

ASI MAGAZINE

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MICHÈLE CHANTÔME
ASI Memories



**TORU TAKAMATSU MS, MAURIZIO CERIO,
VINCENT MORROW MS, JULIE COHEN THEOBALD**
Future of Sommellerie



COMING SOON

A Sommelier's Insight

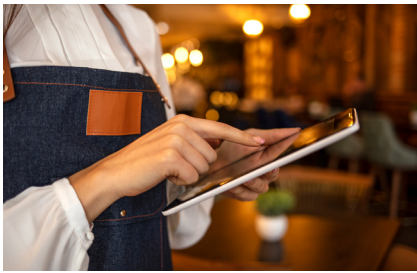
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Editor, Content Manager: Mark DeWolf
Partnership Management: Ana Sofia Oliveira
Marketing & Communication: Xeniya Volosnikova
Administrative Assistant: Claire Monnier
Translation: Michèle Aström Chantôme, Manuel Negrete
Design / Layout: Carissa Botha
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Contributors:
 Maurizio Cerio, Michèle Aström Chantôme, Lionel Lavail, Julie Cohen Theobald, Robbert Degans, Mark DeWolf, Romain Iltis, Vincent Morrow, Kristin Perrin, Benjamin Roffet, Arvid Rosenrgren, Piero Sattanino, Toru Takamatsu, Hannah Williams, William Wouters

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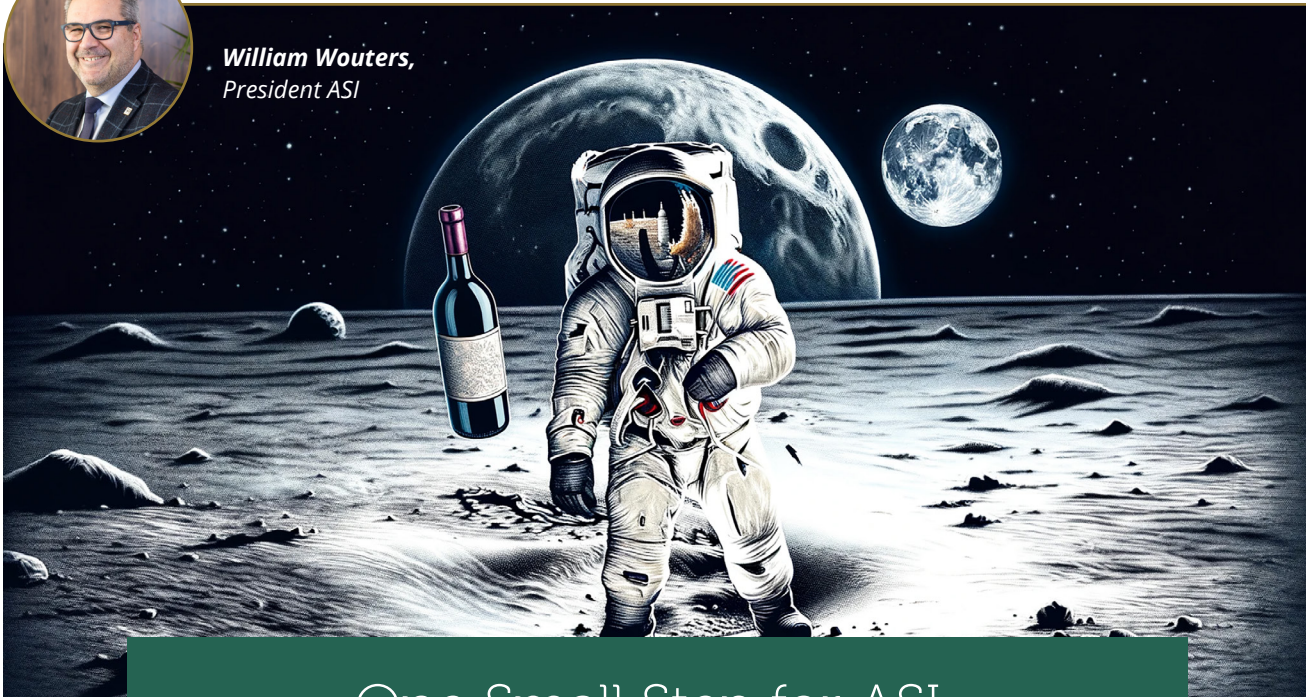
Magazine inquiries:

Mark DeWolf, ASI Content Manager
 markdewolf@asi.info
 General Inquiries: www.asi.info | info@asi.info

Welcome!



*William Wouters,
President ASI*



One Small Step for ASI, One Giant Leap for Sommellerie

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

It was a momentous year. Apollo 11's lunar module, the Eagle, landed on the moon, and shortly thereafter, Neil Armstrong uttered those famous words: "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." AC Milan won the European Cup, Charles de Gaulle resigned as President of France, Woodstock ushered in a new generation of free thinkers, and the first test flight of the Concorde took place near Toulouse with promises of bringing the world closer together. And the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale was formed, with the first Contest of Best Sommelier of the World being held in Brussels.

In those early formative years, ASI was limited to a few European nations, but its willingness to grow and expand was evident. Over the years, ASI embraced new nations, expanding beyond Western Europe. Roots were planted in the Americas, Asia, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe,

and eventually in Africa, Australia, and now the Middle East. Like a great blend, I think of ASI as a sum greater than the equal of its parts. If our regions are the varietals, our individual associations are the plots, the unique individual terroir, that allow us to craft a unique, complex, and diverse association.

Over the years, as our association has grown and expanded, so too has the role of a sommelier. Never has there been such diversity within our ranks, not only within the association itself, including the board and our committees, but also the individual sommeliers around the world that make up the fabric of our profession. Diversity also applies to the age of our sommeliers. Never have we had so many young sommeliers involved. They bring the passion of youth and are ushering in a new age of sommellerie.

In this edition of ASI Magazine, we explore the evolution of sommellerie while remembering those who have supported the association over the last 55 years. ASI Ambassador Michèle Chantôme looks back on some of the key moments in the history of ASI.

Being a modern sommelier involves embracing diversity, technology, adapting to ever-changing consumption patterns, thinking globally and environmentally. The role of the modern sommelier has never been so complicated or challenging. In this edition, we ask sommeliers from around the world for their thoughts on the evolution of sommellerie. We have invited the likes of Toru Takamatsu, Vincent Morrow, and Maurizio Cerio for their comments on the present and future of sommellerie.

Enjoy the magazine and please share it with your community of followers.

55 years ago, in 1969, ASI was born.



ASI, WINE PARIS & VINEXPO 2024 SOMMELIER BATTLE: THE PLACE OF NON- ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

The wine industry is witnessing a significant evolution with the rising popularity of no and low alcohol wines, shifting from a niche market to a major trend. This change is driven by a global movement towards healthier lifestyle choices and mindful drinking, highlighted by a panel discussion hosted by Dominique Laporte (Founder, Le Petit Beret alcohol-free beer, wines and spirits, 2004 Best Sommelier of France), Robert Joseph (journalist, consultant,), and Marc Almert (2019 ASI Best Sommelier of the World), at the Wine Paris & Vinexpo 2024. They discussed the complexities and potential of this burgeoning sector, emphasising the challenges of producing quality no and low alcohol wines without compromising taste. Techniques such as de-alcoholisation and early fermentation cessation are commonly used, though they present obstacles in maintaining the wine's natural aromas and flavors. The concept of "zebra drinking," was introduced by Marc Almert, reflecting the changing attitudes towards alcohol consumption, advocating for moderation and flexibility. Furthermore, the panel discussed how the regulatory landscape for these wines is still developing, with consumer demand focusing more on quality and taste than technical definitions. All agreed this trend signifies a major shift in consumer behavior and points towards a future where no and low alcohol wines hold a prominent place in the industry, aligning with evolving health-conscious preferences and legislative changes.



ASI, WINE PARIS & VINEXPO 2024 CHALLENGE: BLIND TASTING

This highly anticipated blind tasting event attracted a crowd. It featured Raimonds Tomsons, 2023 ASI Best Sommelier of the World, and Valeria Gamper, a top contender in the same competition, as they led participants through a meticulous blind tasting of sparkling and sweet wines. Gamper selected four sparkling wines, challenging participants with seven detailed questions covering origin, sugar levels, ageing, and grape varieties. Tomsons chose three sweet wines, focusing on aspects like sugar content and winemaking processes. The highlight was a surprise segment, where Tomsons and Gamper had to identify a wine selected by the other; Tomsons mistook a red from Ribera del Duero for a wine from further down the river in Portugal's Douro, while Gamper correctly identified a Sauternes. The challenge concluded with the announcement of the winners of the audience portion of the contest : Aris Alouche (Sommeliers International) came in third place, while Valeria Tenison (sommelier, journalist, Master of Wine candidate) finished second, and Antoine Sfeir (co-founder Pif à PaPa, Master of Wine candidate) took the top spot.

Guest Editors

TORU TAKAMATSU MS, MAURIZIO CERIO, VINCENT MORROW MS, JULIE COHEN THEOBALD

Bridging the Gap: **a young sommelier embracing classic wine**



Toru Takamatsu MS

Toru Takamatsu MS is the antithesis of the brash, young sommelier. Despite his young age he is soft spoken and thoughtful, and from outward appearances looks more likely to be found on the slopes of a ski hill than holding a decanter. At just 28 he has already been well-known for some time. In 2020 he became the world's youngest Master Sommelier, at the time one, and of the youngest to ever pass the exam (Xavier Rousset, featured in our last issue of ASI Magazine, was a year younger when he passed at the age of 23). Takamatsu was born into a traditional Japanese family in Sydney, Australia. His route into the world of wine and hospitality started thanks to his father, who was a chef. At the age of 15, looking to make some spending money, he went to his father for support finding a job. Through his father he landed a job working in a small café that was associated with his father's restaurant. The position exposed him to coffee, and how the taste of coffee could change as a result not only of the beans, and the roasting methods, but also by the barista manning the machine. Eventually this curiosity for flavour, moved from coffee to wine. He has worked in fine dining, but recently gave up the accolades and income of the restaurant world to become an assistant winemaker in Japan.

ASI: How important is certification for someone pursuing a career in wine?

Toru Takamatsu (TT): Certification plays a crucial role, especially for those new to the wine industry. It serves as a testament to one's knowledge and dedication to the field. In my journey, certifications like ASI, WSET and the Court of Master Sommelier

"If you have the motivation, passion to work at the best Michelin star restaurants, you'll do whatever it takes to get there be it washing or polishing glasses, running around trays."

A DISCUSSION WITH...

Toru Takamatsu MS, Maurizio Cerio, Vincent Morrow MS and Julie Cohen Theobald

were essential steps towards gaining recognition and opportunities in the wine industry. They are not just proof of expertise but also a reflection of the passion and commitment one has towards mastering the art of wine, which is particularly valuable for individuals at the beginning of their careers.

ASI: With proliferation of certifications available will they be less or more important going forward?

TT: While the landscape of wine certifications is indeed becoming more crowded, the value of certification remains significant. It acts as a marker of knowledge and credibility in the industry, especially important for those entering the field. Certifications from reputable organisations like ASI, the Court of Master Sommeliers or WSET continue to be highly regarded. However, the increasing number of certifications does raise questions about market saturation and the potential for dilution of value. The key is finding the right balance and ensuring that certifications maintain their rigor and relevance to the industry's needs.

ASI: One of the most challenging aspects of becoming a young sommelier is having the opportunity to taste the classics. Do you think this affects the learning experience for young wine professionals?

TT: Absolutely. The soaring prices of classic wines present a significant barrier to young professionals who wish to deepen their understanding through tasting. While knowledge about wine can be acquired through study, the experiential aspect of tasting is irreplaceable. This financial barrier not only restricts access but could potentially influence the direction of interest towards more affordable, perhaps less traditional, wine styles or regions, impacting the appreciation and understanding of classic wines among the new generation of sommeliers.



ASI: Do you think the rising price of classic wines are impeding the development of sommeliers and even pushing sommeliers to other styles of wine?

TT: Yes. I think we have two types of sommeliers. Those that are moving away from the classics, going to, for example, natural wines. You'll probably find them working in natural wine bars and that's fine, but I think if you want to call yourself a sommelier knowledge of classic wines is essential. If you have the motivation, passion to work at the best Michelin star restaurants, you'll do whatever it takes to get there be it washing or polishing glasses, running around trays. You sacrifice to be able to get a taste of those wines. I met a few young Japanese sommeliers recently that exemplified this. They worked hard to be at these restaurants with great sommeliers who had clientele willing to share wine to educate the staff.

ASI: What are the dangers of sommeliers not having an understanding of classic wines?

TT: I think the obvious example when a wine steward doesn't have a lot of experience with the classics, and maybe has veered into natural wine, is the ability to understand fault. Do they know that mousiness and volatile acidity are defects? If they like that it is fine, but if they

don't understand they are faults then we have a problem.

ASI: A lot young sommeliers focus on sustainability, rightly or incorrectly focusing on 'natural', 'organic', 'biodynamic'? Do you have a responsibility as a sommelier to be thinking environmentally?

TT: As a sommelier, I feel I should be selling good wine. Wine that matches guest expectations is the most important thing. Obviously winemakers who have a vision of making high quality wine also make wine using sustainable methods. It goes hand in hand.

ASI: How does technology play into the modern sommelier's role, especially in high-end restaurants?

TT: Technology, while not essential, can be a valuable tool in the sommelier's arsenal, particularly in managing extensive wine lists and ensuring up-to-date information. In my experience, using tablets in a restaurant with a vast selection helped keep the wine list current and manageable. However, the essence of being a sommelier – the knowledge, the service, and the personal interaction – remains at the core, unaffected by whether technology is used. Each restaurant's approach will differ, reflecting its unique style and philosophy towards service and the guest experience.

The Modern Sommelier: a study of inclusivity, diversity and a willingness to change

The Court of Master Sommeliers is a leader in the evolution of sommellerie. The American-based educational institution is at the forefront of change, some of which forced upon it following a cheating scandal related to one of its Master Sommelier examinations and well publicised accounts of pervasive sexism, gender bias and sexual intimidation and inappropriate sexual behavior. The latter leading to the expulsion of six members, not least of which was Fred Dame, co-founder of the Court of Master Sommeliers, and its first president.

The scandals have led to an overhaul of the institution and in many ways forced the once insular body to become transparent, forward thinking, and diligent in how it changes its internal culture.

Leading the charge is **Julie Cohen Theobald**. Theobald wasn't in the wine industry prior to taking on the role of Executive Director of the Court of Master Sommeliers. Her appointment came after 10 years as Executive Director of the Educational Theatre Association. She doesn't even live in wine

country. She's based in Ohio, a state known more for its love of pigskin (American football) than wine.

Vince Morrow MS is one of America's most respected sommeliers. A certified Master Sommelier by the Court of Master Sommeliers, he has worked at and led the wine program at some of California's most prestigious restaurants including Gary Danko, Benu, The French Laundry, ONE65, O' by Claude Le Tohic, and is currently the wine director of PRESS in St. Helena. In 2021 he took on the role of co-chair of the Diversity Committee for the Court of Master Sommeliers.

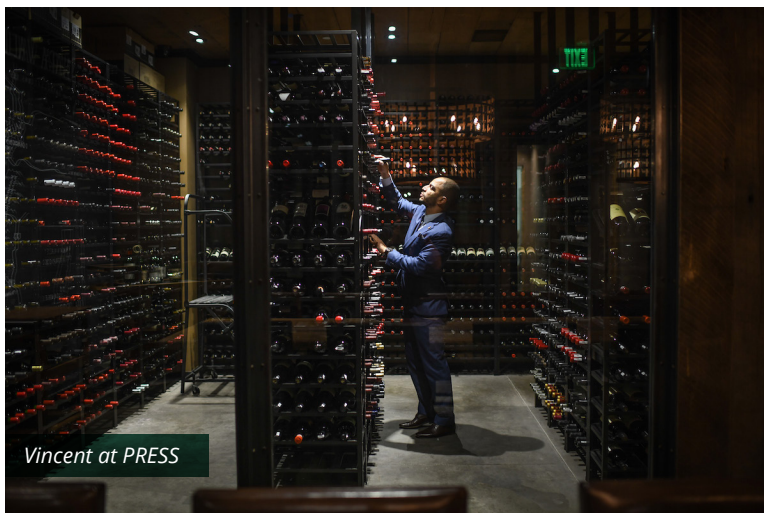
We asked Julie and Vince for their thoughts on how the profession of sommellerie is evolving and what they are doing to promote positive changes.

A DISCUSSION WITH...

Toru Takamatsu MS, Maurizio Cerio, Vincent Morrow MS and Julie Cohen Theobald



Julie Cohen Theobald



Vincent at PRESS



“We’ve come a long way in the last 40 years building awareness, respect, and the number of jobs for sommeliers.”

– Julie Cohen Theobald

ASI: Over history, the sommelier profession has evolved into the restaurant-based position as we know it today. Are we going through another evolution that involves a broader interpretation of what the role is?

Vincent Morrow (VM): For me, if you are helping a guest, I think you are a sommelier. I think it's a bit restrictive, in my own opinion, to be tied to a restaurant serving food, though I do understand where that thinking comes from because that's where my career really blossomed.

Julie Cohen Theobald (JCT): I agree. It's really about service, and that can be anywhere, such as a tasting room or retail shop. The other thing I would add is around the casualisation of restaurants. You can have an incredible dining experience and not have the formality of the past. In fact, we've even changed our service standards recently, for example, to remove gendered service, to reflect more, keeping up with the times.

ASI: The sommelier profession has become truly global. With this larger community, many sommeliers are being introduced to new wine regions, new beverages. Are you finding you need to expand your knowledge as a result?

VM: For context, I took the first CMS (Court of Master Sommeliers) exam in 2012 and then passed the Master Sommelier exam in 2019. Looking back at all the places I've worked at, we've expected our sommeliers to be fully proficient in sake, cocktails, spirits, and beer. At PRESS (a Wine Spectator Grand Award-winning restaurant with a wine list dedicated to Napa and Sonoma wines), we even have a sake and a beer on our pairing menu. They do have some ties to the Napa Valley, even if the exact definition of those is not the origin or being made from items in the Napa Valley.

ASI: How are your education programmes evolving to meet the evolution of the sommelier profession?

JCT: Definitely. Perhaps the biggest initiative on the horizon is with the expansion of our 'business of being a sommelier' content. We're working on a standalone online course that will have multiple levels that helps sommeliers with their beverage programme management and profitability. The beverage programme is a key driver in the restaurant's success. We see ourselves as a trade association. Part of our mission to grow the value of the profession and advance the profession. We've come a long way in the last 40 years building awareness, respect, and the number of jobs for sommeliers, etc. But we still see a lot of upsides. And we can also educate the public about sommelierie, so that they're coming in and asking for the sommelier and finding value in that, which will then in turn place more priority on those jobs.



Vince Morrow MS

“I love a huge leather-bound, beautiful wine list, but my style when a guest gives preferences is for me to pick out two or three different things to talk about.”

– Vince Morrow MS



Master Somm Graduates

or it shouldn't be about having a certificate. However, as a hiring manager for a wine department when I see someone that has put the effort into achieving at least a base level of knowledge in something, I am more inclined to say 'okay. Let's see what else can you learn?' It is about the knowledge that the certificate or diploma may indicate, but more importantly to me, it's also about what it tells you about a person's drive and hunger to achieve and learn.

ASI: The Court of Master Sommeliers had well publicised issues with respect to sexual conduct amongst former members. How are you making the court an institution that is more open, has a safer environment, and perhaps less sexist?

JCT: We've made a lot of structural changes. One of the biggest things is external focus. In addition to me coming from outside the industry to be the main leader, we brought on four external board members who are true experts in their field. We've also made things so much more transparent, and in doing so remove the opportunity for abuse of power by giving students much more feedback, transparency, communicating their scores,

ASI: What do we need to do to continue to make sure our profession is as diverse and as inclusive as it could be?

VM: I don't think that we've come terribly far if you look at the current landscape because to see the fruition of all the work being done now it will take an entire generation. A lot of the work that we've done specifically within the Court is to make sure that even within a meritocracy, the ability to perform is on equal grounds for everyone. Whether it's courses or examinations, we want to make

sure we don't have any roadblocks within our own programming or examinations for people from different countries or backgrounds.

ASI: Is one of the values of having ASI, the Court or WSET the value of certification as a means of proving somebody's knowledge base or skill level?

VM: Yes. I think humans by nature want to strive for something and achieve something. There are sides to the argument that suggest it shouldn't be about certification. It shouldn't be about having a pin,

A DISCUSSION WITH...

Toru Takamatsu MS, Maurizio Cerio, Vincent Morrow MS and Julie Cohen Theobald



moving a lot of our exams to digital platforms that can be blind graded and reviewed without bias, etcetera. We brought in an ethicist to help us with our code of conduct. We have a consultant that we work with on sexual harassment that supports us building a safe, welcoming culture. It's really been a comprehensive initiative across many levels.

ASI: Has this also extended to your examinations?

JCT: We've also updated our dress code which removes any kind of gender standard dress code. It's really about being business appropriate for that organisation. This applies to the exam. It's very common to sommeliers, at certain restaurants, wear trendy sneakers, as they are on their feet all day. We want people to express themselves, and to bring their personality to the exam.

ASI: Is technology something that we as sommeliers should fear or something we should embrace?

VM: I think a healthy dose of both is fine. In our roles as sommeliers, I don't think we need to be too worried about it. At PRESS, we have a ten thousand bottle wine cellar. Without technology, inventory would take several days with a lot of people. Just do the math on the labour to do inventory every month. If it were not electronic,

that would be pretty significant. We also have an electronic wine list that speaks to the back-end of our software which is online. This allows us to make near-instantaneous changes on the wine list so that a guest doesn't see something that isn't there or doesn't exist. Believe me, I'm a classicist. I love a huge leather-bound, beautiful wine list, but my style when a guest gives preferences is for me to pick out two or three different things to talk about. I only have so many fingers to save a page, whereas on an electronic wine list, I can tab those and order them however I like. Ultimately, it makes the guests experience light years better for us with an electronic wine list.

ASI: Are you able to use AI (Artificial Intelligence) as a tool to support sommellerie?

JCT: We just had our first experience in terms of using AI for live translation of courses. We're working with a software company that can translate live in 45 languages all at the same time. When we think about students for whom English is not their first language, they have additional barriers and challenges and expenses when it comes to achieving certification. This AI tool really helps make our programming more friendly and inclusive.



DISCOVER

♦♦ A WORLD OF ♦♦
difference

In a small country, which is the 109th in the world in land area, Portugal contains 14 wine regions producing unique and distinct wines. From hot and dry to humid and cold climates, Portugal manages to produce many different styles of wines.

The Wines of Portugal stand out for their wealth of grape varieties and diversity of terroirs, combined with the ancient wisdom and knowledge of its people. With a heritage of more than 250 native grapes, Portuguese wines offer a unique experience, taking advantage of the diversity of Portuguese terroirs and grape varieties, thanks to the techniques and people who make them. In their diversity, they are versatile and gastronomic. In their quality, they rival the best in the world.

In 2024, the Wines of Portugal brand will be present on 5 continents, in 21 priority markets: USA, Brazil, Angola, Canada, China, Japan, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, Ukraine, Mexico, United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Poland, Belgium, Denmark, Israel, France, Spain and Portugal.

Under the Wines of Portugal brand, around 89 initiatives will be carried out, 56 of which will be attended by Portuguese Producers and 33 of which will not.

These initiatives, aimed at increasing the awareness of Wines of Portugal, will be divided into 4 major headings - Events, Education, Promotion and Communication and will continue to focus on the message that the Wines of Portugal remain genuine and with strong Portuguese character.

Find out what Events and Education initiatives Wines of Portugal will be doing in 2024.



EVENT PLAN

February			
12-14	Paris	France	Vinexpo / Wineparis
March			
20	London	United Kingdom	Grand Tasting
10-12	Düsseldorf	Germany	Prowein
13-14	Valladolid	Spain	Fine #Wine Tourism Expo
20-22	Chengdu	China	CFDF
April			
8	Chicago	USA	Grand Tasting
10	Houston	USA	Grand Tasting
15	New York	USA	Grand Tasting
17	San Francisco	USA	Grand Tasting
22	Macao	China	Masterclass
22	Florianópolis	Brazil	Roadshow Brazil
24	Curitiba	Brazil	Roadshow Brazil
29	Montréal	Canada	Grand Tasting
May			
1	Toronto	Canada	Grand Tasting
6	Calgary	Canada	Grand Tasting
8	Vancouver	Canada	Grand Tasting
13-16	São Paulo	Brazil	Apas Show
21	Guangzhou	China	Grand Tasting
23	Macao	China	Grand Tasting
28	Mexico City	Mexico	Grand Tasting
June			
3	Hamburg	Germany	Grand Tasting
7	Kiev	Ukraine	Grand Tasting
7-9	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil	Wines of Portugal in Brazil
10	Zürich	Switzerland	Vinum Weintours
13-15	São Paulo	Brazil	Wines of Portugal in Brazil
17	Porto Alegre	Brazil	Partnership ABS Sommelier School
19-20	Luanda	Angola	Wines of Portugal Festival
25	Seoul	South Korea	Grand Tasting
27	Busan	South Korea	Grand Tasting
24	Fortaleza	Brazil	Partnership ABS Sommelier School
26	Campos Jordão	Brazil	Partnership ABS Sommelier School
July			
1	Tokyo	Japan	Grand Tasting
2	Tokyo	Japan	Wine and Food Pairing Masterclass
October			
1-3	São Paulo	Brazil	Prowine
7	Warsaw	Poland	Grand Tasting
9	Zürich	Switzerland	Grand Tasting
21	Vitória	Brazil	Wines of Portugal Academy
21	Brussels	Belgium	Grand Tasting
November			
8	Basel	Switzerland	Weinfestival Basel (Vinum)
12-14	Shanghai	China	Prowine
25	Zürich	Switzerland	Vinum Weintours
4	Oslo	Norway	Scandinavian Roadshow
6	Stockholm	Sweden	Scandinavian Roadshow
7	Copenhagen	Denmark	Scandinavian Roadshow
8-10	Stockholm	Sweden	Sthlm Food and Wine Fair
11	Stockholm	Sweden	Masterclass for Trade



Maurizio Cerio

Maurizio Cerio: a modern sommelier, is a passionate sommelier

Don Alfonso 1890, the iconic two-star Michelin restaurant located in Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi, is located in the beautiful Sorrento Peninsula of Campania. Long regarded as one of the finest restaurants in Southern Italy, it is celebrated for its exemplary service, focus on local ingredients, and its deep wine list, which boasts more than 1,800 labels and 27,000 bottles of wine. The man responsible for the wine collection, housed in an ancient subterranean vault, is Head Sommelier **Maurizio Cerio**. Having grown up in the restaurant, Cerio has dedicated more than 35 years to service. He has become a familiar face to gourmards seeking the finest wines and food whilst on a Campania retreat. With such a long-established career and a wine list built on serving classic wines to their devoted clientele, ASI asked Cerio how he keeps his list and his staff evolving in such a classic environment.

“You always have to be thinking 360 degrees, keeping your wine list in tune with your customers’ tastes.”

According to Cerio, one way to keep the wine list modern is "to give more space to your own region. You always have to be thinking 360 degrees, keeping your wine list in tune with your customers' tastes. In terms of keeping the list progressive, I am always searching for small wineries in Campania to introduce to the wine list. If you focus on adding more local, it is easy enough when you have 1,800 wines on the list, to keep a balance between these wines and wines from the rest of the world."

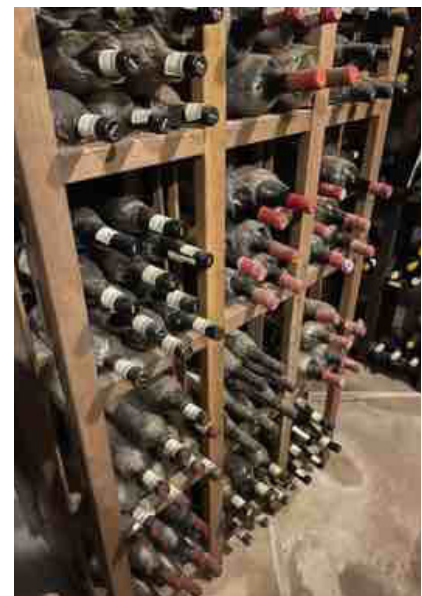
With almost 40 years of experience as a sommelier, Cerio has witnessed the tides of change within the wine industry. However, he notes, "there have been even more changes in our customers. They are increasingly attentive, knowledgeable, and demanding. Each customer now comes with their own background

with wine, and above all with their own unique tastes."

Ultimately, regardless of the era, Cerio says a great modern sommelier must be passionate. Thus, when hiring, he focuses less on certification and

work experience and more on who the sommelier is and where their passions lie. A sommelier must love wine. "A wine must be tasted by a sommelier and recommended to the customer out of passion." While he acknowledges the value of certifications in terms of wine knowledge, he prefers to focus on sommeliers who can relate to the clientele along with their passion for food and drink. Ultimately, he reminds us that a great sommelier is a great listener. "Being scholastic is absolutely not a flaw, but something else is needed near the table. It is practice and experience." They must also be humble and thoughtful. "One piece of advice I can give to future sommeliers is to listen more closely to the guests at your tables and remember it is not your duty to show how much you know. It is to find them a wine they like."

While much of Cerio's philosophy is rooted in the time-honoured traditions of hospitality, he isn't afraid to incorporate technology into the restaurant. With 27,000 wines to manage, he relies on it to help manage the inventory, and with so many nooks and crannies in the cellar, "the iPad greatly simplifies the search for a specific wine for the customer. Of course, I realise that a paper list has its charm and will always be available for customers that prefer not to select their wine with a tablet."





Somm-thing to Savour Slowly:

A history of sommellerie

By Kristin Perrin

The etymology and evolution of the word sommelier surprisingly did not begin around the dinner table. Its history was born out of the Old French term *somier*, for ‘pack animal’— watched over by a *sommerier* who was responsible for not only the animals, but their cargo, too. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Middle French term transitioned into *soumelier*, shifting its meaning slightly to specified cargo. The modern-day spelling of the word mutated into *sommelier*, and that precious cargo is now wine and other craft beverages, and occasionally fine cigars.

Where it all began: Wine stewardship in ancient cultures

Ancient Greek and Roman civilisations referred to individuals entrusted with the remarkable responsibility of overseeing wine production, storage, and service as 'wine stewards.' Their roles were largely to maintain the integrity and quality of the wine selection available to thirsty patrons. Wine stewardship meant firsthand understanding of winemaking techniques, and an incredible ability to discern good quality wine versus poor — deeming them as well-respected figures in society as a result. Extensive wine knowledge was power!

The Middle Ages: When wine became luxurious

Flashback to the Middle Ages, when the status of wine became viewed as a luxury item by society. Affluent individuals that had the means and access to exquisite wines would often employ wine stewards to help manage their liquid inventory accordingly. This was done all in the name of product preservation, and the enhancement of one's richly vinous experience.

"A sommelier is a translator of taste, the one who helps to understand the emotions that the wine creates."

– Andreas Larsson, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2007

Royal butlers once sourced wines for the Kings of England during the 1300s, for both personal consumption and entertaining their kingdoms. It was usually the finer wines of the prized vintages snatched up for the kings themselves, leaving the lesser quality vin-de-table versions for meant to be shared with their guests. What a noble selfless act!

Demonstrating similar roles and trends comparable to modern day sommeliers, wine stewards during Middle Ages were tasked with sourcing reputable wine and ample quantities to last the households or castles during both good and bad vintages. This was all done by buying in bulk to curb the price, when required. As always, supply shortages due to challenging vintages dictated inflated market pricing. The modern sommelier now echoes a similar role in restaurants today, concentrating efforts on securing bottles from acclaimed vintages while searching for overperformers from week vintages and well-made but declassified juice in less-acclaimed years to offer value seekers and as house pours.

Sixteenth century swirls: The genesis of a sommelier

The 16th century is arguably the birth of the sommelier role as we recognise it today, a celebrated wine connoisseur minus the academic merit (which arrived later in the 20th century.) Sixteenth century sommeliers were mostly wine stewards assigned with not only meticulous management of wine cellars and their inventory, but also ensuring efficient and prompt wine service to V.I.P guests. This desirable role was yet to attain the specialised knowledge of worldly wine regions and grape varieties of today.

The nineteenth century: Sommeliers begin to swoon with exceptional wine and food pairings

The word *sommelier* is derived from the French word for “butler” or “servant” and was introduced during the 19th century. As the notion of a restaurant expanded from tavern traditions to a more elevated dining experience, the concept of a sommelier emerged as an essential realm of wine service, complementary to any skilled chef’s culinary creations. The sommelier was well-equipped with wine knowledge, began to remove the guesswork for guests by offering carefully curated, hand selected wines for a sublime match-made-in-heaven on multi course menus.

Revolutionary restaurants: A traditional influence on a modern sommelier’s role

The word ‘restaurant’ is a derivative of the French root word “to restore”, which is exactly the goal of timeless hospitality be it now, or even during trying times of the French Revolution, where the notion really began. Prior to the French Revolution à la carte menus and fine dining restaurants did not exist, only humble stews and pies were available as daily offerings in local taverns to feed the masses. By the late 1700s, there were only a few premier à la carte restaurants offering up made-to-order dishes in France; Antoine Beauvillier’s ‘Beauvillier’ and ‘Boulangier’, along with Bœuf à la Mode (1792-1936).’

“A sommelier is not just someone who knows wine, but someone who can help others understand and appreciate it.”

– Gerard Basset, *ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2010*

The movement solidified this new genre of eating in upscale establishments with a promising future of serving aristocrats throughout the Revolution; that is until it ended. When it did, many chefs were left jobless with the aristocrats wiped out. As a result, many opened their own small shops cooking for the public, and this became the driving force behind early 19th century restaurants. Such venues began to demand beverage professionals who could offer a service like early wine stewards. These stewards were often banished to the basement by those disgruntled chefs, who had lost their luxurious appointments following the end of the Revolution. To think, the modern sommelier’s role was born out of violence in the French Revolution is nothing short of bittersweet!

The early sommelier’s role varied from its modern version today: they dealt directly with négociants, managing the élevage of wine in their cellars stored in barrels, rather than working with agents or the chateau themselves as a modern sommelier might.

It wasn’t until the 19th and 20th century that estate bottling came into practice, a pivotal moment in restaurant wine list history. This meant shipping corked glass bottles all over the world complete with labels on them to inform eager wine connoisseurs of their origin was finally feasible. By adding global access and distribution, not only could bottles be aged differently, but the process was more transparent for patrons and trustworthy knowing that the wine was bottled under the estate’s careful watch.

The global wine trade exploded! The newly available packaging making it possible to serve guests a meal appropriate portion of wine. Suddenly restaurant wine lists were able to offer a much wider variety of wines from all over the world than before. The aging potential of cellar wines in restaurants extended and grew exponentially alongside the sommelier’s rare-find and specialty collections.

As Europe’s love affair for wine flourished, the wine steward’s role transcended boundaries and the demand brought forth a specialised profession: the early wine expert. One whose profound wine knowledge in specific regions, varieties, producers and vintages played a critical role in elevating wine appreciation as an art form.

Meanwhile, in North America, two of NYC’s earliest sommeliers in Manhattan established their careers at The Algonquin Hotel in the

“The true test of a sommelier is not how many wines they know, but how well they can match a wine to a person.”

– Alpana Singh, *Master Sommelier*



A Historic Restaurant

1930s-40s including the glass ceiling breaking Elizabeth Bird, who poured some of the finest liquid art for the famous Round Table club of writers to drown their musings in. These were exciting times in the nouveau wine era!

Somm improvement over the years: The evolution of wine experts

The modern sommelier's role and popular profession has witnessed tremendous growth in the industry over the years. This was all made possible by the changes and challenges of the twentieth century. The 21st century sommelier remains a revered wine expert with unparalleled specialised wine knowledge, with direct experience and expertise via the introduction of comprehensive sommelier training courses and global certification programmes,

including ASI's own ASI Diploma and Certification 1 and 2. These standards of excellence in the industry are the profession's commitment to a mastery in wine stewardship by offering a trusted gold standard for wine service. A sommelier's influential role of wine selection and direct line access through active engagement with winemakers brings an added level of confidence to both consumer and distributor. After all, the best kind of advertising is by word of mouth!

The future of wine continues to blossom into a multidimensional industry, one where many people of various backgrounds and industries by accident or on purpose find themselves in the wine world as a second career, fueled by passion, curiosity, and a thirst for wine knowledge. When these different disciplines collide, a new level of collective wine knowledge both integrates and expands.

"A sommelier is not just a wine expert, but a storyteller."

– Laura Maniec,
Master Sommelier,
CEO/Founder Corkbuzz



Remembering the

Best Sommelier of the World

Runner-Ups

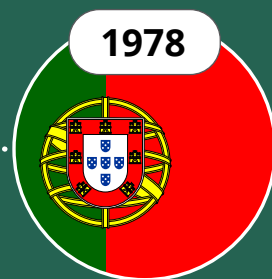
For every ASI Best Sommelier of the World winner, there is someone that shared the stage, narrowly missing out on the glory that comes with being a world champion. Remarkably, many runners-up return the following competition to challenge again. Famously, the likes of Gérard Basset, and Paolo Basso were runners-up on multiple occasions before taking home the title. Will Denmark's Nina Jensen follow in their footsteps?



1969
Brussels, Belgium
 Runner-up: Jean-Marie Stoeckel (France)



1971
Milan, Italy
 Runner-up: Fulvio Farina (Monaco)



1978
Estoril, Portugal
 Runner-up: Jean-Claude Jambon (France)



1989
Paris, France
 Runner-up: Marc Wattier (Belgium)



1986
Venice, Italy
 Runner-Up: Bruno Casetta (Italy)



1983
Brussels, Belgium
 Runner-up: José de Brito Fernandes (Portugal)



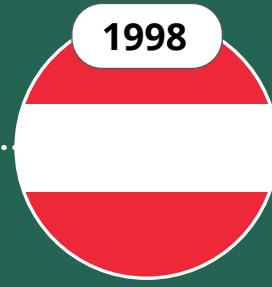
1992

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
 Runner-up: Gérard Basset
 (United Kingdom)



1995

Tokyo, Japan
 Runner-up: Olivier Poussier
 (France)



1998

Vienna, Austria
 Runner-up: Eric Beaumard
 (France)



2007

Rhodes, Greece
 Runner-up: Gérard Basset
 (United Kingdom), Paolo Basso
 (Switzerland)



2004

Athens, Greece
 Runner-up: Gérard Basset
 (United Kingdom)



2000

Montreal, Canada
 Runner-up: Paolo Basso
 (Switzerland)



2010

Santiago, Chile
 Runner-up: Paolo Basso
 (Switzerland)



2013

Tokyo, Japan
 Runner-up: Véronique Rivest
 (Canada)



2016

Mendoza, Argentina
 Runner-up: David Biraud
 (France)



ASI

DEPUIS 1969



2023

Paris, France
 Runner-up: Nina Jensen
 (Denmark)



2019

Antwerp, Belgium
 Runner-up: Nina Jensen
 (Denmark)

ASI is



Michèle Chantôme on the Evolution of Sommellerie and ASI

2024 marks a special year for ASI as it celebrates its 55th anniversary. Few people have been more involved in the association over its history than **Michèle Chantôme**. She has held numerous roles, including Secretary General, Director of Marketing & Communications. Currently, she serves as Vice-President of Africa and the Middle East and ASI Ambassador. Many lovingly refer to her as the godmother of sommeliers.

In her current role Chantôme as Vice-President Africa and the Middle East, she is in charge of pushing sommellerie to corners of the world that just a few years ago many would have thought impossible. In the past, sommellerie was limited in Africa particularly as you left its poles. Morocco and South Africa have been the anchors of the region, with Zimbabwe and Mauritius more recently joining ASI as member associations. With the recent application of Lebanon for observer status, Chantôme is supporting ASI's first move to the Levant, helping navigate the complicated issues of a region as complex as it is historic. Chantôme points to Israel, the Emirates, Congo, Kenya, and Nigeria along with the resort rich island of Seychelles as potential places for the new associations. Chantôme says "Tourism is developing quite rapidly (in these countries). There are some really, high level hotels and restaurants that need sommeliers. Unfortunately, wine and service education levels are quite low currently. We will need to teach them everything."

When Chantôme started to get involved with ASI in the early 1980s there were less than 20 member associations. At the time Chantôme oversaw the Ruinart Trophy. After attending the ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest in 1983,

"Another point of evolution has been the professionalism of ASI over recent years."



Michèle Chantôme

FEATURE ARTICLE

ASI is 55: Michèle Chantôme on the Evolution of Sommellerie and ASI



1969 Best Sommelier of the World

Chantôme had the idea of creating continental contests for Ruinart. In 2007, when Kazuyoshi Kogai was elected President of ASI and Ruinart was ending its sponsorship of the trophy, Chantôme began working directly with ASI. "At the time Moët & Chandon, like Ruinart part of LVMH family, was taking over the role of supporting sommellerie, but there was no need to have two competing contests. I went to Kazuyoshi Kogai and offered him, the competition for Europe, Americas and Asia & Oceania. He said to me 'but we don't know how to manage this.' He asked me to take charge of them. This is how I officially became involved in ASI."

When Shinya Tasaki took over as president, Chantôme was then asked to become Deputy Secretary General, working along Gérard Basset. Chantôme first came to know Gérard when he won the title of Best Sommelier of the United Kingdom, and subsequently Best Sommelier of Europe in 1996. Over the years Chantôme and Basset developed a special bond, so it was only natural when Tasaki asked Basset to be Secretary General, one of Basset's conditions was Chantôme work alongside him. Not surprisingly when asked about some of the special moments in ASI history, Chantôme says "he struggled to become the ASI Best Sommelier of the World. He tried six

times. When he (Basset) won the title in Chile, in 2010, it was really exciting."

Basset became an ambassador of sommellerie, as according to Chantôme "have all the world and continental champions. Thanks to Basset (and the other champions) sommellerie became more and more renowned, all over the world. The winners of the contests have helped to attract young people to the field as they have some idols, icons, to emulate. This is very important." Their inspiration, and the growing strength of ASI, has helped attract dozens more member country associations to join ASI. With a truly global association (ASI now counts 68 member associations), the role

of ASI has expanded. "ASI has done much for the competitions, of course, but now also for the exams. In 2012, the ASI Diploma, we launched during Shinya's tenure. However, this exam is at a very a high level, and was not meant for everybody everywhere around the world. As we've grown there are some small associations that are not well equipped to teach their students to this level. To support we created two other levels, Certification 1 and Certification 2. These have been a real great success. I am very happy because I get to work with another ASI Best Sommelier of the World, Giuseppe Vaccarini, who also used to be an ASI president, on this."

Another point of evolution for Chantôme has been the professionalism of ASI over recent years. Chantôme says "currently we have a very good team, with a lot of people who are really motivated. Everyone has the same objectives, the same goals. We also have a very good leader in William Wouters. He listens to everyone and following that we discuss and then we make decisions. This is very important because, in the past, some presidents didn't really listen to others, including members of the board. They had their own ideas, and everything went their way. Now decisions are based on exchanges of ideas."



Serge Dubs

This new level of professionalism which includes bi-monthly meetings, and a small staff, has allowed ASI to raise the bar of its offerings. Chantôme identifies the development of the continental contests, the ASI Guidelines, ASI Tutorials and ASI Bootcamp as initiatives that have pushed the association to a new level.

Chantôme also identifies the annual General Assembly as an important moment each year for the association, describing them more like family reunions than business meetings. "ASI is a big family. It's more than friendship. There's a special connection within the association, which is exemplified at the assemblies. It's funny because you have very young people and older people, but everybody is really on the same page. Everybody enjoying the same good moments with gastronomy, with wine and good, life, I would say."

"Their inspiration, and the growing strength of ASI, has helped attract dozens more member country associations to join ASI."



Chantôme would know better than anyone, as she's attended nearly 40 ASI General Assemblies. All have been special to her "but if I had to pick, a special GA (General Assembly), it was, in the late, 90s in, Zagreb, Croatia. We were hosted for this GA just after the war there. We had to travel across the country, witnessing the remnants of war. There were cattle in the meadows because, there were mines and ruins everywhere. It was really a disaster. The landscape was terrible. But when we arrived in a small village, all the people from the local wineries and the villages came in their folkloric clothes. They were singing and dancing and ready to host us. Everybody was crying because it was so moving."

Chantôme also acknowledges the contributions of the Japan Sommelier Association. Every time we have gone to Japan, whether it is for a competition or an ASI General Assembly, the events have been amazing. They are incredible. They love wine, they love life, and they showcase it via their gastronomy, culture and hospitality." They approach hosting an event like a sommelier. Chantôme concludes "as Serge Dubs used to say a sommelier is here to make you, the guest happy."



From Plant to Plate and Glass

With Dean Haberland and Robbert de Gans, Restaurant de Kas

Dean Haberland and **Robbert de Gans** are two young sommeliers working at Amsterdam's Restaurant de Kas restaurant. De Kas is known throughout The Netherlands as a model of sustainability, having earned the MICHELIN Green Star for its commitment to "from plant to plate" cuisine. The restaurant cultivates around 300 varieties of vegetables, herbs, and fruits onsite. The two 20-something sommeliers have embraced the philosophy of de Kas and become leaders of sustainable sommellerie despite their youthful age. De Gans found his wine calling via culinary

school, before stumbling on de Kas restaurant, where he decided to explore the front side of the business and learn about wine under the tutelage of Edwin Raben. Haberland, the senior of the two, worked his way up in the industry. His first role as a teenager was a dishwasher, before subsequently moving to the front of the house, eventually working at Restaurant Bridges, where he learned about wine from sommelier Lotte Wolf. De Gans then moved to Restaurant De Kas, where he has been an integral part of the team for the last five years.

ASI: Do you think as modern sommeliers, you have a responsibility to think about climate change and the environment as part of building a wine programme?

Dean Haberland (DH): The short answer is yes. I think everyone in the industry should feel some sort of responsibility for climate change. Since we only use products that are in season in the kitchen, we might be one step ahead. But I think every sommelier must understand that climate change is a huge problem for winemakers and grape-growers. If we want to keep enjoying the things we love, we must be realistic and make sure the wines we consume come from honest grape-growers that love and respect nature. From vigneronns that don't focus on high yields, or with monoculture mindsets. We want to purchase from those that respect the earth and not have vines on soils that are dying because they've been sprayed for decades with herbicides and pesticides. This is why we prefer working with wineries that care for their vineyards and for nature without sacrificing quality.

"Just like the vegetable centered dishes we serve; we try to work with wines that are pure and energetic that excite people."

– Dean Haberland

Robbert de Gans (RG): I agree with Dean. As an example, I'd like to highlight the fact that we, like other sommeliers, are somewhat increasingly moving away from the 'obligated' statuses of the French classification system by featuring many Vin de France or lesser prestigious appellations on our list. The reason I mention this is because I believe the appellation system is lagging far behind in terms of development alongside the environmental circumstances the growers face. We are increasingly prioritising the quality of the wine, the respect for the surroundings in which it was produced, and its alignment with our own values. Instead of merely selling prestigious names and locations where appellation rules strain crops and pressure winemakers in unsustainable ways amid rapidly changing climates.

I'm not diminishing the beauty of wines from those places I mentioned; in fact, we serve quite a few exquisite wines from top-tier producers. We are simply seeking a balance between modern and classic, always striving for organic, biodynamic wines or their closest approximation. Another aspect we're delving deeper into is into vessels. We're highly interested and already discussing with one of our importers about options like KeyKegs. I'm also eager to explore what the future holds, such as canned wine, but I believe the market isn't quite ready for it yet, sadly.



Robbert de Gans

ASI: De Kas is well known for its seasonal, vegetable focused menus. How does seasonality impact your wine list decisions?

DH: Just like the vegetable centered dishes we serve; we try to work with wines that are pure and energetic that excite people. The wines should speak for themselves and be free of any major faults. As far as the wine list goes all year round, we offer wines that are very fresh and not too bombastic. In the summer we feature more white wine pairings and towards the fall and winter we serve more red wine, like most restaurants.

RG: I feel like seasonality impacts the wines we serve more via our wine pairing programme than the actual wine list itself. Working with seasonal-based menus asks for a broad range of characteristics from the wines to choose from. We are lucky to work with very talented like-minded importers. Via them we find clean, powerful and diverse



(natural) wines which are exciting and lively and pair well with our menu.

ASI: How do you practically introduce the concept of sustainability into your wine list?

DH: As a restaurant that grows their own vegetables and fruits, we try to get our hands on products that are as local as possible. For wine that is a bit trickier because the Netherlands isn't the best wine producing country. Most soil types here aren't even suitable for growing quality grapes. That's why winemakers here tend to use a lot of hybrid grape varieties. We do, however, try to get wines from regions as close as possible to our restaurant. This means we'll have a lot of wines from Germany and northern France, these are also the wines that tend to work well with our cuisine. We do realise that trucks have a greater carbon footprint than when you ship wines by boat from New World winemaking countries, but this is where we drew the line.

RG: Besides our distance related wine menu, no further than a thousand kilometers from where we are is the 'rule', we are also looking for other exciting developments. KeyKegs are very fun but also an efficient option. More importantly things like KeyKegs for wine are positive with

respect to sustainability as they provide efficiencies with respect to transport. Besides these options I would love to further explore the possibilities of serving wines from cans or other vessels that are more sustainable than bottles. I think de Kas is also 'THE' place to try these things. People visit our restaurant with a like-minded mindset, so I think it will be a little easier for us than others to get away with serving wine in these vessels.



Dean Haberland

“We are increasingly prioritising the quality of the wine, the respect for the surroundings in which it was produced, and its alignment with our own values.”

– Robbert de Gans

Photo: Elena Wolfe

Hannah Williams of Blue Hill at Stone Barns: **where sustainability is the legacy**



FEATURE ARTICLE

Hannah Williams is the Head Sommelier and Beverage Director at New York’s famed Blue Hill at Stone Barns. Originally from Miami, Florida, Williams took a circuitous path to leading the beverage programme at one of the United States’ best-known restaurants. Although as she says, “as a former ballet dancer, used to being in a niche, hyper-dedicated world, working at the highest level of hospitality wasn’t foreign to me.” While studying English at New York’s prestigious Barnard College, Williams took an opportunity in her junior year to attend the University of Edinburgh. Williams joined a wine society at the college, admittedly for the novelty of being able to drink wine at 19 (the legal drinking age in the United States is 21). She soon discovered a talent for wine and was promoted to the university’s competitive blind tasting team. This experience afforded Williams the opportunity to travel to the classic wine regions of Europe. Upon her return to the United States to finish her degree, she took an intern position with Wine & Spirits magazine to combine her scholastic and outside interests. Williams officially had the wine bug. Soon thereafter she was convinced to work at a new Italian restaurant, called La Sirena, before eventually transitioning to Blue Hill at Stone Barns.

ASI: When you inherited the job of managing the wine programme at Blue Hill at Stone Barns did it feel like an honour or a heavy burden?

Hannah Williams (HW): It’s definitely both. A wine programme of this stature and size is really a legacy programme. I feel like I’m reaping rewards of the wine directors before me, and not just the last one. When there is an opportunity to cellar wines for more than a decade, that’s special. You also learn a lot from building a programme from scratch, which I had seen at my previous job, as part of the wine team, but it’s another ball game when you’re inheriting the history of a place. It was intimidating at first, but I was up for the challenge.

“Through being here, I’ve learned very quickly the difference between true sustainable practices and ones that aren’t.”

Hannah Williams of Blue Hill at Stone Barns: where sustainability is the legacy

ASI: Blue Hill is famous for its commitment to the sustainability which includes Stone Barns Center, a nonprofit agriculture and gastronomy research center with a mission to catalyse an ecological food culture in the Northeast United States. How do you infuse the same ethos into your wine programme?

HW: I have learned here to immerse myself in sustainability and seasonality, which was a bit of a foreign concept to me growing up in Florida, where farmers' markets were just fruit stands and there was no 'tomato' season per se. The education programme here is demanding. To simply deliver food to a table there is so much to learn. Our front of house team are educators relaying so much information about agriculture and farming to our guests. Through being here, I've learned very quickly the difference between true sustainable practices and ones that aren't, and I've applied this to my understanding of the wine world. While I've never been super outdoorsy or agriculturally minded, I have discovered you don't need to have any (farming) experience to understand vine health. If you look at a row of vines and see dark, dead earth the vines aren't healthy. If you look at another row next and

see life, with insects, pollinators and things growing between the vines, it is. Philosophically, it has made me have to pay attention to things like that. Which leads me to support winemakers that are doing it correctly, whether that's in Champagne, Corsica, Long Island, or the Finger Lakes. It means a lot to make a wine list that earns a Grand Award from Wine Spectator, even if it involves omitting wines regardless of market demand. That says a lot.

ASI: So how does certification of organic, or biodynamic practices, for example, factor into your decision making?

HW: I never buy wines based on a certification. You need to think deeper. A good example is several Demeter certified Oregon Willamette Valley winemakers, who faced with wildfires and an infestation of a rare insect, that comes every 25 years, that lay eggs in the grape cluster, choose to use a non-chemical, but not Demeter certified spray. They aren't allowed to be certified Demeter anymore but are they any less sustainable? As such, I never buy based on an organic or biodynamic label. We're more interested in the story about the people, the families behind the wines, and how they as individuals

are working with their vineyards and their land. We can really promote this via the by the glass selections. Since we don't have a set menu, but essentially a tasting menu with wine pairings we can talk at length about the story of these wines. When we're selecting a wine to be in one of these slots, it's very important to us to be able to communicate to our customer who's making it, how they're making it, and where they're making it in a really personal and thoughtful way.

ASI: How do you deal with carbon print of heavy bottles? Do you ever consider wines in non-traditional packaging?

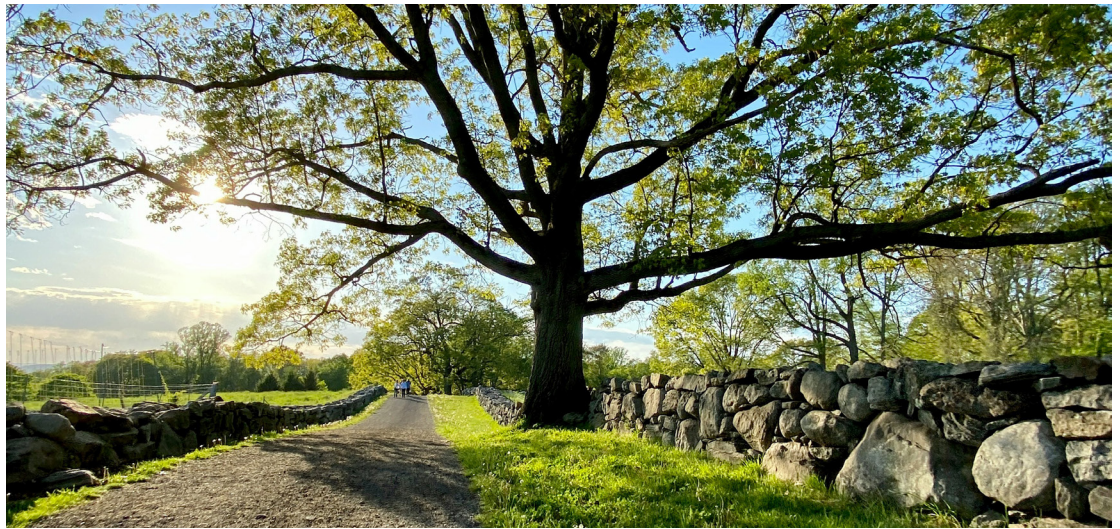
HW: That's just not in the cards for us at a fine dining level. During the pandemic, there was a moment that canned wine, for example, made sense, but it really isn't something we considered for the long-term. We continue to buy wine in glass bottles. That said, it is great we (the broader wine world) are having conversations about reducing bottle weight.

ASI: How does local play into your thought process?

HW: We have an international list, but we also love pouring and supporting local New York



Photo: Elena Wolfe



wines. There are some great local wines. Recently we have had the opportunity, for a large table, to open a magnum of 2010 Paumanok Assemblage, a Merlot dominant Bordeaux blend from the North Fork of Long Island. It was amazing! It's great to have local wines like this to introduce guest to, who might

have ordered a second growth Bordeaux, for example, and serve a wine like this. No one would have guessed it was from Long Island.

ASI: Are you finding customers more willing to experiment?

HW: Definitely! They

trust us to pick out wines from all over the world. You can take them to Corsica, or you can start them with a sparkling wine from the French Alps, but you can also introduce them to a dry Riesling from the Finger Lakes (New York) or a light Pinot blend coming from the North Fork of Long Island. It's just so fun to bring it back home by weaving in local wines alongside the classic wines of the world. I think this is really important.

ASI: What are other ways you craft a sustainable drinks programme?

HW: As beverage director I also oversee the bar programme. We do many things to ensure almost zero waste. Although, we don't

have a liquor production license, which means being careful with respect to fermentation. We focus on creating infusions. In fact, our bar programme is built around byproducts of the kitchen. Whether it's cilantro stems or corn cobs or leftover sorghum that we're turning into sorghum syrup, we're using those leftovers like an apothecary and as a first response to the waste that comes from the kitchen. And vice versa, the kitchen uses our waste. We collect any leftover wine, and either provide it to our chefs for cooking, or keep them to make things like vermouths and infusions. We are not able to distill, but we ferment like everything. We have someone dedicated on staff, purely to fermentation projects related to that.

ASI: Is this how you introduce sustainability via seasonality into your beverage programme?

HW: Yes. When it's winter, for example, we really must rely on preserved items rather than fresh ones. This is evident in our bar programme, which we're proud of. Since we only serve about 50 people, or less, a night these days we can create some special small batch products for them at the bar, using ingredients the kitchen gives us. We must work very closely with them, but I think that makes the end results the best they can be.

"It's just so fun to bring it back home by weaving in local wines alongside the classic wines of the world."

FEATURE ARTICLE

Hannah Williams of Blue Hill at Stone Barns: where sustainability is the legacy



Sake Study Tour

Introducing our Sake Study Tour, one of our initiatives aimed at sommeliers worldwide, limitedly inviting them to visit Sake Industries in Japan.

While Japan is a small country, it stretches from north to south, surrounded by seas and adorned with mountains in the inland areas. This geographical diversity results in varying climates and terrains, contributing to a rich and diverse food culture. Approximately 1,400 breweries across the country craft sake, reflecting the uniqueness of each region, all developed to complement Japan's diverse food culture.

During the Tour, participants start by acquiring fundamentals about sake production, raw materials, and unique characteristics compared to other alcoholic beverages. By focusing on specific regions, the tour delves into the reasons behind the distinct flavors of local sake and specialized topics such as water, rice varieties, climate, history, and food pairings.

A crucial element in sake production is koji, which is essential for fermentation. The tour includes visits to seed koji producers to understand the significance of koji in sake brewing, its necessity, and its impact on the flavor through interactions with the producers.

Moreover, the tour contains visits to soy sauce or miso manufacturer, passed-down seasoning using koji, and traditional crafts ateliers to enhance their comprehensive understanding of sake.

The tour, conducted from January 22 to 26, 2024, included visits to six breweries, a seed koji and a miso manufacturer, and a traditional crafts atelier in Nagano, Yamanashi, and Aichi prefectures. Participants toured the breweries, explored the water source and rice paddies, and engaged in discussions with producers, deepening their sake knowledge.

Sake, with its unique characteristics distinct from wine, is crafted through the dedication of skilled artisans in an exceptional natural environment.

For more information on each brewery's details, please refer to the link: <https://japansake.or.jp/sakagura/en/>

Make Me a Match

Fine Wine from 69?

1969, like many of the vintages of the late 60s and early 70s, was a difficult year for many regions, particularly for the red wines of Bordeaux. However, Burgundy, Champagne, Sauternes and other places proved capable of producing fine, if not robust wines. Piero Sattanino, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 1971 says speaking broadly of the vintage "it produced wines of delicate fragrance and final texture. 1971, the year I won the title, was by contrast an exceptional vintage with splendid harmony and balance, producing exceptionally plush, intense and wonderfully elegant, fragrant wines."

We asked **Piero Sattanino**, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2016 champion, **Arvid Rosengren**, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2023, **Raimonds Tomsons** along with **Lionel Lavail**, winemaker of Maison Cazes (part of ASI partner Advini) with a challenge. What if a guest, suggested in celebration of ASI's 55th anniversary they would bring over a special bottle of wine from the 1969 vintage to a dinner party you are hosting. What would you serve with the wine?

1969 Krug Brut/Piero Sattanino, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 1971

As it is the 1969 vintage, I would have some trepidation of the wine being 'alive.' Presuming it was cellared well, I would expect the wine to be of a light opal, topaz colour. If it still has life, I would serve the wine outside of the meal, introducing it more as a 'meditation' wine. If pressed to accompany it with food, I would suggest we have it with bruschetta topped with sheep's milk ricotta, a tapenade of Taggiasca (a cultivar of olives from Northwestern Italy, and Southeastern France better known as Niçoise) and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. The combination of these ingredients will cleanse the taste buds, helping to create a wine of some balance and moderate aromatic persistence. It would be a taste to discover!



Piero Sattanino



1969 Domaine Ramonet Bâtard Montrachet Grand Cru/Arvid Rosengren, ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2016

That would be a good surprise indeed. The oldest Ramonet Bâtard I've had is 10 years older than this and it was spectacular. Granted, 1969 is a different beast... so I'd probably want to keep a backup or two in hand just in case. That said, assuming the wine is in good condition - and why wouldn't it be in our own dream - this is definitely the kind of wine that both demands full attention, center stage and all the spotlight and reverence one can muster. We all live for the moments to try wines like these, imbibe history, terroir and human ingenuity. Especially at a gathering of friends. Any matching dish would need both hedonism and humility in equal doses. Nothing too ornate or over-wrought. Instead, good honest ingredients and classic cooking. I'd serve something that can capture both the acidity and the oxidative tones this wine is likely to show, matching both the complexity and depth of the wine. In my mind, I want the best grilled turbot, glistening with fat and collagen with beurre noisette - why not add some toasted hazelnuts, fennel and plenty of lemon? Let's hope we get a chance to try this out!

1969 Graham's Single Harvest Tawny Port/Raimonds Tomsons ASI Best Sommelier of the World 2023

While after a dinner cheese course would be an easy choice, I would prefer to serve this wine with pan fried foie gras with a Tawny Port reduction accompanied by caramelised walnuts, a savoury fig chutney and black truffle. This dish combines all the complex flavours of an aged Tawny Port such as dried fruits, walnuts, caramel and the earthy scent of truffle. Additionally, the structure, richness and lively acidity of this Tawny Port will cope with and support the fattiness and texture of the foie gras.



MAKE ME A MATCH!

Fine Wine from 69?

1969: a sweet and timeless vintage

With Lionel Lavail,
Director General, Maison Cazes



Lionel Lavail



MAKE ME A MATCH!

Few wines from the 1969 vintage have survived the test of time as well as Vin Doux Naturel from Roussillon. The sweet elixirs, crafted from naturally sweet, ripe grapes of Southern France and fortified via a process known as mutage before being aged in large foudres, seem almost youthful, especially when compared to wines from some of their northern neighbours. We ask **Lionel Lavail** of Maison Cazes to discuss why their 1969 Maison Cazes Rivesaltes Vin Doux Naturel (VDN) retains so much life and vitality, 55 years after harvest.

ASI: From your understanding how was the 1969 vintage for Vin Doux Naturel?

Lionel Lavail (LL): 1969 was a great vintage in Roussillon, for both sweet wines and red wines. The impact of vintages on sweet wines is less significant, thanks to our know-how in the wine making (the “mutage” process) and overall, because these sweet wines are aged in our specific century old barrels.

ASI: Why does Vin Doux Naturel and in particular Cazes Vin Doux Naturel age so well?

LL: Natural sweet wines (VDN) age so well because they live first in oxidative conditions, which can be between 20 and 40 years in our “foudres” (large oak barrels). Also, there is a perfect balance between the level of residual sugar (120 g/L) and the level of alcohol (16%) which allows the wine to age without any time limit.

ASI: How is the 1969 Cazes Vin Doux Naturel Rivesaltes presently showing?

LL: The 1969 is fresh, elegant and incredibly well-balanced. The palate reveals flavours of citrus and honey, walnut and peppermint on the finish.

ASI: Anytime you open a wine that is more than 50 years old it is a special occasion. If someone suggested, they would bring a bottle of the 1969 Cazes Vin Doux Naturel Rivesaltes to a dinner party you were hosting. How would you serve it?

LL: I would recommend a serving temperature of around 12 °C in a Burgundy glass. As for food pairings, a tarte tatin or a mature cheese would be perfect with this wine. You could also enjoy it on its own, to share in good company.

ASI: Your sweet wines are served at many of France and the world's top restaurants. Do you have any favourite experiences enjoying this wine at a restaurant?

LL: I've had an amazing Beijing duck with a glass of this outstanding VDN!

Fine Wine from 69?

Tech Somm?

With Benjamin Roffet and Romain Iltis

In the dynamic and ever-evolving world of wine, the role of the sommelier has expanded significantly beyond the traditional confines of white linen-clad dining rooms. While a new breed of sommeliers is populating more casual environs, such as wine bars, wine shops, and the tasting rooms of wineries, the tailored-dressed sommeliers working in our finest restaurants are also keeping up with modern times. Technology has become a more pervasive, necessary, and valuable part of the profession. We asked two sommeliers working at two of France's finest restaurants to offer their insights.

TECH TALK



Benjamin Roffe

Digital tools for managing wine inventories and supply chains have become indispensable to many. Even some of the most traditional sommeliers and restaurants are using technology to ease the laborious burden of inventory.

Benjamin Roffet, Best Sommelier of France 2010 and Head Sommelier at the Eiffel Tower's *Le Jules Verne*, utilises a computerised system to place orders which connects directly to their inventory. He says, "There is no more docket pad here. Here (*Le Jules Verne*) we take a more modern approach with respect to technology than the first restaurants I began working at in the 2000s." Likewise, **Romain Iltis**, Best Sommelier of France 2012 and Wine Director of Villa René Lalique,

codes each wine. Doing this allows them to track the sale, movement of each. As he says, "It's a big job at the beginning, but we can assess if a wine was missing during delivery, we are sure each bottle is billed, at the right price, and we have instantaneous updates of our cellar inventory."

Technology has also made the diffusion of information easier. Roffet uses WhatsApp (a cellular or Wi-Fi-enabled application that allows for the sharing of information) for staff meetings and turns to electronic information sheets to share details of wines, particularly those served by the glass, to their customers and staff.

Tech Somm?

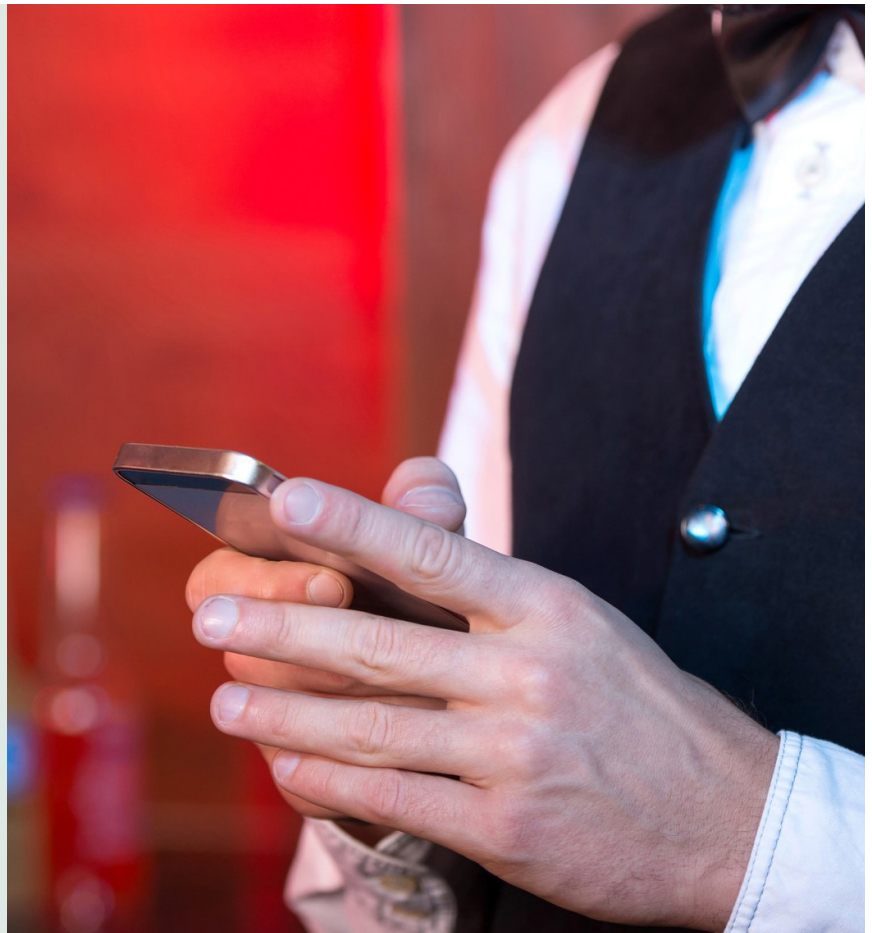
Looking ahead, the trajectory of the sommelier profession is set to undergo further transformation, driven by advancements in technology and shifts in consumer preferences. While some see the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help guide their selections, Iltis cautions relying on technology too much. While AI might be able to provide a food match, for example, Iltis says, "Pairings are so complex and intuitive. The fine details of the food of the chef and the palate of a guest can't be transferred to a computer programme. It's about the discussion and exchange between the guest, the sommelier, and what they have in their cellar. Relying on the sommelier is a much better way to find a new discovery than reading it on an iPad."

The sommelier profession is becoming more diverse and technology-driven, requiring sommeliers to adapt to new tools and trends while still maintaining the depth of knowledge and personal touch that define their expertise. As the wine industry continues to evolve, so too will the role of the sommelier, promising a future that is as rich and varied as the wines they champion. As for fully embracing technology in every aspect of the restaurant, Iltis cautions, "I think that in this busy and connected world, the restaurant is one of the places to disconnect and have real human contact."



Romain Iltis

"As the wine industry continues to evolve, so too will the role of the sommelier, promising a future that is as rich and varied as the wines they champion."



Member Association Spotlight

Taking Sommellerie in Argentina to New Heights



“This international collaboration enriches the AAS, providing its members with a broader perspective and more opportunities for professional development.”

Under the presidency of **Marcela Rienzo**, the Asociación Argentina de Sommeliers (AAS) continues to set ambitious goals, much like her esteemed predecessor and now ASI Vice-President Americas **Matías Prezioso**. According to Rienzo, the success of the association is measured through a multifaceted approach that includes membership growth, educational advancements, increased activities, sponsorship support, and member commitment. “Our main goal is to raise the level of the sommellerie in Argentina,” Rienzo stated, emphasising the active role of the association in achieving this through collaboration with 82 sponsoring wineries and the organisation of diverse programmes ranging from language workshops to master classes with international speakers.

With 721 active members, of which 660 are professional sommeliers, the AAS represents a significant community within the Argentine wine industry. The association’s efforts to create a vibrant and supportive environment for sommeliers are evident in its robust calendar of activities and the rich educational content provided to its members, including a monthly newsletter featuring interviews, guest writers, and the latest news from the wine world.

A Mandate of Promotion and Awareness

The AAS's mandate goes beyond just supporting sommeliers. It aims to promote the culture of Argentine wine and other beverages, whilst advocating for moderate and responsible consumption. "The AAS has to be the place where all sommeliers belong," Rienzo noted, highlighting the importance of building a community and support network among professionals in the field. Achieving these objectives requires hard work, proactive initiatives, and a collaborative spirit among the board members and the wider sommelier community.

The Benefits of International Collaboration

According to Rienzo, membership in the ASI offers the AAS a platform for global leadership, knowledge sharing, and participation in the global sommelier community. Rienzo expressed pride in having Matías Prezioso on the board, noting his role as a source of inspiration for the association. This international collaboration enriches the AAS, providing its members with a broader perspective and more opportunities for professional development.

"With a clear vision and a committed team, the AAS is poised to continue its impactful work, shaping the future of sommellerie in Argentina and beyond."



Education and Continuous Learning
While not a sommelier school, the AAS plays a crucial role in the ongoing education and training of its members. Recognising the disparities in academic offerings across the country, the association has implemented a free AAS exam accessible to sommeliers from non-endorsed programmes, showcasing its commitment to inclusivity and the advancement of sommelier standards nationwide.

Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, Rienzo plans to maintain the focus continuing "on its path of work and commitment to excellence." Plans include hosting events outside Buenos Aires to decentralise activities, even if a challenge given the financial crisis plaguing the nation. There are also plans to host a national best sommelier contest by 2025, reflecting the association's continued commitment to fostering talent and celebrating excellence

in the Argentine sommelier community. Rienzo concludes "the prospect of a contest excites us because we know how much it means for the candidates and for the Argentine sommelier community."

Under the leadership of Marcela Rienzo, the Asociación Argentina de Sommeliers exemplifies the power of community, education, and collaboration in advancing the sommelier profession. With a clear vision and a committed team, the AAS is poised to continue its impactful work, shaping the future of sommellerie in Argentina and beyond. Joining Rienzo on the board are Vice President, Natalia Suárez, General Secretary, Andrés Lafarge and Treasurer, Máximo Lucioni. The AAS board additionally includes Paz Levinson, Rodrigo Khon, Valeria Gamper, Pablo Colina, Andrea Donadío, Andrea Techera Rienzi, Eugenia Loria, César Vera Barros, Laura Sotelo, Marcelo Yanisky, and Sol Diebel.

Industry News



The Most Expensive Wine in the World: Apple TV releases documentary about Liber Pater

Love him or loath him, it is undeniable that Liber Pater's vigneron **Loïc Pasquet** provokes thought. The wine itself is marketed as the most expensive wine of the world, and his mission is to challenge how wine is being made in Bordeaux. An advocate of using indigenous varietals, those that dominated the vineyards of Bordeaux pre-phylloxera, planting vines on their own rootstock (francs de pied) and high-density vineyard plantings. He controversially calls traditional Bordeaux 'varietal soup'. Past his contentious pricing and the rhetoric Pasquet's quest for authenticity and his critique of modern viticulture practices are thought provoking. Discover more about Pasquet's mission by watching the documentary on Apple TV.

Wine of Moldova historic first appearance at Wine Paris & Vinexpo Paris 2024

Wines of Moldova were represented by 18 wineries at the event which attracted 4,070 exhibitors and 41,253 visitors. The highlight was a masterclass led by the Moldovan Ambassador to France, **Corina Calugaru**, **Stefan Iamandi** of the National Vine and Wine Office, and journalist **Robert Joseph**, celebrating "10 Revolutionary Years of Building a National Wine Brand." Ambassador Calugaru emphasised the transformation in the Moldovan wine industry, attributing success to the hard work of its people and international support. Iamandi noted the tripling of wine exports to western countries, marking a significant achievement in the industry's growth. Joseph remarked on the growing popularity of Moldovan wine, highlighting the challenges and opportunities ahead. The event was praised by participating wineries as a valuable platform to showcase alongside the world's leading producers, marking a significant milestone for Moldova's wine industry on the global stage.



Le Gavroche Auctions Cellar

Over 100 items from Le Gavroche, including rare wines and memorabilia, will be auctioned by Christie's from April 10-24, following the iconic two-Michelin-star restaurant's closure on January 13 after 57 years in London's Mayfair. Curated by **Michel Roux Jr**, who has led the establishment since 1991, the auction features top wines from Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Rhône, along with vintage Champagne, and Port. Highlights include a bottles of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Grand Cru, among others from prestigious producers. The auction also includes artworks and significant items from the restaurant, offering patrons a chance to own a piece of Le Gavroche history. Michel Roux Jr expressed a special connection to the memorabilia and wines dating back to the restaurant's opening in 1967. Christie's officials and the culinary world have shown enthusiasm for the sale, highlighting Le Gavroche's enduring legacy and its role in shaping the gastronomic landscape, having been a training ground for renowned chefs like Gordon Ramsay and Marco Pierre White.

Member News



Arman Seisebayev (Kazakhstan)



Lois Otavio Alvares Cruz (Brazil)



Vuk Vuletic (Serbia)

2023 Fourth Quarter Results

News has taken its time to reach us, but we are thrilled to announce the recent winners of national sommelier competitions from around the globe. The 2023 Best Sommeliers have been named for their respective countries: Arman Seisebayev from Kazakhstan, Luis Otavio Alvares Cruz from Brazil, and Vuk Vuletic from Serbia. We extend our congratulations to these winners, as well as to the runner-ups, for their remarkable achievements. Additionally, we applaud the ASI member associations for their role in organising these exceptional events and for their continuous efforts to elevate the standards of the sommelier profession worldwide.

MEMBER NEWS



Portuguese Sommelier Association Hosts Gala

Over the course of two days, on November 26th and 27th, Anadia, located in the Bairrada region, became the focal point for the Portuguese Sommelier Association's annual gala and national competitions: the National Sommelier Contest and the Fernando Ferramentas National Contest. This prestigious event attracted Portugal's top sommeliers, including those currently active in the field, for a series of challenging exams. Like the previous year, the event fostered camaraderie among attendees, including sommeliers, sector professionals, and enthusiasts, all gathered to celebrate and further the sommelier profession's development and recognition. Amidst the rigorous theoretical and practical exams, moments of relaxation were enjoyed, culminating in the Escanções de Portugal 2023 Grand Gala at the Curia Palace Hotel, where awards were presented and new members were inducted. Marc Pinto triumphed for the second consecutive year in the National Sommelier Contest, while Eugénia Queiroz, Bruno Monteiro, and Marek Zalewski distinguished themselves in the Fernando Ferramentas National Contest, showcasing the depth of talent and dedication within Portugal's sommelier community.





**ASI CONTEST BEST SOMMELIER OF
EUROPE & AFRICA**

**BELGRADE, SERBIA
NOV 11 - 15**