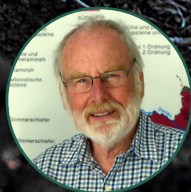


# ASI MAGAZINE THE SOIL ISSUE

APRIL 2023  
ISSUE #8



**DR. ALEX MALTMAN, JOHN SZABO MS,  
ALICE FEIRING**  
From soil to glass?



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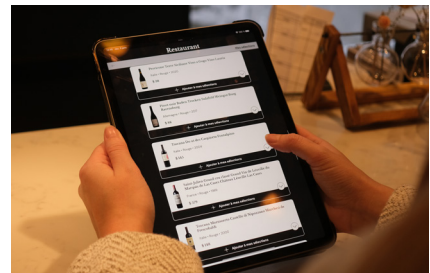
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# Welcome!



*William Wouters,  
President ASI*

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

Climate change is upon us, and evolutions in the way we make wine never stop, but there is a constant. It's the soil. As Alice Feiring, one of our guest editors of this edition - along with geologist Dr. Alex Maltman and John Szabo MS - so eloquently reminds us, it is the consistent variable. The wine world went through decades of manipulation and adulteration. While those vestiges of 'science over nature' thinking still linger, I am happy to say the vast majority of high-quality wine production is moving back to more natural processes, both in the vineyard and in the cellar. It should come as little surprise that sommeliers have embraced this, incorporating more and more sustainable, biodynamic, and natural wines onto their wine lists.

**"Terroir can be influenced through farming, climate and man's involvement. However, the bedrock is the one constant that cannot be denied. It is the wine's 'control.'"**

*- Alice Feiring*

With the rising consciousness of nature's role in the wines we serve and enjoy, we are speaking more and more about soil. Some sommeliers even identify soil on their wine list and a select few even organising their list by it. The question becomes how, and how much does soil contribute to the character of a wine? We all know and love many wine regions that have staked their reputation on their soils. Have we given soil too big a voice in these regions? Perhaps not enough? Are we assigning the right attributes to a wine's organoleptic character as a result of what happens beneath the ground? Should we be focusing more attention on what's happening above the ground? Soil after all isn't just nourishing the vines, but all the flora and fauna that cohabitates

with them. How does this play into the equation? In this edition, in addition to our guest editors, we've asked sommeliers such as Reeze Choi from China, Romain Iltis of France and Heather Rankin of Canada to share their views on the connection of soil to what's in the glass. We've asked others to share their 'Love of Dirt' by identifying wines they love and the soil those wines were grown in.

For all the talk of soil's influence, do we not need to also talk about the roots that transmit the nutrients and perhaps ultimately responsible for what's in the glass? Can there be a discernable influence of soil if the grapes aren't grown organically or biodynamically? Can they emit the true language of the land if the vines are not own-rooted? We interviewed Francisco Figueiredo of Adega Regional de Colares and Liber Pater's Loïc Pasquet, the latter whose strong views on own-rooted vines are both fascinating and polarising about this subject.

This is an edition that we believe will inspire thought, even debate. As Joseph Joubert, the French author, says *"it is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it."*



William Wouters, President ASI



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# Guest Editors

DR. ALEX MALTMAN, JOHN SZABO MS,  
ALICE FEIRING

# From SOIL to GLASS?

The role soil plays in the final character of a wine is an increasingly embraced and debated topic. Chablis' 'Kimmeridgian' soil, Napa's Rutherford dust, Coonawarra's Terra Rossa, the volcanic soil of Italy's Mt. Etna, and Jerez's Albariza are just a few of the soils that have inspired a connection between a wine's character and the very ground upon which the vines responsible for nourishing the grapes used to make the wine were grown. There is little debate that 'somewhereness' exists, but how much a factor a vineyard's geology is responsible for it may be questioned.

Has soil been given too much credit? Or not enough? Perhaps we've been looking too much below the ground and not enough above the ground. How much does fungi, bacteria, or even soil residue on grape skins play in a wine's character? A question for another day. The question at hand about soil's influence has never been so relevant as sommeliers across the globe have come to embrace soil, often weaving it into their descriptions and commentary of a wine.

A DISCUSSION WITH...

Dr. Alex Maltman, John Szabo Ms and Alice Feiring



**Alice Feiring**, the noted American wine writer, author of *The Dirty Guide to Wine* which begs readers to connect a wine to its source, the very ground from which it grows. Of the trend, Feiring suggests the value of organising a wine list by soil isn't necessarily how much it tells the consumer about the wine, but the questions that arise from it. As she says of the concept "why not? Whether or not it will inform about the taste, it orients the drinker to a wine of place, instead of a grape and encourages questions and curiosity. And whether the sommelier can identify a subsoil, as was asked in the recent ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest it again assists in pushing the somm to think of wines as from living plants from a place."

It is a sentiment shared by Canadian **John Szabo MS**, who says "if there is a competent, well-trained staff on hand to guide customers, it can certainly be a useful way to approach listing wines, one that will generate curiosity, engender conversation, and encourage people

to think a little differently about wine and to try something different. But I think it only works in an intimate environment where the exchange between server, sommelier and customer is expected, and where diners come for an experience, not to simply eat and drink. Wine is already complex enough as it is with so many regions, grape varieties, producers, and vintages. Throwing out soil type on top of it all, at a customer who simply wants a nice glass of white, is counterproductive and will almost certainly discourage consumption. But for someone open-minded, who's at an establishment for an experience and can be guided by a well-trained server, sommelier, a journey through the wine world viewed via the lens of soil type can be a fascinating and memorable encounter, one that may just bring them back for another round."

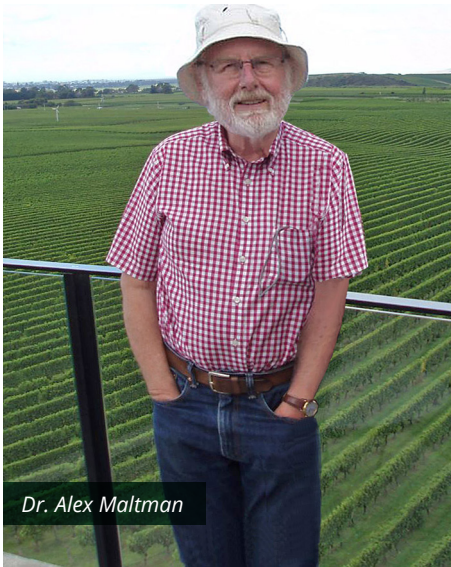
To the contrary, **Dr. Alex Maltman**, a world-renowned geologist says: "I think the trend has gone too far. Vineyard rocks and soils are certainly part of the picture, influencing choice of vine rootstock, cultivation methodology, water management, etcetera. However, the trend you mention is of the soil being important, even paramount, for the taste of the finished wine.

I absolutely get the attractiveness and usefulness of this idea and I dearly wish I could go along with it, but unfortunately it troubles me. The assertions never say how it comes about, and our scientific knowledge of how soil and vines interact makes it hard to see how it could happen, at least to the extent said."

For a final thought on the connectivity between wine, soil, and nature itself we've asked Alice Feiring, the noted American wine writer, creator of The Feiring Line, the world's first independent natural wine newsletter, a passionate protector of the authenticity and diversity of wine, for her thoughts.

In this edition of ASI Magazine, we explore the role soil plays in the character of the wines we cherish. Leading are Dr. Alex Maltman who in addition to being a notable geologist is a wine lover and author of many articles that seek to expose the misconceptions and misunderstandings of soil's role in the character of a wine. John Szabo MS is, along with Véronique Rivest, Canada's best-known sommelier and the author of *Volcanic Wines: Salt, Grit and Power*, which has earned critical acclaim including the André Simon award for best drinks book.





Dr. Alex Maltman

**“The roots are incapable of absorbing solids, and the geological rocks and minerals such as the ones sommeliers like to talk about, such as granite, schist, quartz, flint and so on, which are solids and virtually insoluble. The vine simply can’t absorb them.”**

– Dr. Alex Maltman

**ASI to Dr. Alex Maltman (AM):** As a geologist and scientist, you (Dr. Maltman) have clearly articulated in your research the impossibility for soil rocks and minerals to be absorbed by vines, let alone to the grapes, and finally through the fermentation process and into the bottle. Please explain.

**AM:** The vine roots take in soil pore-water and things dissolved in it, in particular the fourteen or so chemical elements (nutrients) – potassium, calcium, magnesium, etcetera, that are required for the vine to grow. The roots are incapable of absorbing solids, and the geological rocks and minerals such as the ones sommeliers like to talk about, such as granite, schist, quartz, flint and so on, which are solids and virtually insoluble. The vine simply can’t absorb them. (Of the connectivity between soil and taste), when such claims have been subjected to truly blind taste-tests they simply haven’t held up. Belief, no matter how passionate, doesn’t count as evidence. I’m afraid the idea is overhyped.

**ASI to John Szabo:** Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Maltman?

**John Szabo (JS):** Yes and no. Rocks are composed of minerals. When rocks weather, their mineral constituents become part of the soil composition. Mineral ions (positively or negatively charged atoms or groups of atoms), soluble in the water that soil contains, then become available to the root system of plants to absorb and uptake. Without essential minerals in the soil, like calcium, magnesium, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur, aka the macronutrients, as well as a host of additional micronutrients (and the water in which they can dissolve), a plant won’t grow. So, grapevines necessarily absorb minerals and distribute them throughout the plant where needed.

The real question is, do these minerals (organic and inorganic) directly affect a wine’s aroma, flavour and texture? Proving any direct relationship between soil mineral content and wine aroma/flavour is fraught with complications, not least of which is the complex transformation from fresh grapes to wine, and (as stated in the original question) the multiple processes involved, like settling, fermentation, malolactic conversion, precipitation, and various possible additions, etc., which alter the original composition of the grapes themselves. Though it’s quite easy to show that different soils produce wines with different chemical signatures, different aromatic precursors, and polyphenolic profiles, it’s hardly a stretch to say that different soils produce wines with differing compositions. And from there, it’s another short step to say different soils yield wines with differing aromatic and textural profiles, given their differing compositions. A planet-full of anecdotal (tasting) evidence establishes this fact. But exactly which minerals, how they interact with other (organic) molecules and what specific direct and/or indirect impact they have on wine sensory characteristics is, at this stage of understanding, impossible to say (as far as I know).

It’s worth remembering that most inorganic minerals on their own have no smell or taste – they are inert (sulfur is the main notable exception), so cannot have a direct impact on wine aroma, taste. Your wine can’t smell or taste like slate or basalt because these rocks (agglomerated minerals), have no smell and taste on their own.

**ASI to Alex Maltman:** You’ve been quoted as saying “the presence of these nutrients in wine can indirectly affect a range of chemical reactions and thereby



influence our taste perceptions. But these are complex and circuitous effects, a long way from vineyard geology dominating wine." Does this mean soil can have an impact on flavour, albeit small, and the point should be not to dismiss soil, but not overplay its importance on the final character?

**AM:** Exactly so. The geology of a vineyard soil governs its structure, water properties, thermal behaviour, etc. and hence can influence the development of flavour precursors in the ripening grapes. Vinification then transforms these into the compounds that give wine its flavour. So, yes, in such indirect ways geology can have some influence on the final wine. But this is a very long way from the claims of the current trend: "Soil, not grapes, is the latest must-know when picking a wine", that kind of thing.

**ASI to John Szabo:** A similar question to you John, but more specifically when looking at the connectivity of soil to flavour. Is the relationship between soil composition and wine taste profile only part of the equation? Are



John Szabo MS

there other impacts of soil, such as the soils impact on concentration, acid levels or even other chemical processes at play that lead to flavour perception?

**JS:** I'd argue that other aspects of soil, other than mineral make-up, have a much greater impact on a wine's sensory characteristics. Chief among them is a soil's capacity to hold moisture. Water availability is directly linked to berry composition and concentration of compounds within, which in turn directly impact aspects like wine colour (concentration of anthocyanins in red wine), and texture (concentration of tannin).

Acidity and pH can also be directly affected by soil composition. A prime example are soils rich in potassium, like the volcanic soils in Lake County, California. Since potassium is what's called an acid buffer, and its abundance in soils translates to an abundance in grape must and eventually wine, winemakers have a hell of a time trying to make pH adjustments (lower the pH to a level at which a wine would be more stable and less prone to bacterial attacks). Buffers like potassium resist (neutralise) a change of pH after an acid addition, making it near impossible to lower pH (without dumping in tons of tartaric acid, which is not advisable).

A counter example can be found in Santorini, Greece, where soils are also derived from parent volcanic material, but in this case practically devoid of potassium. There, wines from this warm, dry Mediterranean climate, with finished alcohols of 14 per cent plus, show improbably low pH, sometimes under 3, the sort of level one would expect from a Mosel Riesling.

These are textural, mouthfeel aspects, not related to flavour, but for me, a wine's texture has a much more direct and concrete relationship to vineyard soils than its aromas, flavours. Those are more

closely linked to grape variety and climate, weather.

**ASI to Alex Maltman:** Do you agree there are other important determinants of the final character, 'terroirness', of a wine?

**AM:** The great value of the terroir concept is that it brings together in one word all the multifarious factors that give distinction to a site and potentially to its products. The factors dynamically interact with one another, and we now know they can vary surprisingly intricately, even from row to row of vines, and from vintage to vintage, season to season, even hour to hour of a day. So it's a fiendish challenge to try and disentangle all the factors and gauge their relative importance.

Even so, some have tried. And invariably soil isn't high on the list. Factors usually subsumed within the single word "climate" tend to rank highly, things to do with temperature and light intensity. For example, we now know how these affect things like methoxypyrazines (green, herbaceous notes) and the rotundone (black pepper) in some Shiraz wines. But what sommelier is going to wax lyrically about ultra-violet light intensity and diurnal temperature ranges? Soil, though, has the right visceral ring!

**ASI to Alex Maltman:** How do you explain the connectivity in character between the wines of Chablis, for example, if it isn't soil? Is it climate, or other factors?

**AM:** Anecdote and belief go a long way in the world of wine! In fact, climate is key at Chablis, France's northernmost producer of still wine. The finest sites are mid-way up well-drained, optimally south-west facing slopes; the initial (1938) AOC demarcated these sites as *Grand Cru*. The sites coincided not with soil but with an underlying, intact bedrock (the reason the slopes are there) that happens to be of a particular geological age. There are other slopes underlain by this very same





Terra Rossa Soil Coonawarra

bedrock but unfavourably oriented, so vines there were unclassified; indeed, there are some without vines at all, even today.

Since the 1938 classification, although the *Grand Cru* demarcation (which, incidentally, covers only 2% of the Chablis area) has remained the same, nowadays there are numerous AOC Chablis and *Premier Cru* sites, on various bedrocks, of differing geological ages.

If you'll allow me a slight digression, most wine enthusiasts know that the bedrocks at Chablis formed on an ancient seafloor and contain striking fossilised seashells. It all puts one in mind of the sea! Consequently, things maritime often appear in tasting notes on Chablis, such as an iodine note. For example, "Chablis – you can almost chew the iodine"; "...plenty of Chablis character, in particular iodine."; "... that exclusively Chablis note of iodine". And, naturally, it's related to the soils: "fossilised oyster shells give Chablis its unique iodine flavor" and the like.

It occurred to me a few years back that unlike many tasting words iodine is well characterised, a chemical element that can be measured. As such, we analysed soil and vine-leaf samples from *Grand Cru* sites together with finished Chablis wines. Then did the same down the road with soils and Chardonnay vines growing on Burgundy's Hill of Corton. We also, just for fun, analysed some supermarket Chardonnay wines from Argentina's Mendoza and Australia's Barossa Valley. All the analysed values for iodine were minuscule in the wines, and way below the limits of taste detection. But what was striking – frankly surprising – was that all the lowest values came from the Chablis samples and the highest from the Barossa. Go figure!

**ASI to John Szabo:** Your research has been focused on volcanic soil.

**Do you believe there a quality found in wines made from vines growing in volcanic soil that binds them?**

**JS:** Simple question, complex answer. I'll give you a quote from my book which explains the general idea:

"Let's be clear: there is no such thing as 'volcanic wine'. There are, however, wines grown on volcanic soils that come in a radiant, infinitely nuanced rainbow of colours, tastes and flavours. What I mean is that there is no volcanic wine in the singular, but a great and varied many.

...despite grand variations, there are nevertheless a couple of features that appear with enough regularity in wines grown on volcanic soils (even if they are not exclusive to them) to lead to anecdotal, if not rigorously scientific, conclusions. These features loosely sketch the picture that is then completed by the infinite subtleties of every region and every wine and every vintage.

Number one is that wines from volcanic soils hinge on a common mouth-watering quality, sometimes from high acids, almost always from palpable saltiness, sometimes both. Mineral salts involving elements present in wine – like potassium, magnesium, and calcium, along with their acid-derived molecular partners like chloride, sulphate, and carbonate – have been implicated (although in seaside vineyards it's often plain old sodium chloride from sea spray, not soils). Mineral salts may also explain the vague, but pleasantly bitter taste found in some wines.

Number two is their savoury character. Volcanic wines have fruit, of course, but it's often accompanied, if not dominated by non-fruity flavours in the earthy and herbal spectrums of flavour, along with the nuances covered under the magnificently useful, multi-dimensional term minerality and all



of its varied definitions. Minerality and volcanic wines walk hand-in-hand.

The best examples, like all great wine, seem to have another, or at least different, dimension, a common sort of density that can only come from genuine extract in the wine, not alcohol or glycerol, or just tannin and acid. It's a sort of weightless gravity, intense, heavy as a feather, firm but transparent, like an impenetrable, invisible force shield of flavour that comes out of nowhere but doesn't impose itself, it's just there and you have to work your tongue around it. It can be gritty, salty, hard, maybe even unpleasant to some, but unmistakable.

Of course, 'volcanic soil' is only slightly more descriptive than 'cheese'. Cheese is made from milk, as volcanic soil derives from parent volcanic materials. There are hundreds of different types of soils that might be called volcanic, even according to my relatively limited definition. In obvious places such as Vesuvius, Etna, Santorini, or the isles of Macaronesia – places formed by volcanoes – the volcanic-ness of the dirt is unquestionable. But even there, soil composition varies astonishingly. Even pure lavas come in technicolour variations. They range from a few days to tens of millions (billions) of years old and have different chemical and physical

structures – from pure rock to volcanic sand or weathered old clays. That's just the tip of the volcano. I haven't even mentioned human interference on soil chemistry and structure.

To describe all of the possible different categories of volcanic soils and the impact they have on wine character would take a full book (or two) to describe!

**ASI to Alex Maltman:** *Vignerons have long searched for soils to suit individual varieties. There are great stories of winemakers such as Josh Jensen in California seeking out limestone, for example, to grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Is it your contention that they were perhaps misguided in their approach? Could it be that historical allegiance to soil has given winemakers and sommeliers a romantic, rather than scientific, view of the connectivity of soil to a wine's flavour profile?*

**AM:** I know exactly what you mean. For example, I have in front of me a chart (which I've often seen reproduced) that has columns for different cultivars and rows for particular soils. Some squares have a bold check mark indicating the "preferred" combinations - Syrah and granite for instance - while other squares are blank, presumably indicating pairings to be avoided. Thus, it seems to be saying, to grow quality Syrah you need granite soils. But surely all this, as your question

suggests, is simply a reflection of certain classic European sites, in this instance Syrah thriving in the famously granitic soils of the northern Rhone? It doesn't hold up. Syrah flourishes and yields superlative wines in non-granite soils in the northern Rhone: the Côte Rôtie is not granite and Hermitage has soils other than granite. And conversely, Condrieu is composed of granite but isn't planted with Syrah.

Elsewhere, even in France, it doesn't work (e.g. Gamay on the granite soils of Beaujolais). Syrah vines obviously thrive in the granite soils of, say, South Africa's Swartland and Paarl, but they also flourish in Australia's Barossa, New Zealand's Hawkes Bay and Washington State's Yakima Valley, none of which involve granite. Wineries in the Sierra Foothills of California are proud of their granitic soils but here it's Zinfandel that rules. Etc., etc., with exactly parallel arguments for the other so-called preferred pairings.

And all the time there's that unsaid "elephant in the room" – the vine rootstocks. After all, it's not Pinot Noir, say, that interacts with the soil but the pathogen-resistant roots onto which it will have been grafted, almost certainly of different species. But somehow I can't see sommeliers enthusing about 1103 Paulsen, AXR1, 41B, 161-49 Couderc.

**"To describe all of the possible different categories of volcanic soils and the impact they have on wine character would take a full book (or two) to describe!"**

– John Szabo MS





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## SOMMELIERS, OUR HEROES



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## Soil: a natural approach

with Alice Feiring



Alice Feiring

In a discussion that focuses so heavily on the science of soil, itself a building block of nature, it can be surprising how little discussion is given to the way a wine is made and how that relates to the discussion at hand. Is the question of soil's impact all for not if winemaking and winery practices are not natural? From cultured yeasts to any number of potential additives that mask and alter flavour, is the argument mute unless the methodology is non-interventionist, non-manipulative?

It is something Alice Feiring feels strongly about. "Terroir can be influenced through farming, climate and man's involvement. However, the bedrock is the one constant that cannot be denied. It is the wine's 'control... For a wine to transfer that magic we call terroir, the winemaking should be as free of ingredients and process as possible. Even without additions, just by choosing the method of winemaking meaning: stems, extraction, temperature, the elevage vehicle, the addition or not of sulphur, there are plenty of variables to choose from and plenty of options for a winemaker to play with."

Feiring doesn't claim to be scientist or as she says, "someone who lays claims to empirical knowledge." While Feiring agrees the soil does not have an aromatic or flavour impact, she says "I do believe it has a textural impact, influencing the vertical or horizontal nature of the mouthfeel. Sometimes I also believe or experience salinity, though this is more complicated as salinity can come from a number of other influences. This is supported by scientist Benoit Marsan's research....To look at it only via a scientific perspective is to look at art only through analysis. Wine has the power to have an emotional impact and to explain its existence only through science limits its immense power to connect to people, the moment, and a little bit of *je ne sais quoi*."

If soil is at the 'root' (pun intended) of terroir character, and natural winemaking a conduit for sharing its voice in a wine, then surely rootstock must also play a factor. Feiring says "I can put my neck out there and say the choice of rootstock's impact on wine is huge, mostly tied to yield and water retention, nitrogen, and potassium uptake... etcetera... more than actual flavour and disease resistance. That might be why own rooted vines, where it is possible, is the holy grail, a direct link to the soil."



# Terroir without the Filter:

is francs de pied (ungrafted vines) the holy grail of viticulture?



Loïc Pasquet

If soil is a voice of terroir, does the voice get diminished, even lost, if the grapes aren't grown on their own roots? For Bordeaux winemaker Loïc Pasquet, owner of Liber Pater (the world's most expensive wine) it does. His decision to plant ungrafted vines was based on a desire to produce Bordeaux wines as they were made in the past but also a belief that grafting onto American rootstock masks terroir. As he says, "if you can be ungrafted, you have the best message of the terroir because you have no filter." Pasquet recognised in some places there is no choice, but in his location, it is.

Francisco Figueiredo also deals only in own-rooted vines. Unlike Pasquet who purposively chose to return to a time, before grafted vines were the norm in Bordeaux, Figueiredo works in a region, Portugal's Colares DOC, which has never had to graft, as its sandy topsoil has long protected it from the scourge of phylloxera. Figueiredo, who is the winemaker and viticulturalist of Adegas Regionais de Colares, the local cooperative, grew up in Lisbon and remembers helping his father make homemade wine from the local Ramisco grape of Colares. Now as an adult he is responsible for most of the production for the small DOC contained within the city limits of Lisbon, although increasingly he is being joined by a new generation of Lisbon-based winemakers seeking to return Colares to its past glory.

Of his decision to create the Liber Pater wine project Pasquet says when he started his project in 2004, "we (Bordeaux) had lost as a result of phylloxera a lot of native varietals, and the taste of Bordeaux wine. Today in Bordeaux, we (referring to other Bordeaux winemakers) make a wine that is like soup. My question when starting the project was 'what was the taste of wine, before phylloxera?' If we compare Bordeaux now to 1855, the time of the classification, the taste of the wine today is not the same as it was then. Today they don't have the native varieties, they don't have francs de pied (ungrafted vines). Everything has changed. I said to myself 'if I replant the vineyard like it was before phylloxera maybe we can rediscover a very old taste'... Before phylloxera we spoke about Bordeaux as fine wine. Now when we talk about Bordeaux we say it is full-bodied,

**"I said to myself  
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Before phylloxera  
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fine wine."**

- Loïc Pasquet



alcoholic, extracted etc. I say we must find the fine wine of Bordeaux again. In fact, Bordeaux can be totally different (lighter, fresher) and very good. That's why I replanted everything ungrafted."

In the Colares DOC, a thin strip of land, on the Atlantic Coast, near Sintra, on the western edge of Lisbon, little has ever changed. There never has been an edit of the varieties planted there. The native Ramisco vine, only grown in the Colares DOC, is one of the few vinifera vines in Europe never to have been grafted onto American rootstock. While sommeliers are currently seeking out authenticity in their wine selections, it hasn't always been the case. The lower alcohol nature, high acidity and firm tannins of Colares red wines wasn't popular in the 1980s, 90s and even the early 2000s. Along with a rising demand to transform vineyard land into housing developments, saw production of Ramisco wane to miniscule volumes. In the early 2000s reaching Colares DOC hit a low of approximately 12 hectares



Francisco Figueiredo (Photo: Lucas Frazão)



Vines in Colares



**"As sommeliers,  
and wine  
consumers,  
gravitate to  
fresher styles,  
Colares has  
become in  
demand."**

- Francisco Figueiredo

of land under vine. As sommeliers, and wine consumers, gravitate to fresher styles, Colares has become in demand. Whether or not, the particular character of Colares' wines is a result of being ungrafted vines is debatable for Figueiredo. He says of Ramisco "it should offer subtle fruit notes such as sour cherry or cherry, along with some balsamic character, some wood tones, smoky iodine note, along with earthy and dry leaf tones on the palate in combination with very fresh acidity and a salty character, which is quite rare in red wines. This salinity comes from the vineyards, which are sometimes as close as 100 metres from the ocean. It comes from the microclimate. Some of it may be coming from the soil, which at one point was under the sea, but I believe this character is mostly as a result of the influence the Atlantic Ocean has on the grapes themselves."



Pasquet is more demonstrative in his thoughts on own rooted vines, as it relates to Bordeaux. He says "if you plant ungrafted vines, you have the best way to communicate the message of your terroir. That's why it was very important for me to replant these varieties on good soil, on their own rootstock (francs de pied)." Pater elaborates that there would be no option to plant Merlot in gravel or Cabernet Sauvignon in clay, if on their own rootstock. Explaining grafting onto American rootstock allows wineries to plant anywhere but the motivation isn't to express terroir but to express varietal character, and by mixing them up you get a sort of varietal soup. "If you want to make varietal soup it is easy. You graft, then you say I want 80 per cent Merlot, because it is full-bodied, it has alcohol, it has sugar. Then after you say you need 10 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon to add structure. Its like adding potato and carrots to the soup. Then you say you want spice, so you put in 10 per cent Petit Verdot. You can make this wine anywhere. To have the message of terroir, it is unique, because it is your terroir. Only you can make the wine (that reflects your terroir). That's why important to replant good varieties, on good soil, using francs de pied. This is why I don't have Merlot or Cabernet Franc, because I don't have clay and I don't have limestone."

Amongst the unique historic varietals Pasquet does have planted in addition to Cabernet Sauvignon are Mancin (Tarney Coulant), Castet, Saint Macaire, Pardotte, Prunelard, Camaralet and Lauzet. Remarkably he also plants to a vine density of

20,000 vines per hectare, a common practice in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As for any concern that phylloxera may appear in his vineyards, he is not worried as he has gravel and sand topsoil. What he does worry about is "the law, because the law does not allow for the use of native varieties." Speaking for Bordeaux only, appellation is only for making industrial wine. Appellation is not interesting, because you have no freedom. It's impossible to use native varieties. Currently it's just a taste of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. I need to have the taste of the terroir, and to so I need the native varieties. I am proud to be labelled Vin de France because I am free, and when you are free it is the best."

As far as the question of viticultural practices and winemaking as it relates to terroir expression, Pasquet says "for me the choice not to graft. As the graft is a filter. The technique in vineyard could be organic or biodynamic. To be honest, I never understood biodynamic viticultural. I only have one god and don't have enough time for them. If I have to treat Steiner like a god too, I would have no time. What is ultimately important is keeping life in the soil. We are of course natural since we don't use sulphur in the cellar. We can say we are natural, but we are more we are everything. We want to make wine like before. Leonardo Davinci "it's difficult to some easily." We work a lot in the vineyard to do nothing in the cellar. I am not a winemaker. I am vigneron. I don't make anything. I am just here to help nature make the wine.

Loïc Pasquet is a leading member of Francs de Pied, an association of notable vigneron who believe in the authenticity of flavour created by ungrafted vines. Amongst the other notable producers are Germany's Egon Müller, Thibault Liger-Belair of Burgundy, Campania's Feudi San Gregorio, and Alexandre Chartogne of Champagne amongst others.



**"I am proud to be labelled Vin de France because I am free, and when you are free it is the best."**

- Loïc Pasquet





## MOLDOVA'S WINE REVOLUTION: UNDERPINNED BY SUSTAINABILITY AND DIVERSE TERROIR

Moldova has a millennial history of winemaking, an ideal climate, many different soil types, and an appealing range of indigenous and international grape varieties. Unfortunately, during the collectivization of the Soviet era, Moldova's wine industry regressed. It took a while to regroup after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and while new wineries opened and quality improved, it was only a decade ago that the wine revolution truly began. In 2013, the National Office for Wine and Vine opened as a public-private partnership, and since then, \$500 million has been invested in the industry. The number of wineries has grown to 200, including sixty small producers, and there are now 40 wineries that welcome tourism, compared to four in 2012. Exports beyond the old post-Soviet markets have tripled in the last decade. Today, Moldova is the world's 20th biggest wine producer and the 14th biggest exporter. Most importantly, quality has flourished, as reflected by the over 5 000 medals won at international competitions. But this is just the beginning. Huge amounts of work are being done in the vineyards to ensure that the ideal grapes are grown. Wine of Moldova embraced sustainability, something that the entire wine industry committed to in 2023. There's also a lot of work going on in the wineries to increase the blends of local grapes and local and international varieties, which is Moldova's particular strength in winemaking.



Moldova has three Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) regions: PGI CODRU, PGI ȘTEFAN VODĂ, and PGI VALUL LUI TRAIAN. The PGI CODRU has a relief characterized by a strong fragmentation of slopes with varying degrees of inclination and is represented equally by all types of slope exhibition. The vineyards from the PGI "Codru" wine region are located at the highest altitudes in the country, reaching up to 400m, and the slopes have a predominantly south-west and east orientation. The structure of the soil is essential for the quality of wine and vine products. The soils in the PGI "Codru" region chernozems (black soils) prevail, with 62%, while carbonated soils predominates with 21%. The PGI ȘTEFAN VODĂ has a medium fragmentation relief, with deep valleys and slopes with different degrees of inclination. The slopes with an average length of 200-400 meters and an inclination angle of 3°-5° predominate here. The altitude in ȘTEFAN VODĂ region is characterized by a variation from 7.0 meters to 290.7 meters above the sea level, and 73% of the total area, falls within the slope limits of 1° to 10°, where slopes of 1° - 5° predominate. The region's territory falls within the Eastern European and Mediterranean natural zone of silvosteppe with downy oak and xerophytic steppe with thatch - needle grass, beard, grass, and Austrian wormwood.

The wine regions of Moldova offer a one-of-a-kind terroir and flavor profile that sets them apart in the world of wines. Moldova's unique story and new generation of ambitious winemakers contribute to the country's potential to become a major player in the global wine industry.



# Somms & Soil

Sommeliers have varying opinions on the role of soil plays in the characteristics of their favourite wines. We asked three sommeliers, from the different continents, and representing different viewpoints to share their insights on soil.

FEATURE ARTICLE

**R**eeze Choi is the founder of a sommelier services and wine consultancy company, known as Somm's Philosophy. He is the recipient of the ASI Gold Diploma, is an Advanced Sommelier with The Court of Master Sommeliers and is a certified WSET educator. Reeze finished second runner-up at the recent 2023 ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest in Paris, was first runner-up at the 2018 ASI Best Sommelier of Asia & Oceania contest and has won the title of Best Sommelier of Great China four times.

Romain Iltis won the title 'Meilleur Sommelier de France' in 2012, and in 2015 the accolade of 'Meilleur Ouvrier de France', in the sommelier category. Born in Alsace, he trained at the Alexandre Dumas Hotel College, in Illkirch-Graffenstaden and began his career with Chef Alain Ducasse. Since 2015 he has held the title of Head Sommelier

at Villa René Lalique, the 2-star Michelin property in Wingen-sur-Moder.

Heather Rankin is co-founder & co-owner of Obladee, a wine bar with a strong focus on natural, sustainable wines in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Certified via the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers, she is a regular wine judge for the National Wine Awards of Canada and a fixture on many provincial competitions and panels.

**ASI:** How do you feel soil expresses itself in a wine?

**Reeze Choi (RC):** This is one of the trickiest questions in the world of wine. In oenology, there are two prevailing opinions. Some say vines absorb certain minerals in the soil, and the minerals make up the character of the wine. The other opinion holds that the soil influences the way in which grapes grows which in turn shapes



Reeze Choi

**“To me as a sommelier, the production method does not matter as much as whether the wine comes out tasting well.”**

– Reeze Choi



the character of the wine. Since I am not a wine scientist, I am not going to further discuss in what way soil affects the wine. But if we look at the nuance of character and style in the wines from the same grape grown in two nearby regions, we can be sure that soil has considerable impact on how a wine comes to be. Barolo and Barbaresco are both in northwest Italy. The wines from these two regions are produced from 100% Nebbiolo and tend to receive less oak influence. We know that Barolo and Barbaresco have different soil combinations, and the difference contributes to the dissimilar characteristics of their wines. Barolo has much older soil hence a more structured wine; whereas soil in Barbaresco has more nutrients and it gives its wine a more floral aroma, and an easier and approachable style with fewer tannins. Soil may express itself in a more direct way in some other cases. For example, we can detect the smokiness and savory character in Koshu and Carricante as a result of the influence of volcanic soil; and we find flint and the note of rock in Riesling grown on slate.

**Romain Ittis (RI):** I am a lucky man as I live in Alsace where there are all sorts of different types of soil, which makes it easy for me to compare. Personally, I believe the soil expresses itself on the palate in the form of the texture of the acidity on the tongue. Why is acidity important? Because acidity is present for the entire life of a wine. It is like the wine's skeleton, its structure, and is present for the wine's entire existence. Also, acidity is primarily responsible for elevating the taste of wine...it's like when you add an acid to a sauce, it will enhance the saltiness of it. When you focus on the acidity of a wine, you will recognise it has a texture which reflects the soil. For example, it will be sharp if the vines are grown in granite or tender if



grown in limestone. It provides a common point when trying wines made from the same terroir, but by different producers or from different vintages.

**Heather Rankin (HR):** I feel soil expresses itself in wine through the grapevine's response to that soil. For example, a vigorous vine planted in highly fertile loam soil might produce a lighter, slightly dilute wine, whereas a vine planted in a heat-retaining soil, like granite, might yield riper grapes and a more full-bodied wine. I am not sure that we "taste" the actual limestone (or gravel or slate) in a wine, but rather we taste the detailed results of the effect the soil has had on the grapes, and ultimately, the wine. Soil is highly complex, and goes beyond simple types like clay, sand or chalk, for example. It encompasses elements like structure, depth, pH, temperature, microbial content, fertility, and so on. All of these facets combine to determine what kinds of grapes can grow, how well they'll grow, and the



Heather Rankin

unique expression or characteristics those grapes (and ultimately, the wine) will take.

**ASI:** Is soil the key contributor to a taste of place or just one of many factors that contribute to a wine's 'terroir' character?

**RC:** Soil is a factor important to the taste of a place, for sure, but equally important to the survival of the vine. Besides giving certain characteristics to the wine, the type of soil also determines whether vine growing is even possible in some harsher climates. For example, slate in Mosel retains and releases the heat in cold nights to enable ripeness; chalk helps holding the water in dryer regions like Champagne; soil with better drainage, such as gravel, facilitates the concentration of the wine in Medoc.

**RI:** Soil is important, but it is not the only factor. Climate, such as the amount of rain and sun, is equally important because it defines the agronomic potential of the vine. The wine grower is also an important part of this play. They are the conductor while the grape is the musical instrument. They have the decision of which grape they will plant, determining the ripeness level to harvest at, the maturation



of the wine and more. All of these decisions give them a way to express terroir. A winemaker once told me 'the choices made by the vigneron didn't change the soil but his expression of the wine.'

**HR:** Soil is just one part of the natural environment in which a wine is produced. Topography and climate are also key contributors to a wine's sense of place. These three elements often work together (rather than independently) to support the vine and transmit terroir. For example, the famous slate soils of the Mosel are known for excellent drainage and trapping heat - both essential for top tier Riesling, but the soils alone will not ensure the vine's success or the wine's ability to express terroir. The region's steeply sloped vineyards position the vines optimally for maximum sun exposure, and the proximity of the river provides additional reflected light as well as a tempered climate. All three elements - soil, topography, climate - contribute to the wine's 'terroirness'.

**ASI:** How does production method play a role? Can the influence of soil, terroir only be expressed using natural methods, or can conventional wines also express their soil and terroir character?

**RC:** In my opinion, "expressing soil character" and "expressing the terroir" are two different things. While terroir is defined by climate, soil, topography—features in the natural environment, I consider human intervention as a significant factor as well. How humans cultivate the soil also affects the terroir. So, terroir does not only reflect the soil character per se, but also reflects culture. Some well-known conventional wines can well illustrate this: for instance, the "classic" aromas of Bordeaux are more prominent in its conventional wines than in its natural wines. In this sense, we may say that conventional wines



Romain Iltis

**"The wine grower is also an important part of this play. They are the conductor while the grape is the musical instrument."**

– Romain Iltis

express the terroir even more notably. I think natural methods and conventional wines represent different philosophies of nature and cultivation, and hence different ways of presenting soil characters and terroir. To me as a sommelier, the production method does not matter as much as whether the wine comes out tasting well.

**RI:** It is difficult to provide a definitive opinion. Some conventional wines are marvelous, giving a real expression of the soil, but most of the time they need to be aged for the terroir to reveal itself. That said, I think that you have a less filtered expression of the soil when you are using bio or biodynamic methods.

**HR:** I think it's generally accepted that conventional, non-sustainable farming limits the ability of soil to regenerate and maintain health over time. I don't think it's a stretch to suggest that less healthy soil would have a harder time supporting the vine, and the wine a harder time expressing terroir character. Sustainable farming methods that encourage microbial health of the soils likely provide better support for the vine and similarly, allow for clearer terroir expression. In the winery, one could argue that a wine fermented with indigenous yeasts from the local environment provides a truer terroir expression than a wine fermented with cultivated yeasts, and that anything added to (or removed from) the wine might "mask" or distort some original terroir character. But natural methods don't guarantee terroir expression. If the wine is too volatile, or too oxidised (for example), terroir expression can also be blocked. In general, I feel that a wine made intentionally and with care by a skilled coach interested in communicating terroir is what's important - rather than whether the wine was made completely "naturally" or not.





**ASI:** Do you have a favourite soil or favourite soil and varietal combination?

**RC:** I found that I quite enjoy the sensation that limestone soil gives to some white wines. It provides the wines, especially those produced using reductive winemaking practices, with a lovely rocky, smoky, and savory tone. Domaine Follin-Arbelet, Corton Clos Blanche 2014 and Domaine Leflaive Bourgogne Blanc 2004 are two of the wines that vividly show these characters that I have enjoyed recently.

**RI:** I admit I do love Riesling grown on sandstone soil. It is a combination that provides linearity, a purity of acidity and a granular texture which translates more via an expression found in the gums than on the nose. I also find it provides a saline character in the finish and warm stone aromas characteristics. As for red wine, I love Grenache grown on schist soil. The schist provides the wine refined tannins, a velvety texture, freshness, but with a burnt character on the finish. A perfect pairing with roasted meats.

**HR:** The Teroldego grown in the foothills of Dolomite Mountains in the alpine region of Trentino Alto Adige in Italy's extreme North is one of my favourites. The soil is a unique composition of the dolomite mineral (calcium and magnesium carbonate, also known as magnesium limestone) which gives the mountains a crystalline pink-coral colour that refracts sunlight onto the vines. Teroldego is indigenous to the Trentino region and related to Syrah. Like Syrah, it is deeply coloured, with firm tannins and bright acidity with flavours of blackberry, pepper, and earth. There is an intensity and freshness to these wines that is uncommon, and likely due to the unique combination of soil, elevation, and climate of the area.

**“I feel that a wine made intentionally and with care by a skilled coach interested in communicating terroir is what’s important.”**

– Heather Rankin





The ASI  
**Gérard  
Basset**  
Foundation

**Sharrol Mukendi-Klaas** is the  
Inaugural Winner of the  
ASI Gérard Basset Foundation  
Sommelier Scholarship



## **“I plan to use the education I receive from the Sommelier Academy to inspire up and coming female sommeliers across South Africa and Africa.”**

Sharrol Mukendi-Klaas journey into the wine world wasn't expected. In fact, Mukendi-Klaas grew up far away from wine culture, both literally and figuratively. Raised in the small town of Klerksdorp, in South Africa's North West Province, far away from vineyards of the Western Cape, Mukendi-Klaas says, "I saw wine as a drink for people with money. A drink of glitz and glamour."

The idea of making a living from wine, let alone drinking it, was an even more far fetched idea. She elaborates "working in a restaurant is the easiest way for someone without specific skills to get a job in South Africa. I became a waitress out of a need to earn a living. Right away I fell in love with the interaction I had with customers when it came to presenting their food. Explaining the different flavours of the food allowed me to become a poet of sorts. At the same time we would get basic training teaching us how well wine paired with food which would allow us to do a better job upselling."

It was this very customer focus that according to Romané Basset made "Sharrol stood out to the judges. What I admired most was her emphasis on the guest's experience when she serves them. She loves to interact with them, to share her knowledge and to ensure they chose a wine they will enjoy. It reminds me of papa's (Gérard Basset) insistence that a sommelier should love people just as much as they love wine."

Mukendi-Klaas is the first recipient of the ASI Gérard Basset Foundation Sommelier Scholarship. Nina Basset notes "I am personally delighted we have created this scholarship in conjunction with ASI, not least because ASI played such an important role in shaping Gérard's own career. It is therefore fitting to be partnering with ASI to help shape and enhance Sharrol's career in wine, along with many other future scholars too."

The scholarship was born out of discussion between the foundation, led by Romané and Nina Basset, and ASI's Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Collaboratively, they decided a scholarship centred in Africa, whose sommelier culture is rapidly growing, but is still under-represented in the international wine world, would have the greatest impact in showing that sommellerie is a truly global profession. As such, the foundation partnered with ASI and Jean Vincent Ridon's Sommeliers Academy to develop and deliver the scholarship curriculum. Of the decision to partner with Ridon, Romané says "his great experience of working in sommellerie in Africa, as well as his educational career and international network of contacts, meant we could be sure the winner would receive a topnotch programme which will certainly put them through their paces, but also greatly develop their competencies and knowledge."



Sharrol Mukendi-Klaas

It will be a big step forward for Mukendi-Klaas who says of the opportunity "I plan to use the education I receive from the Sommelier Academy to inspire up and coming female sommeliers across South Africa and Africa. I know after learning about my journey in the wine and hospitality industry and seeing how far I have come, they can also see themselves making a career, and a successful one, from it. If you believe and work hard anything is possible."

As far as the future, Mukendi-Klaas sees herself as a wine judge and "being directly involved with the South African Sommelier Academy where I can share my experience and teach up-and-coming female sommeliers."



## HOW CAN WINEGROWING SOILS BE RESTORED?

This is the question that Vinexposium asked Emmanuel Bourguignon, a doctor in microbiology and soil ecology, and associate director of the Laboratoire d'Analyses Microbiologiques des Sols (LAMS).

While living soils are the very foundation of the notion of terroir, a guarantee of authenticity, typicity and quality of wines, the climate crisis continues to amplify the consequences of the irregular management of wine-growing land on a global scale.

In the face of this emergency, Vinexposium reaffirms its commitment to those who are alert, who are developing new solutions and who are leading the way. Gathering forces and words at the group's events around the world (Wine Paris & Vinexpo Paris, Vinexpo Asia, etc.) to accelerate and facilitate change. This is the claim of the world's leading organiser of events dedicated to wines and spirits.

### How can wine-growing soils be restored?

The level of degradation of wine-growing soils varies greatly depending on the region, the type of wine-growing and its history. Vineyards with the most degraded soils are highly exposed to erosion, compaction, loss of humus, loss of microbial activity and chronic pollution. These soils can be restored, aggraded and revitalised to enable them to regain their full functionality and their capacity to host an abundant biodiversity that ensures quality nutrition for the vine. The real question is rather how long does it take to restore these soils? Depending on their level of degradation and the climate where they are located, it can take more than ten years, or even more than 20 years in the most extreme cases. Fortunately, there has been an important evolution in the wine world over the last few years with a growing sensitivity towards the soil. Virtuous practices based on the principles of agro-ecology are multiplying in the vineyards.

### What is the role of sommeliers today?

This profession plays a central role, the women and men who practice this profession allow people to discover and be introduced to this extraordinary drink that is wine. They must learn to understand why and how viticulture that respects the soil, the terroir and biodiversity allows us to obtain grapes that are more qualitative, more concentrated, more complex, with a strong typicity. These same grapes, placed in the right hands, will be the source of wines vibrant with life and energy, wines of the highest quality, unique wines bearing the complexity of the interactions between man, the vine, the microbial world and a terroir. I believe that those involved in this profession must be committed to helping the general public understand the importance of consuming wines whose production has not been harmful to the environment, the soil, biodiversity and humanity. Some people will say that, in these times and with the current geopolitical stakes, wine, unlike bread and rice, is a luxury product that is not vital to our societies. This is a valid argument that requires us to generalise virtuous winegrowing practices, and sommeliers are in the front line in explaining this to their customers. There are more and more small wine estates, in so-called "modest" appellations, but whose work is absolutely exemplary in terms of respect for the soil and the quality of their wine. Sommeliers must also be a driving force in highlighting these craftsmen of the vine, as they are often the winegrowers of tomorrow.



Scan the QR code to listen to the full episode of the podcast "Wines of The Future" produced by Vinexposium, with Emmanuel Bourguignon.

Available on





# The Increasing Reach of the ASI Diploma



**T**he ASI Diploma is increasingly seen as one of the pinnacles of sommellerie. When the first exam was offered in 2012, only a small number of ASI member associations were participating. Now, a little more than a decade later, sommeliers from all over the world are participating on a yearly basis. The ultimate goal, according to ASI Exams Committee coordinator and ASI Ambassador, Michèle Chantôme “was and still is to harmonise the level of sommellerie in as many countries as possible.”

To become an ASI Sommelier, by having passed the very demanding Diploma exam, means to be part of the world’s elite and to be able to prove one’s abilities and talent everywhere in the world. It is a high-level reference on a personal level. And for the associations, it is an undeniable plus to be able to offer this opportunity to their members.

According to Chantôme “the fact that more and more national associations are organizing this exam, including observer members, shows that there is a real need for recognition on the part of sommeliers. In addition, many nationalities are represented, and

therefore different cultures, which gives the Diploma a diverse and inclusive character.”

The ASI Certification Exam Committee also prepares a protocol for people with disabilities. This year, a candidate with a hearing impairment took the exam. For this, the committee adapted the time allocated to certain tests, while maintaining a high level of requirement in both the written and other practical tasks.

Chantôme elaborates “I think the presidents of national associations are happy to take advantage of our offer because, in addition to giving them a “turnkey” exam, we guide them through a hotline on WhatsApp at the time of the exam and there is very precise instructions and advice also provided before the day of the exam.”

The members of the committee themselves, led by a World’s Best Sommelier, Giuseppe Vaccarini, represent various countries including Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Morocco, the Netherlands, South Africa, United Kingdom, and Venezuela, which

ensures diversity and neutrality both in the preparation of the tests and in their evaluation.

Through the Diploma and the Certification 1 & 2 exams, ASI encourages sommeliers from all over the world to improve their skills and the associations to train them. There is a strong demand for courses, especially from associations that are not equipped to deliver them. The Bootcamps partly meet this expectation by proposing masterclasses, each year in a different continent. While the overall reach is limited, it is already an enormous leap forward.

Chantôme, on the growth of ASI, says “judge for yourself: the ASI used to organize only competitions. First only the World Contest, since 1969, then the continental ones since 2008. Then ASI launched the Diploma, the Certifications, the ASI Guidelines (Grids and Tutorials) and the ASI Bootcamps! We are on the right track!”

Last month, the Diploma exam was offered in 21 countries, with 99 candidates representing 29 nationalities taking part.



# I ♥ Dirt

Many sommeliers have a reverence for the French notion of terroir, and the connection between soil, vines and ultimately the glass. ASI asked sommeliers for their favourite soil and wine combination.



**The Sommelier:**  
Jo Wessels, South Africa

**The Soil:**  
Granite

FEATURE ARTICLE

One of the soil formations in viticulture which often fascinates me is granite. Not only does it remind me of my South African home with the dramatic backdrops of granitic outcrops around Paarl and Stellenbosch, but it also represents the terroir of many wines which I enjoy deeply on a personal level. I think of regions such as Beaujolais, Portugal (Dão and parts of the Douro), Galicia (where even the vineyard poles are made from granite) and the crus of northern Rhône – particularly the famous hill of Hermitage.

Granite is an igneous rock formation that is somewhat of a juxtaposition. On the one hand it is quite high in minerals, notably potassium, albeit not always freely available to the vines. It also doesn't offer much water retention in its raw form. I'm sure anyone with a granite countertop in their kitchen probably wonders how vines can grow on such a robust

material. Indeed it can be a bit of struggle. Unless there is thorough decomposition and enough presence of organic matter, it is not a particularly lush soil. Vines on granitic soils often need to show some "fighting spirit" and dig their roots deep. And this often pays off, with a quality of fruit that deserves admiration.

I generally find that wines stemming from granitic soils show a particular precision, freshness and floral characteristic. Black grapes such as Gamay Noir, Shiraz, and Cinsaut tend to show these nuances best. I also firmly believe that there's huge promise for old-vine Chenin Blanc from granitic soils in South Africa. They are definitely worth looking out for! These are often my go-to and feel-good wines for when I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place (bad pun intended) and need some reminding of the value of having some fighting spirit in challenging situations!

**"I generally find that wines stemming from granitic soils show a particular precision, freshness and floral characteristic."**



**“The annual effort of the winemakers which includes pruning, canopy management and harvesting, all done by hand, is rewarded by natural sweet wines of undeniable quality.”**



Marylou Javault

**The Sommelier:**

Marylou Javault, France

**The Soil:**

Black Slate, Banyuls

Banyuls is one of my favourite terroirs. The Banyuls AOP which encompasses the communes of Collioure, Port-Vendres, Banyuls-Sur-Mer and Cerbère Banyuls, is nestled between the Mediterranean on one side and the Pyrenees on the other, with Spain just a short drive away. Here, the vines are planted on steep slopes (often as much as 45 degrees) in the unique black slate soils of the region. These treacherous slopes, which seemingly plunge directly into the sea below, along with the soil, make cultivation of vines challenging and leads to the local flora digging deep, sometimes as much as 15 metres, in search of water and nutrients.

The black slate soils themselves are of marine origin, dating back 300 million years. The soil is rich in organic matter and hydrocarbons which explains the dark colour. The vines which grow on these

soils additionally contend with heavy rains in both spring and autumn, together with scorching hot temperatures and drought in summer. The soils and climate would scare off many vines, but not Grenache, the monarch of Banyuls. Grenache has become accustomed to the inhospitable environment of Banyuls, only getting a little respite from the scorching heat as a result of the Tramontane, the famous Mediterranean wind which cools and helps keep the vines healthy.

All these elements make Banyuls a very special terroir, where the annual effort of the winemakers which includes pruning, canopy management and harvesting, all done by hand, is rewarded by natural sweet wines of undeniable quality. The very low yields, due to the richness of old vines in combination with the poor black slates soil, provide these wines'

amazing aromatic concentration. And it is not just the sweet wines that benefit. The dry wines produced under the Collioure AOP are also fabulous. These wines made from vines grown on the local black slate soils always reveal a beautiful balance on the palate, combining a superb freshness with supple and silky tannins. The nose of the wines can be varied, juggling between ripe black and jammy fruits, liquorice, and sweet spices.

In short, the terroir of Banyuls will mesmerise you with its landscapes, its soil, and the taste of its wines!





Kevin Lu

**The Sommelier:**  
Kevin Lu, Taiwan

**The Soil:**  
Gravel, Medoc

There is something special about the gravel soil of the Medoc. It offers Cabernet Sauvignon in the Left Bank of Bordeaux an immense amount of energy in the wine, especially Pauillac which is one of best places to grow the varietal. When I visited the chateau there, the quality of wine was outstanding.

However, one of best kept secrets is that Cabernet Sauvignon can be some of the best value wines. The Cabernet Sauvignon based wines grown on gravel display very high quality throughout their entire evolution, showcasing beautiful blackcurrant, cedar wood and violet notes.

Gravel Soil in the Medoc





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SCHOOL OF PORT

# DOURO SOMM CAMP



## DOURO SOMM CAMP RETURNS: SCHOOL OF PORT'S IMMERSIVE EDUCATIONAL BOOTCAMP IS BACK FOR A SECOND YEAR!

Launched by Symington Family Estates in 2020, School of Port has been teaching wine professionals and enthusiasts about the category, dispelling misconceptions, tantalising tastebuds, and raising port's profile both inside and outside the industry ever since.

Last year saw the first ever Douro Somm Camp – an educational bootcamp based in the Douro Valley – and it is set to return this year between 3 – 6 July. Along with a new programme of events, tastings and activities, this year's edition will also welcome American and Asian sommeliers, in addition to those from across Europe.

Participating sommeliers will have the opportunity to visit several historic Douro properties, attend tastings and masterclasses, get to know the people behind the wine including winemakers, viticulturists, and salespeople, and be able to have behind-the-scenes access to the winemaking process in the Douro.

Although many specific details of the programme are being kept secret, we've been told that the bootcamp will include a masterclass on climate change in the region, a dinner at the historic Factory House in Porto, and a visit to the iconic Quinta do Vesúvio in the Douro Superior – one of the last remaining Vintage Port estates to still tread grapes by foot.

**Fifth-generation port producer, Rob Symington, said,**

**“We're excited to be welcoming another group of promising young sommeliers from across the world to Porto and the Douro. By sharing our love for this region and the wines it produces, we hope to give them a rich learning experience that they can take back home and share with others.”**



# Super Somms Discuss AI in the Cellar

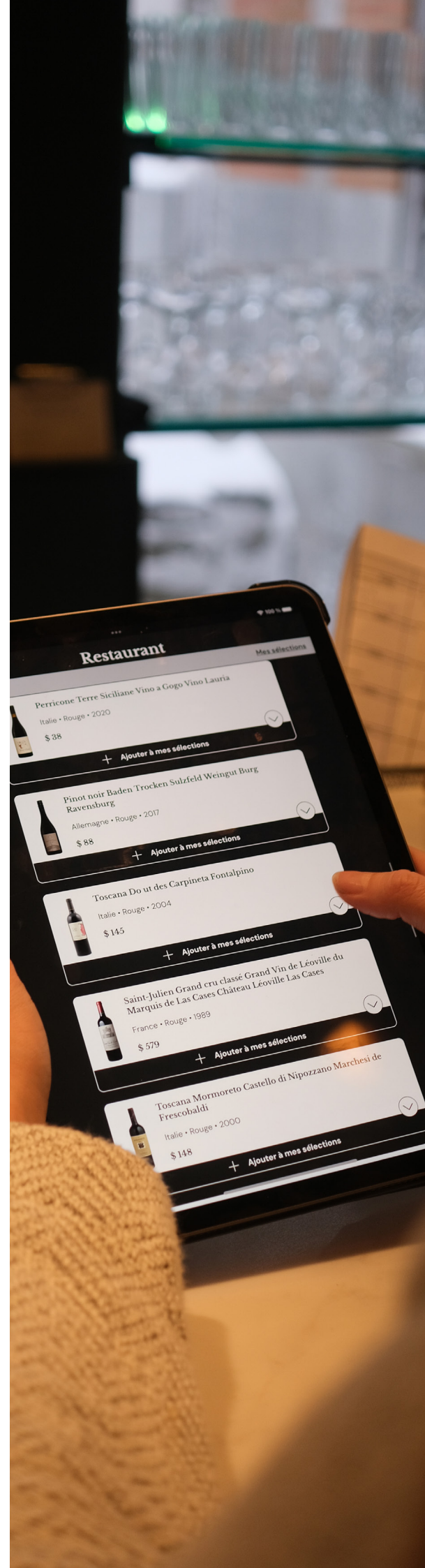
**Clement Robert**, is the Head of Beverage and Wine Buyer for The Birley Clubs, a collection of private clubs in London, England

**Ronan Sayburn** is a Master Sommelier, a previous winner of the United Kingdom Sommelier of the Year contest, and twice represented the United Kingdom at the ASI Best Sommelier of Europe contest. He has been a head sommelier and consulting sommelier at many prestigious restaurants in the United Kingdom.

**Sylvain Nicolas** began his sommelier career as an apprentice to Philippe Faure-Brac, the 1992 ASI Best Sommelier of the World. Since 2008, Nicolas has been the Head Sommelier of Restaurant Guy Savoy at the Monnaie de Paris.

For many sommeliers, the daily, weekly or monthly walk into the basement to count bottles is a dreaded routine. Few sommeliers relish in the often-painstaking task of counting labels. One of which is Clement Robert, the Head of Beverage and Wine Buyer for The Birley Clubs, a collection of private clubs in London, England. Despite his relative youth, 37-year-old Robert, remembers a time “not so long ago, of taking inventory via pen and paper before transferring the information to an excel spreadsheet.” More recently they had a functional software system, which allowed them to place, send and receive orders but was it wasn’t quite the specific tool required for their operation. While many large restaurants, and restaurant groups such as The Birley Clubs, have moved to technological solutions, not all see the systems as solving a problem, including Sylvain Nicolas, of Paris’ Restaurant Guy Savoy who prefers to maintain a hands on approach.

Inventory Management Systems in themselves, such as Alfred Technologies, allows sommeliers to digitise their orders and eases validation of stock received, allows for the easy recording of received inventory and the ability to add receivables automatically to inventory. It also allows sommeliers to always have a real time view of inventory levels. Of the development of their system Alfred Technologies’ Guy Doucet, says “our team of experts works tirelessly to bring forward the best solution that helps establishment managers and sommeliers monitor their operations and focus





their efforts on truly value-creating tasks, while spending their time on the most important aspect of their daily activities: their customers. Sommeliers who implement Alfred certainly have an asset in their pocket, by eliminating the tedious periodic inventory taking process, while increasing profit margins significantly". Sentiments shared by Rajat Parr, an advocate of Doucet's work, as he says "Alfred is a game changer when the restaurant industry needs it the most. This management application, powered by artificial intelligence, will help your restaurant be more profitable, ease boring and tedious tasks and give you back time to be with your clients".

While many see the value of shedding labour hours and other advantages of technology, Nicolas does not want to risk losing the physical connection to the bottles. Nicolas has a wine list consisting of approximately 1,300 wines, amounting to 24,000 bottles, held in two cellars - a working cellar at the restaurant and a large aging cellar located outside the restaurant - the latter managed by a third party outside of the restaurant. As he says as a Head Sommelier "it's important be connected to the wine inventory, it's important to touch the bottles, look at them, as you can



Clement Robert



Ronan Sayburn

witness the evolution, the change in volume in the bottle, things that a computer can't do".

**"Our team of experts works tirelessly to bring forward the best solution that helps establishment managers and sommeliers monitor their operations."**

*- Guy Doucet, Alfred Technologies*

Robert took inventory management one step further six months ago, when they revolutionised their inventory management system by adding RFID (Radio Frequency Identification). This allows them to tag each bottle as it arrives with its own unique identification. A scanner records the unit price and within minutes its registered in the stock.

For their operation, where cellars may be located off premise, such as across a street, or an individual site may have numerous restaurants within that single location, the addition of RFID allows them to track in real time the movement of each bottle. Understanding where within their complex the wine is moving, has been a logistic godsend for their highly complex and interwoven business.

Ronan Sayburn MS, says of the introduction of a bespoke wine management system installed at 67 Pall Mall, "the new technology has eliminated a lot of human error



Guy Doucet



Sylvain Nicolas



as result of tired somms doing stock at two o'clock in the morning, following a shift, by linking our wines to a POS system using RFID chips, barcodes. It also has had the benefit of identifying errors such as if a Chassagne 1er Cru Les Caillerets was served to a customer instead of the 1er Cru Chenevottes, for example."

Nicolas, on the other hand, isn't deterred. Although, he looked at introducing a computerised inventory system, he says "we weren't convinced to change our system, as it what we are doing works well for us." His system which still relies on him placing daily orders from the aging cellar to fill the restaurant cellar, which he believes gives him an understanding of his inventory a computerised system cannot. As for the issue of potential losses, the entire inventory goes through a tri-monthly inventory, audit to ensure accountability, traceability and profitability of the wine program.

For others digital systems provide not just peace of mind, but also real economic benefit. Robert explains the system saves up to 20-man hours per location upwards of 150 hours for the entire operation, per month in reduced time spent counting inventories. Sayburn agrees saying "at 67 Pall Mall we could take stock of a 5,000-bin wine list in just a few hours using barcodes and a hand scanner plus re-confirm locations within the cellar. It also has allowed us to track trends on average selling prices, wine styles etc."

Ultimately is it a function of modernity versus tradition or accounting versus intimate knowledge? The answer of the true benefits of an inventory management system may lie in the individual sommelier that manages the list and the specific needs of the restaurant.

**"Understanding where within their complex the wine is moving, has been a logistic godsend for their highly complex and interwoven business."**

TECH TALK

Super Somms Discuss AI in the Cellar







SINCE 1883

# TRÁPICHE

ARGENTINA

## High-altitude vineyards in Argentina

Argentina is recognised in the world for its high-altitude vineyards, where concentrated and elegant wines are produced, wines with their own unique characters and varied styles comparable to the best in the world.

The Calchaquí Valleys is a system of valleys and mountains located in the northwest of the country, that extends for 270 km from north to south through the provinces of Salta, Tucumán and Catamarca. It gathers some of the highest vineyards in the world, reaching between 1,700 and 3,100 meters above sea level, representing 2% of the vineyards planted in Argentina.

This region is delimited by the Sierras de Quilmes, on the west and the Aconquija on the east which conditions the climate preventing moisture masses from entering the valley, generating continental climate. Its aridity and scarce rainfall (200 mm per year), makes it essential to use irrigation with pure melting water from the mountain.

In height the average temperature is lower since it decreases, approximately one degree every 100 m when we ascend, delaying the vine processes as well as the ripening, achieving higher quality grapes.

It also favors the thermal amplitude allowing the plants to work during the day and rest and recover during the night, especially on the hot summer days before the harvest.

Altitude also determines the quantity of UV radiation. Due to a thinner atmospheric layer UV radiation is greater. This generates a physiological reaction in the plant that develops thicker skins to protect itself, creating a higher concentration of polyphenols.

Great aspects of wine come from the skins including color, aromas and tannins. Added to a precision viticulture that seeks the optimum point of maturity for the harvest, allows wines with personality and elegance to be achieved concentrated but subtle, memorable wines to drink today or save for years.





# Make Me a Match

## Indigenous Varietals, Indigenous Cuisine

MAKE ME A MATCH!



Jaba Dzimistarishvili



As the wine world not only returns to but is seeking out indigenous varietals, it stands to reason there will be a similar return to traditional pairings which reflect a unison of vine and food rooted in an authentic taste of place. We asked two sommeliers from countries with ancient traditions of winemaking to provide their recommendations for indigenous food and wine pairings.

### The Sommelier:

Jaba Dzimistarishvili

### The Varietal: Saperavi

**The Pairing: Kakhetian Pork Lagaza with Berry Demi-glace as prepared by Chef Levan Kobiashvili**

### About the Varietal

In Georgia, there are some 525 indigenous grape varieties, of which 60 per cent are white, and 40 per cent are red. Saperavi, which literally translates to 'giving colour' stands out among the red grape varieties as it is one of the few varietals whose pigment / anthocyanins are found not only in the skins, but also inside the grape. The grape is responsible for wines produced in some famous appellations including Mukuzan, Kashmi Saperavi, Kvareli for dry wines and Akhasheni and Kindzmarauli in the case of semi-sweet wines.

When made into dry red wines, Saperavi has an amazing aging potential and delivers aromas and flavours reminiscent of blackberry, black plum, cherry, and black pepper. It can also be aged either in oak barrel or Qvevri.

### About the Pairing:

No matter, the aging vessel we get a wonderfully gastronomic wine that pairs perfectly with Georgian cuisine. Since Saperavi is considered to be a Kakhetian

Indigenous Varietals, Indigenous Cuisine



grape variety, I chose to pair wines made from the varietal with Kakhetian cuisine, which offers a wide selection of meat dishes.

Lagaza, a Kakhetian pig breed, is fed forest acorns, which provides the meat a unique taste. To prepare this dish, Chef Levan Kobiashvili roasts lagaza piglets and seasons the meat, which is soft and tender, with a berry and demi-glace sauce, spiced with cinnamon and star anise. Accompanying the dish are mashed potatoes mixed with Kakhetian truffles, and Gurian adjika (a west Georgian sauce made of nuts and green peppers) which brings with it a gentle heat.

A perfect pairing for this dish is created when it is served with a Saperavi wine made using the traditional method which means it is fermented on the chacha (pomace) and held in Qvevri for 6 months. Saperavi's tannins will perfectly neutralise the fattiness of the pork. The varietal's flavours are also intensified by the berry sauce and the truffle garnish gently presents itself. Lovers of spicy food will enjoy Gurian adjika as the aroma of black pepper, characteristic of Saperavi, together with adjika creates a culinary firework in the mouth.



#### The Sommelier:

Sotiris Neophytidis

#### The Varietal: Promara

#### The Pairing: Sautéed Asparagus with Egg and Tomato

##### About the Varietal

Let's be honest when someone hears Cyprus, in terms of wine, the first thing that comes to their mind is Commandaria that is made from Xynisteri and Mavro. These two grape varieties are the most planted on the island.

However, one of the upcoming white grape varieties worth noting is Promara. Promara is a thick-skinned white grape variety and as its name suggests is the grape that ripens the earliest in Cyprus. As such a lot of care is required to maintain its acid structure. It only currently occupies about one per cent of total vineyard in Cyprus. So think about how small the production of it is in the world context and why it is so rare and special.

##### About the Pairing:

One of the most famous and traditional dishes of Cyprus is sautéed asparagus with egg and tomato. The bitterness of the asparagus will be combined with the phenolics of Promara, the egg is providing the body to keep up and the tomato will emphasise the bright acidity of this grape.



Sotiris Neophytidis



# The Paths of Sommelier Distinction

The journey to become recognised as an elite sommelier and wine expert can take many paths. At the top, there are the ASI Diploma Gold, Master of Wine, and Master Sommelier distinction. Each brings with it its own challenges and rewards. We ask Monika Neral, ASI Diploma Gold, Doug Frost, Master of Wine (and Master Sommelier), and Eric Zwiebel Master Sommelier to enlighten us on their path to sommelier excellence.

ASI EDUCATION



Monika Neral

**“I can say that the ASI Diploma is much more inclusive and complete because it takes into consideration more skills that a sommelier should have.”**

**M**onika Neral’s hometown is Rijeka, Croatia, but she spent 17 years in Italy. In Italy she graduated with degrees in foreign languages and literature and fell in love with the world of wine. She is a sommelier, a recipient of the WSET Level 3 award in wines, and the only woman in Croatia to achieve the ASI Gold Diploma. She was also third in both the 2021, and 2022 National Croatian Sommelier Championship.

After working in various luxurious hotels over the years, she recently made the leap to entrepreneurship with the opening of VINNER. Through VINNER Monika organises wine workshops, educational classes, and wine tours with the purpose of sharing her knowledge, merging in a unique yet professional way the two biggest passions of her life: languages and wine. ASI asked Monika about her path to becoming an ASI Diploma Gold recipient.

**ASI:** Did you always aspire to have a career in wine and hospitality?

**Monika Neral (MN):** A career in wine and hospitality was something that came by chance, at the right time, when I was having a break between my studies in 2017. It was never in my plans, but the best things happen spontaneously. That’s what life has taught me. It caught me by surprise, and it quickly became a love, and then a job.

**ASI:** Did studying for other certifications help you to prepare for the ASI Diploma exam?

**MN:** Yes, I have attained the WSET Level 3 award in wines which was a big step in my education since it opened a completely new world to me. Before that, I was analysing the wine only as the final product. After it, I started to understand the process to get to the final product: what is happening in the vineyard,

The Paths of Sommelier Distinction



on the vine, how the terroir is important, the human intervention in the wine cellar and many aspects that I was previously ignoring. Therefore, the WSET education widened my knowledge in many ways and it definitely helped me study for the ASI Diploma.

**ASI:** Did studying for the ASI Diploma help you prepare for competition, and vice versa?

**MN:** I've competed twice in the National Croatian Sommelier Championship and both times have come in third place. I wrote the ASI Diploma exam after the first contest. It was a big help because I gained self consciousness (awareness) which allowed me to deal with the stress of the Diploma. On the other hand, the preparation for the Diploma exam was so intense that in 2022 I felt motivated to compete again in the championship and once again I achieved a very good result.

**ASI:** What was the most challenging part of the Diploma exam?

**MN:** The most challenging part of the Diploma exam was managing the stress in front of the committee during the practical tasks such as food and wine pairing, selling a bottle of wine and decanting. I think that you can learn how to cope with stress by gaining experience on the stage but, before that, you should work on your internal control with breathing exercises, meditation or doing things that calm you and allow you to better understand yourself.

**ASI:** ASI is a global association representing countries that produce a wide breadth of beverages. Is this reflected more on the ASI Diploma exam compared to other certifications?

**MN:** As I haven't attempted the Master Sommelier exam, I am only able to compare the ASI Diploma with the WSET certification which includes a theoretical part and the wine tasting description, but not a

practical examination. In that sense, I can say that the ASI Diploma is much more inclusive and complete because it takes into consideration more skills that a sommelier should have: theoretical, tasting and practical. Moreover, it involves the knowledge of not only wine, but also spirits, beers, coffee, tea, cigars, etc. while WSET is mainly based on wine. I can also say it was incredibly challenging and complex as the questions not only demanded more knowledge of a broader, more diverse landscape of beverages but required extremely precise answers. Passing with the Gold distinction gives me the confidence to continue towards the WSET Diploma and MS certifications.

**ASI:** How do you envision how the ASI Diploma will help your career?

**MN:** The ASI Diploma was a big achievement for me and a huge satisfaction. I was definitely more aware of my knowledge when I got the results and, I can say, I was proud of myself. It is a very important certification that will open a lot of "doors" for me during my career, but this doesn't mean

that the learning process is over, rather it is only a starting point on my journey. I also hope this achievement will be an example, and an inspiration, for other women to become more involved in the wine industry and to compete at the highest levels of the sommellerie profession.

## The Mid-Western Master of Wine

**Doug Frost** is the President of BUSA (Best USA Sommelier Association), CEO of Echolands Winery, Master of Wine and Master Sommelier as well as an author and wine consultant based in Kansas City, Missouri. Frost is one of three individuals in the world to hold simultaneously the Master of Wine and Master Sommelier titles, achieving his MS in 1991 and MW in 1993. We asked Doug about his experience with the Master of Wine program.



Doug Frost



**ASI:** You grew up in an era and a place, Kansas City, that one would not instinctively associate with wine culture. How does someone at a time when fine wine consumption was in its relative infancy in the United States, and in the mid-west, rather than California, discover a passion for wine?

**Doug Frost (DF):** I started out washing dishes in the back of a small-town steakhouse in the middle of Kansas, at 14 years old. It was a truly weird place, but I kind of liked the crazy mania that came with back-of-the-house in the middle of a Saturday night. And then out of college I started working in a ‘fancy’ restaurant to pay some bills and on the first weekend I won a wine sales contest. The wine steward there figured I should know something about wine (I clearly fooled him and the customers) and invited me to a wine tasting. It was the 1970s and everybody would throw a twenty-dollar bill on the table and then we’d drink a First Growth Bordeaux. I was hooked. Kansas City was a city of about a million people then and there were many serious wines to be found there, but not that many people trying to buy them.

**ASI:** You achieved your MS in 1991, what was driving you to subsequently also want to achieve the MW title?

**DF:** Truthfully, I tried to get into the MW program in the mid-80s, but I became the statewide sales manager for a wholesale company and my time was no longer my own. By 1989, I was able to get back to it and, just as I was gearing up for my first MW exam, a friend told me about the MS program. I had no idea what it was, but restaurants run in my veins so, on two weeks’ notice, I went and took the Advanced exam (you could get away with stuff like that then). Shockingly, I passed it so, essentially, I ended up doing both Master of Wine and Master Sommelier at the same time, from 1989 to 1993.

**ASI:** When people ask you the difference between Master Sommelier and Master of Wine, what do you tell them?

**DF:** The MS is a service exam. The MW is a writing exam. Half-jokingly, I could say that the MS is a mile wide and a few inches deep and the MW is a few feet wide and a mile deep. There’s a Venn diagram to it all, of course, but it’s really in how you offer the information to the examiner that makes the difference.

**ASI:** Do you feel having the Master Sommelier title and going through the experience of passing those exams help you with your Master of Wine exams?

**DF:** As I say, they happened more or less simultaneously but each exam was, in some ways, helpful to the other. The breadth that is the MS exam offered me more ideas and examples for the MW exam; and the depth that is the MW exam helped support my ideas and answers in the MS. And blind tasting is blind tasting, no matter how they ask you to fashion your answers and evidence.

**ASI:** What did you find the most challenging part of the Master of Wine program?

**DF:** The tasting portion is definitely more challenging for many than the theory. I passed the theory the first time, but it took two tries to get through the tasting. I strongly believe that my MS blind tasting work fed into and strengthened my MW blind tasting. I tell MW candidates to study the MS format as preparation.

**ASI:** What words of inspiration would you give to someone currently trying to get their MW?

**DF:** You have to write to a standard that is British in nature. Study short form essay writing and lose every extraneous word. Write like you’re writing a legal brief and medical research paper. As for the tasting, use the same process every time. Those tasters who are going to pass are those that have a nearly military precision to their form and process.

**“Shockingly, I passed it so, essentially, I ended up doing both Master of Wine and Master Sommelier at the same time, from 1989 to 1993.”**





Eric Zwiebel

## Master Sommelier: Just One Stop on the Journey

**Eric Zwiebel** is an ASI Gold Diploma recipient, a Master Sommelier, and has competed many times representing England and France at various sommelier contests. He currently works as Director of wine at the Samling in Windermere, England. We asked Eric about his wine education journey, and specifically about the Master Sommelier designation.

**“The MS is just one train station on a long ride. It’s a bit like icing a cake, as it makes you realise what you have worked for has been recognised.”**

**ASI:** Growing up in Alsace surrounded by vineyards and great restaurants, did you ever consider not making wine or hospitality your career?

**Eric Zwiebel (EZ):** It is definitely in my blood. Both my parents used to run a restaurant. My father was the chef and my mother worked in the front of the house. The day I told my father I wished to work in a restaurant it was very upsetting for him because he thought they (my parents) worked really hard to offer for my sister and I a better future. He couldn't believe it. He said to me 'we worked so hard for all our lives and now you have decided to make the same mistakes as me.' But growing up in Ribeauvillé, in Alsace, wine was part of my DNA, so I decided to work in this industry.

**ASI:** Describe how your wine career started?

**EZ:** I started working in kitchens, but I hated it, so I moved to the front of house side. I started at a local place with a strong gastronomic tradition but not a 'Michelin-star' place.

The head sommelier, restaurant manager, and owner were very involved in wine. On the first day, my father came with me, he told me it would be good to learn about wine here because it could give me the opportunity to do something a little bit special and different in the future. I did a two-year apprenticeship there.

After my time there my father brought me to L'Auberge de l'Il, where Serge Dubs worked. I worked as commis sommelier there. To be honest, I didn't have much opportunity to connect with Serge. Even though he didn't train me, he was the first big influence on my wine career. One day Serge was serving a group of 16 people, and I was listening to him describe wine to the guests. Suddenly, it made sense and I thought to myself this is something I can do. At the same time, I was also quite enamored that as a sommelier walking through the restaurant the guests see you as someone with knowledge. They

look at you as someone they want to meet, as they want you to give them your knowledge. I now had the sommelier 'bug.' After my one year at L'Auberge de l'Il, I knew I absolutely wanted to be a sommelier.

At this point I had learned everything without formal schooling. To gain more experience, I moved to Paris where I worked with Olivier Poussier for about six months before moving on to various restaurants in the city with Michelin stars. I kept learning more and more through these different experiences. I wasn't competing at this time, because I didn't want to just be seen as just a dictionary of wine.

At 24, I decided to move to England, where I met Gérard Basset, and things changed. Gérard at this time (1997) was famous, having already won the title of Best Sommelier of Europe. I began working for him. The experience in England changed a lot for me. I think in France, sometimes, as sommeliers, people





like Gérard and myself didn't always feel like we were good enough. Suddenly in England I learned how people appreciated you. It was very rewarding.

Gérard and I would talk a lot. I love to talk and so did Gérard. We would share ideas. I loved his approach to sommellerie. He also talked about his experiences including the sommelier competitions. He described how he trained himself. Remember at this stage knowledge wasn't so easy to find. Gérard inspired me to compete and challenge myself.

Looking back, I can say 'Serge helped me discover what I wanted to do. Through Gérard I discovered what I wanted to become.'

**ASI:** How did your journey to become a Master Sommelier begin?

**EZ:** That started really in England. Coming out of France, as a sommelier working with famous chefs, my wine knowledge was good but not special. It was Gérard that encouraged me to take the WSET exams, compete, and study through 'the Court', eventually achieving the Master Sommelier title. I can say everything that I have done to improve my career has been because of Gérard. I worked five years with him. It was a wonderful time. Of course, he didn't just

inspire me, he inspired and helped a lot of sommeliers. Gérard, with his Hotel du Vin group of hotels really changed the culture of sommellerie in England.

**ASI:** How do you apply your MS designation in your daily life?

**EZ:** How I utilise my Master Sommelier designation is also a bit inspired by Gérard. I am one of the few Master Sommeliers that still work on the floor, although my new job will have me doing some wine buying for private customers. He also inspired me to understand the Master Sommelier designation isn't about me. In short, the Master Sommelier designation has been a plus, but the philosophy I have now is that it is my job now is to help others on their journey. Like a sensei in martial arts, it is my duty to pass on my knowledge.

**ASI:** What words of inspiration would you give to someone trying for their MS?

**EZ:** To be frank my journey never ends. The MS is just one train station on a long ride. It's a bit like icing a cake, as it makes you realise what you have worked for has been recognised. Since then, I have competed at many sommelier competitions, winning Best Sommelier of England in 2004, twice competing in the final of the Best Sommelier of Europe,

a fourth place finish at the 2013 ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest, and a runner-up finish in 2007 competing against the likes of Gérard Basset, Paolo Basso and winner Andreas Larsson in the finals. Even so, my suggestion is to keep going. Even if I stop competing, I am now the vice president of UK Sommelier Academy, and on their technical committee, and continue to train others.

When I did my ASI Diploma, and I received a Gold. I used this experience as preparation for competing for Best Sommelier of World in Antwerp. I would say today the ASI Diploma is a very good exam. It really should be more recognised because I think the ASI certification is very challenging and well-rounded, as it also involves other skills such as food and wine pairing. It is very realistic about what we do, and it is also very international. Keep in mind, the 'MS' is very focused on wine, whereas the ASI Diploma is broader and more inclusive. I find it better preparation for competition. The ASI Diploma was, in the end, another step forward on my journey, one of which I was very proud to complete. I am excited to see its progress, as I think the ASI Diploma brings with it new energy and it is very positive for our industry.



# Member News

## Vinexpo America and Drinks America: uniting the world of wine and other beverages.

Vinexposium the organizers of Vinexpo America once again brought the beverage alcohol world together for 2-days this past month in New York. Held in tandem with Drinks America, the combined events highlight wine, spirits, beer, sake, ready-to-drink, and other related products and services. ASI was featured at the event via a seminar titled Bubbles and Chocolate. Gabriela Pozo, President of the Ecuadorian Sommeliers Association and CEO of MUZE Ecuadorian Chocolate along with Doug Frost, president of the Best USA Sommelier Association were invited to present a seminar on pairing chocolate with sparkling wines at Vinexpo America in New York. At the seminar, some of the world's most delicious chocolates were served and paired with wines representing the world's most famous sparkling wine styles to determine the best pairings.



Kelcie Jones

## Competition Season Begins in Canada

The Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers (CAPS) has begun its journey to Halifax, where its Best Sommelier Canada 2023 competition will be held. Justin Madol, sommelier at Don Alfonso 1890 in Toronto, won the Best Sommelier in Ontario competition at the end of 2022, while it was recently announced that Kelcie Jones, Wine Director at Michelin-starred Burdock & Co, took home the title of Best Sommelier in British Columbia. The duo will be joined by representatives from the Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec and Atlantic Sections associations, along with other past regional champions, at the Best Sommelier in Canada competition, which will take place 12-15 November in Halifax, under the direction of ASI magazine editor and former CAPS president Mark DeWolf.

## New Scandinavian Sommelier Champions

Last month Emma Ziemann has won the Swedish Sommelier Championship for the third time. The final featured four contestants as opposed to the usual three as result of a very close semi-final round. In the end, Ziemann came out on top, with Albert Wendensten finishing runner-up and Elliot Björkman finishing third.

Ziemann's victory follows closely after Nikolai Haram Svorte took home the title of Norway's Best Sommelier at a contest held at the Hotel Bristol in Oslo in January. Haram Svorte, bested Kristoffer Aga and Sander Johnsson in the final. Filmon Fitsum, of the Britannia Hotel in Trondheim won the Junior Wine Award at an event held at the same time.



Emma Ziemann





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