, we use apples to make a simple but delicious dessert: apple salad. The recipe consists of combining diced yellow apple, pineapple in syrup, pecans and red cherries, with cream, condensed milk and syrup. This, with a glass of cava or prosecco, is a delightful way to end a holiday dinner, and signal time to gather around the table to play a board game or open gifts.

Celebrating Germany at Christmas

**With Barbara 'Babsi' Wanner,
ASI Press Secretary**

"Germany has many beautiful Christmas traditions: festively decorated cities, Christmas markets with (unfortunately not always good) mulled wine, and, if we're particularly lucky, a dusting of snow. I love this particularly cozy time of year and look forward to spending some peaceful hours with my family and dear friends.

Germany's culinary Christmas traditions vary significantly from region to region. Living very close to the French border allows me to enrich my Christmas celebrations with Alsatian delicacies, particularly good French cheese.

In our family, we start in the early evening with my mother's Christmas biscuits—definitely the best in the world—and this year, with one of the most remarkable Sekt wines in Germany, the Karthäuserhof Brut from Mathieu Kauffmann. It's delightful.

The first thing to be served is always a delicious lamb's lettuce with walnuts, pomegranate, and an extraordinary vinaigrette. This is followed by braised game, deer or venison goulash with lots of spaetzle and winter vegetables, for which we prefer to uncork two red wines: Häusleboden Pinot Noir from Dr. Heger and a mature Barolo Le Vigne from my good, unfortunately deceased friend Luciano Sandrone.

A fresh dessert concludes the meal. This year I have decided on almond pavlova with citrus fruit salad. I am sure I will find another amazing bottle in my cellar. It doesn't always have to be Riesling, but it could well be the case.

The best Christmas moment is after dinner at our large dining table. There is chatting and laughing, glasses clink, and there might be further plundering of the cellar."





Stölzle Lausitz
Born in Fire



At the beginning of the year 2024, Stölzle Lausitz became the official glass partner of the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale.

For over a century, Stölzle Lausitz has been one of the world's leading manufacturers of high-quality, lead-free crystal drinking glasses. The company's story began in 1889 in Weißwasser, Germany in the heart of the Lusatia region. Since then, the company has preserved the art of glass production, continuously refining techniques from mouth-blown to advanced machine production, through generations. Their diverse product ranges includes stemware, tumblers, decanters, jugs, and carafes, tailored to meet the needs of hospitality and retail customers. The hallmark of Stölzle Lausitz is its stem glasses, crafted with stems drawn to the highest perfection. These glasses, which appear mouth-blown, feature no seam lines or tangible transitions. With 135 years of experience, dedication, and attention to detail, Stölzle Lausitz creates glasses of the highest precision, quality, and timeless elegance. This unwavering commitment to superior quality has made their products the favorites of sommeliers, gastronomy, hotels, chefs, connoisseurs and the beverage industries in more than 120 countries.

The ASI as well as Stölzle Lausitz are proud to embark on this partnership, aiming to share their expertise in high-quality glassware with the global sommelier community. The precise

craftsmanship and elegant design of the glasses are intended to enhance the full potential of wines, elevating the tasting experience to new heights.

A key aspect of the partnership is the focus on educational programs and training initiatives. To support the development of sommeliers, a series of workshops, seminars and training sessions will be held throughout the year.

One notable event was the Bootcamp in September which took place in the enchanting city of Sevilla, Spain. This intensive three-day program featured masterclasses, workshops and tastings, delivering top-tier education to sommeliers from around the world. Among the highlights was a masterclass by Christina Hilker – awarded as Germany's Best Sommelier and a representative at the ASI European Championships. Titled "Stölzle Lausitz Wine Glasses - A Sensory Journey through Form, Function, and Indulgence," she explored how the right glass can transform a wine tasting, revealing hidden aromas and accentuating every nuance of the wine.

Another significant event was the Best Sommelier of Europe, Middle East and Africa competition, in Belgrade, Serbia in November. The tasting experience at this

prestigious gathering was enhanced by Stölzle Lausitz glasses, especially with the Q1 and Quatrophil series, creating unforgettable moments in the world of wine and sommellerie.

Leopold Grupp, CEO of Stölzle Lausitz, is delighted about this long term-partnership: "We are extremely proud to collaborate with the ASI. This partnership gives us the opportunity to share our passion for high quality glasses with a global community of sommeliers. Our glasses stand for high quality and precision which perfectly match the ASI's standards of excellence."

Stölzle Lausitz glasses not only enhance the exceptional taste of wines from around the world but also elevate the entire wine-drinking experience. Together with the ASI, the passion for wine and craftsmanship blend seamlessly in perfect harmony.



stoezle-lausitz.com

Member Association Spotlight



A Decade of Growth and Vision: Spotlight on the South Africa Sommelier Association (SASA)

The South African Sommelier Association (SASA) has come a long way since its inception in 2010. As the brainchild of a group of passionate sommeliers from diverse backgrounds, SASA aimed to establish a professional community for sommeliers while riding the wave of an anticipated hospitality boom in South Africa. Today, under the leadership of **Spencer Fondaumiere** and a committed team of volunteers, SASA continues to evolve, uplifting the profession and creating meaningful opportunities for its members.



"SASA was started by a group of like-minded sommeliers in South Africa, including the current Head of Bylaws and Ethics, Higgo Jacobs," Fondaumiere explains. The initial vision was ambitious: to capitalise on the momentum of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and develop a robust hospitality sector that embraced sommellerie. However, when the anticipated economic boom did not fully materialise, SASA recalibrated its focus. **Recognising the need for local talent, SASA affiliated with the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI) and began developing its own certifications.** In 2014, Fondaumiere became the first SASA-certified sommelier. "Since then, we've developed several certifications and certified hundreds of students at different levels," he notes. **Today, SASA's vision extends beyond promoting sommellerie to tackling South Africa's high unemployment rate by equipping individuals with skills that lead to employment in both local and international markets.**

One of the key milestones shaping SASA's trajectory has been joining the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI). Fondaumiere highlights this affiliation as pivotal. "It allowed us to plug into the global sommelier community," he says. He also points to the association's contests and ASI Bootcamps as offering participants unparalleled cultural immersion and professional growth. "You can take someone without formal qualifications on a journey that opens up the world to them and gives them a respectable profession," he asserts. This connection between SASA and ASI has paved the way for South African sommeliers to compete on the world stage, with notable achievements such as **Wikus Human** becoming the first African Master Sommelier and **Jo Wessels** placing in the top ten at the 2023 ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the World, held in Africa.



Spencer Fondaumiere

The development of certification courses also stands out. SASA's partnership with the Sommeliers Academy, led by ASI Education Committee member **Jean-Vincent Ridon**, has provided a unique training platform on the continent. **"The Academy trains many aspiring sommeliers, offering a structured pathway to professional development,"** Fondaumiere adds. SASA's three-tier certification system is designed to nurture talent at all levels. The introductory course introduces participants to the basics of wine and service, serving as the "widest part of the funnel". "It's a very accessible course and has already attracted over 100 participants," says Fondaumiere. The Junior Sommelier certification follows, focusing on practical skills and global wine knowledge with a South African emphasis. For advanced sommeliers, SASA collaborates with ASI to offer world-class certifications, including the ASI Diploma. **"We discontinued our SASA sommelier certification in favour of the ASI product because it's an elegant, global standard,"** Fondaumiere explains. Beyond certifications, SASA connects members with job opportunities, mentorship programmes, and potential international work exchanges.

"You can take someone without formal qualifications on a journey that opens up the world to them and gives them a respectable profession."



Jo Wessels

Despite the progress, Fondaumiere acknowledges that South Africa presents a unique environment for sommellerie. "We have very few career sommeliers who spend their entire working lives on the floor," he notes. Additionally, the country's wine expertise tends to focus heavily on South African wines, which constitute less than 5 per cent of global production. This limited exposure can be a challenge for sommeliers seeking broader knowledge. However, these challenges bring opportunities.

"Our vibrant hospitality industry relies heavily on South African wines, and we are creating experts in this field," Fondaumiere points out. By elevating service standards, SASA aims to enhance the guest experience. "When a tourist is served wine at the right temperature, in the right glassware, by a knowledgeable professional, everyone benefits – the establishment, the winery, and the sommelier," he explains.

As the continent's leading sommelier association, SASA embraces its responsibility to support emerging organisations across Africa. "We're like the big brother that's been there before," Fondaumiere says. Jean-Vincent Ridon's efforts in establishing associations in Zimbabwe, Congo, and Kenya exemplify this mentorship. "We share our experience and guide others through the steps to become recognised by ASI."

Looking forward, Fondaumiere suggests success isn't just about numbers. "It's about the impact on people's lives," he emphasises. SASA members have gone on to transform their careers, becoming ambassadors for the organisation and inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. "When people see their peers excelling, travelling, and growing, they are inspired to do the same. That is success."

With a decade of accomplishments and a clear vision for the future, SASA continues to uplift the profession of sommellerie in South Africa and beyond, creating a ripple effect that benefits individuals, industries, and communities alike.



Regional Correspondent Reports

El Sabor del Éxito

ASI Magazine Regional Correspondent, Maria Demidovich, Spain

In 2022, Cultura Líquida published Gérard Basset's book *Tasting Victory* in Spanish, the second most spoken language in the world.

Over the past decade, the profession of sommelier has gained significant recognition in Spain. Today, many young people see it as an opportunity to pursue a successful career. However, what are the strategies for achieving success in such a competitive and demanding field?

This question is crucial, and Gérard Basset's autobiography, written shortly before his death, offers valuable insights into the importance of setting goals for success. It reminds us that, no matter the challenges we face, we have the capacity to overcome them.

I recently had the opportunity to ask **Pedro Ruiz Aragonese**, president of Fundación Cultura Líquida and CEO of Alma Carraovejas, about the impact of the first Spanish edition, *El Sabor del Éxito*, translated by **Raquel Senra Fernández**, on Spanish readers. Here's what he shared:

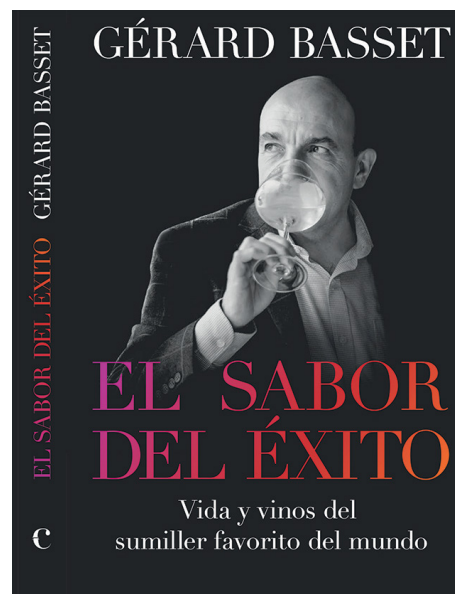
*"We decided to publish a Spanish edition of *Tasting Victory* because our publishing house, Cultura Líquida, is firmly committed to presenting works that tell compelling*

stories about wine, viticulture, climate, territories, and wine professionals. Translating this special book into Spanish was absolutely essential.

"We believe in the importance of a wine culture, but also that wine itself is a culture—a bridge connecting people and places. Gerard Basset's life and work are not only a source of inspiration for sommeliers but also for wine lovers in general. Therefore, having the opportunity to enjoy it in Spanish, our language, was crucial!"

What is the potential contribution of this book to aspiring sommeliers? Gérard Basset was one of the few individuals in this sector who exemplified the perfect combination of qualities such as nonconformity, curiosity, restlessness, and tenacity. This aligns perfectly with our philosophy, and we believe that contributing our grain of sand to ensure present and future generations can enjoy this book in Spanish is the best tribute we can pay him.

The prologue to the Spanish edition of *Tasting Victory* is written by **Ferran Centelles**,



a Spanish contributor to **Jancis Robinson**, and a renowned sommelier who worked for over a decade at El Bulli restaurant. Ferran encourages us to "read, underline, and enjoy the following pages, as they are brimming with advice, teachings, and reflections."

Gerard Basset was always driven by the desire to learn more, and his final book continues to inspire us and "make us want to be better sommeliers."



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent
Maria Demidovich (Spain)

ReadyToWrite

Against All Odds: Founding ASLIB and Elevating Lebanon's Sommeliers to the Global Stage

ASI Magazine Regional Correspondent,
Joseph Mounayer, Middle East

In a country overshadowed by political turmoil, economic hardship, and the scars of war, wine may seem an unlikely symbol of hope. Yet, it was this passion for the vine that drove me to establish the Association des Sommeliers du Liban (ASLIB). Against all odds, ASLIB became a beacon for sommeliers in Lebanon, elevating our talent to international heights, including selecting a Lebanese representative for the ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa, and the Middle East competition. This is a story of resilience, community, and the belief that wine can unite, inspire, and elevate, even in the hardest of times.

The Spark: A Question That Changed Everything

The idea for ASLIB began with a simple question. While dining at a fine restaurant in Lebanon, my 9-year-old son, Oliver, observed the staff struggling with wine service and asked, "Why don't you help these waiters become better at wine etiquette, like you do in Sweden?" His words struck a chord. Lebanon, with its proud winemaking history, deserved sommeliers who could reflect that heritage globally. His question sparked ASLIB—a platform to raise service standards and honour Lebanon's wine culture.

Building ASLIB: Turning Vision into Reality

As founder and president of ASLIB, I, Joseph Mounayer, reflect on our journey—filled with challenges but supported by remarkable individuals. **Michèle Aström Chantôme** offered invaluable guidance, while **Nadim Khoury** of Muse du Liban provided resources and belief in our mission. Deputy Speaker **Elias Bou Saab** lent credibility and united the community, showcasing Lebanon's rich cultural heritage. Special thanks also go to Dhour Shweir's mayor, **Habib Moujaes**, whose support provided stunning venues for our events.

A key milestone was launching a certification programme for sommeliers, culminating in the Best Sommelier of Lebanon competition. Joseph Haddad won, but personal reasons prevented him from representing Lebanon internationally, so runner-up Sylvana Haddad proudly showcased Lebanese talent on the global stage.

Special gratitude goes to **Giuseppe Vaccarini**, ASLIB's "godfather," and **Jean Vincent Ridon**, Best Sommelier of South Africa, for their invaluable contributions. We also thank Dhour Shweir's municipality



for hosting our three-day event, which welcomed 21 wineries and over 11,000 guests.

Looking to the Future

ASLIB has become a movement, offering Lebanese sommeliers a platform to thrive and network. Our next competition in July aims to exceed previous successes, with ambitious goals to expand education, create opportunities, and strengthen Lebanon's global wine reputation.

Wine, like life, thrives under pressure. Just as Lebanon's vines endure harsh conditions to produce beautiful grapes, so too have our sommeliers risen to the occasion, proving that excellence knows no borders, even in adversity.



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent
Joseph Mounayer (Middle East)

ReadyToWrite



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Member News

Mikk Parre Wins Coveted ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa and Middle East Title

Mikk Parre of Estonia has claimed the prestigious title of ASI Best Sommelier Europe, Africa, and the Middle East 2024 in Belgrade, Serbia. Competing at the pinnacle of sommellerie, Parre triumphed over Pascaline Lepeltier of France and Martynas Pravilonis of Lithuania in a captivating final. Contestants faced a series of rigorous challenges, showcasing advanced tasting abilities, technical expertise, and exceptional service skills under pressure.

With over a decade of experience as a sommelier and restaurant manager, Parre is no stranger to accolades. Twice named “Best Sommelier of Estonia” in 2022 and 2023, he also secured the title of “Best Sommelier of the Baltics” in 2022. This latest achievement cements his status among the profession’s elite.

The competition welcomed 41 participants from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, demonstrating the highest standards of wine knowledge and service. ASI President William Wouters praised Parre’s excellence, integrity, and passion, expressing confidence in his ability to represent the global sommelier community. Parre’s win follows Latvia’s Raimonds Tomsons’ triumph at the ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2023 contest, further solidifying the Baltic region’s prominence in the global sommellerie arena.



Rafael Alexander Sánchez Named Best Sommelier of the Dominican Republic 2024

Rafael Alexander Sánchez has been crowned Best Sommelier of the Dominican Republic after triumphing in the final of the 2024 National Sommelier Competition. Held on October 1 at the Catalonia Hotel as part of the Santo Domingo 2024 Gastronomic Expo, the event celebrated the third edition of this prestigious contest.

Sánchez emerged victorious over **Yerika Fernández**, who secured second place, and **Juan Paredes**, who finished third. The competition, held between August and September, featured rigorous theoretical and practical tests designed to assess the participants’ knowledge and technical skills. Seventeen professionals reached the finals following challenging preliminary stages.



Currently a Wine Educator at El Catador, Sánchez has over a decade of experience in the hospitality industry. As the winner, he will represent the Dominican Republic at the Best Sommelier of the Americas Competition in California in 2025 and the World Sommelier Competition in Portugal in 2026.

Organised by the Dominican Sommelier Association, a member of the International Sommelier Association, the event highlights the Dominican Republic's growing presence in the world of wine and hospitality. Sánchez's victory is a significant milestone in the nation's culinary and sommelier journey.



Martin Parýzek (middle) wins consecutive Best Sommelier of Czech Republic titles

Martin Parýzek Crowned Best Sommelier in the Czech Republic

Martin Parýzek, a representative of Californian Wines, has secured his second victory at the BOHEMIA SEKT Trophée Czech Republic Sommelier Championship. This win brings Parýzek closer to the elite "hat trick" status achieved by only a few in the competition's history.

"This year's competition was exceptionally demanding, especially the knowledge test, which was the toughest I've encountered in my time at BOHEMIA SEKT TROPHÉE," Parýzek remarked. "Defending the title is far more challenging than winning it the first time. A sommelier must prepare year-round and train intensively in the months leading up to the contest."

The competition's runner-up was **Natálie Válková** of Vinařství Válka, while **Tomáš Hanel** of The Eatery claimed third place. Sixteen competitors, faced a series of tasks such as a knowledge test, blind tastings of wines and spirits, and red and sparkling wine service paired with suitable dish recommendations.

The event culminated in a grand finale at the New Stage of the National Theatre before an audience of 300 guests. "Each year, the quality of competitors improves, raising the bar for the sommelier profession," said Ivo Dvořák, President of the Czech Sommelier Association, who chaired an expert jury featuring prominent industry figures.



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