

ASI MAGAZINE

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NATURAL, REGENERATIVE, SUSTAINABLE
Isabelle Legeron MW, Anne Jones



ECO-HOSPITALITY
Job Seuren, John Hamel



eco-conscious
Sommellerie



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Welcome!



William Wouters,
President ASI

Cultivating Truth: The Future of Eco-Conscious Sommellerie

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

I have been a proponent of natural wine long before it became fashionable. In the 1990s, I opened my first wine bar in Antwerp, focusing on natural, sustainably produced wines. This was not out of altruism, but from a genuine desire to pour wines made by nature—crafted by farmers who respect their land, their vines, and their craft. I'm proud that this philosophy continues today, shared with my wife Filipa, and extended through our own family wine production.

At some point along the journey, as the natural wine bandwagon gained momentum, it was painted in bold technicolour. The rise of 'hipster wines' ushered in bottles adorned with eye-catching, street-art-style labels and filled with wines of often unnaturally vivid hues. It certainly added some colour to our industry and galvanised some new young sommeliers to rethink what great wine is. Did it also muddy the natural waters?

In my travels I quite often encounter wines with no indication of who grew the grapes or where they came from. Some vigneron who label their wines as *vin de pays*, *vin de table*, or *vino da tavola*, do so to challenge the establishment—and to them, I raise my glass. To the



William Wouters and Filipa Pato

others, I'll borrow an analogy from **Isabelle Legeron**, one of our guest editors. Natural wine is like a pond, the most natural, made with organic grapes, vinified naturally and not subjected to overuse of sulphur, are the middle of the pond. Some others are closer to the edge than they are the middle.

To that new wave of natural wine brands, many of the ones which are appealing to the enthusiasm of young consumers, they are often somewhere between just a faint ripple along the edge of the

William Wouters, President ASI

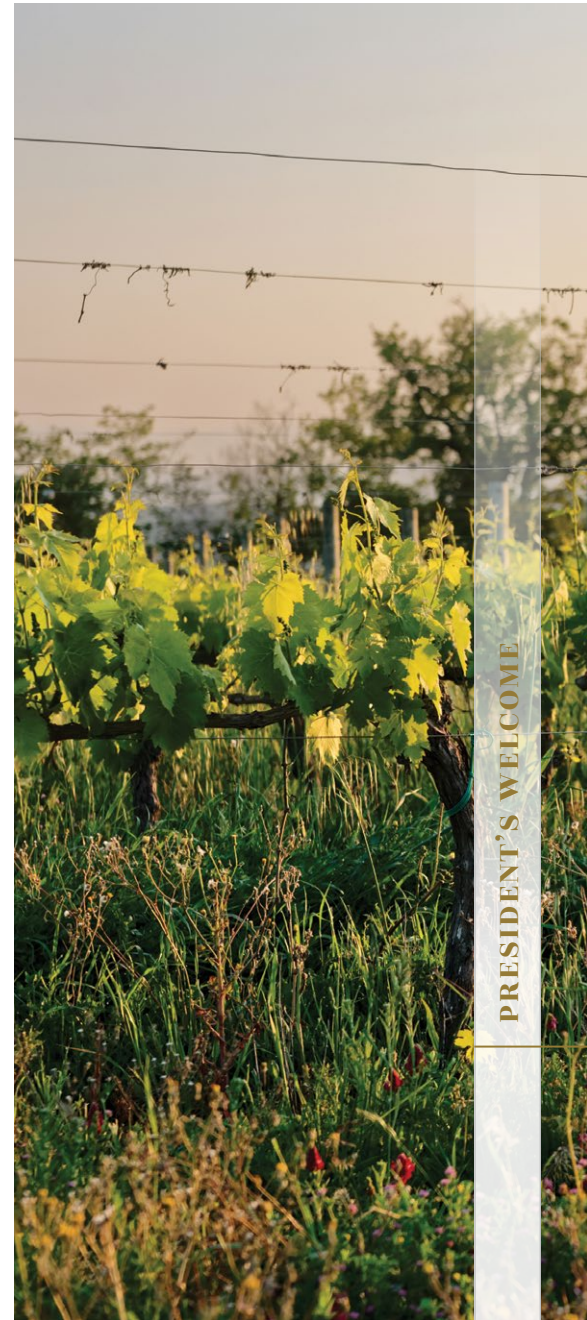
water and the centre of the pond. I welcome the inspiration, vitality and creativity you've brought to our industry. I also encourage you to follow in the footsteps of others, and journey closer to the centre of the pond. The waters are deep here, and work laborious, but the rewards of making natural wine that is made from grapes you've cared for and nurtured, and guided through the winemaking process is worth the effort.

It's hard these days to know the paths to follow. When I am in doubt, I remind myself what great wine is. Great wine is wine that is made in the vineyard. I believe the greatest wines are rooted in a philosophy of honesty and purity. That begins in the soil, in the vineyard, and flows through to the bottle. I think we've been guilty sometimes of thinking of "natural wine" as a style but I think it is a reflection of place, people, and the earth itself. I am Belgian, so I say: to each their own. But in my glass, I want beautifully made, authentic wines from healthy grapes grown with love by those who farm them.

Encouragingly, in this edition of ASI Magazine, I see a willingness to ask the hard questions—about the future of natural wine and its role in eco-conscious sommellerie. Few have done more to champion authentic natural wine than **Isabelle Legeron MW**, whose RAW Wine Fairs have become rallying points for professionals seeking wines of integrity.

We also speak with Amsterdam-based **Job Seuren** and Montreal's **Théo Leroux** about the challenges and realities of integrating genuine natural wines into restaurant programmes. To explore how technology can support sustainability communication, we hear from the team at Lyrarakis Winery in Crete, whose innovative Message in a Bottle (MiB) platform shares their sustainability journey with transparency and credibility. While eco-conscious sommellerie is the overarching theme of this edition, you'll also find a rich array of stories from the ASI community. We speak with **Sören Polonius** about the updated ASI Tasting Guidelines, recap the recent ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas contest—including an exclusive interview with winner **Joris Garcia**—and reflect on the unforgettable gala dinner hosted by ASI partner, Perlage.

Looking ahead, we eagerly anticipate gathering in Cape Town this May for our General Assembly. We look forward to the hospitality of South African Sommelier Association President **Spencer Fondaumiere**, and the entire SASA team.



PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

"It was not about chasing trends. It was about supporting growers who worked with respect for their land, their vines, and their craft."

William Wouters, President ASI



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In My Glass



Mark DeWolf

Mark DeWolf, Content Manager ASI
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Thinking Inside the Box

The day after the finals of the ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas, I joined a group visit to Matthiasson Wines in the Napa Valley. Crossing over the Mayacamas which separate Sonoma from Napa, I expected to find Matthiasson's vineyards filled with healthy old vines surrounded by natural vegetation, and to taste fine, delicate wines made using low-intervention production practices. And I did just that. Matthiasson is, after all, renowned for its commitment to regenerative viticulture.

What I did not expect to see was a stack of cardboard boxes. Not the typical wine shipping boxes, but the kind that hold bladders of wine for bag-in-box production. It was a subtle sign that the world of fine wine is finally beginning to look beyond the glass bottle. While hardly a mainstay of Matthiasson's production, the fact that this highly sought-after and respected California winery had even contemplated bag-in-box was intriguing.

While I would never suggest we eschew the time-honoured tradition of wine stored in glass bottles, it is surprising that, as a global industry, we are not more receptive to alternative packaging. Why shouldn't we be drinking juicy, fresh Bardolino from a box? Could a glass of crisp, piercingly fresh Sancerre not be just as satisfying if poured from a can rather than a bottle?

Some of our adherence to glass is of our own making. The ritual of wine service is embedded in our very being as sommeliers. No doubt, that eloquent dance around the table might feel a little clumsy

if, instead of the faint whisper of a cork expertly retrieved from a bottle, it was the snap of a can. Or if, instead of decanting a young wine into a carafe, it was the glug of wine rushing from the spout of a bag-in-box.

But twenty years ago, we also resisted opening bottles closed with screwcaps. I still recall the awkwardness of standing at a table, unsure whether I should place the screwcap on the table. Was I really supposed to spin the bottle down my arm, catching the cap in my hand, as was being taught in many sommelier programmes adjusting



“Let’s ask ourselves: what can we do to support eco-conscious sommellerie in its entirety? How can we bring eco-packaging into the fine dining world?”

to this then-new but rapidly expanding form of packaging?

The screwcap — or more accurately the Stelvin closure — has come a long way. No longer seen as a contributor to or preserver of reduction, its technology now allows minuscule amounts of oxygen into the bottle, supporting its use as a pre-eminent means of preserving freshness and vitality across many wine styles. While some may still doubt the ability of wine to age under screwcap, I have tasted too many beautifully preserved bottles to question its effectiveness.

While Stelvin closures have greatly contributed to reducing the issue of TCA — a fault many young sommeliers encounter far less than us grey-hairs — they did not solve the environmental issue of bottle weight and its impact on our planet.

In the pages of this issue, we will explore the importance of eco-conscious viticulture, the need for wineries and other beverage producers to utilise renewable energy sources — but how often do we discuss the final piece of the equation? How is a wine packaged? How much does sending a heavy glass bottle halfway around the

world contribute negatively to our environment?

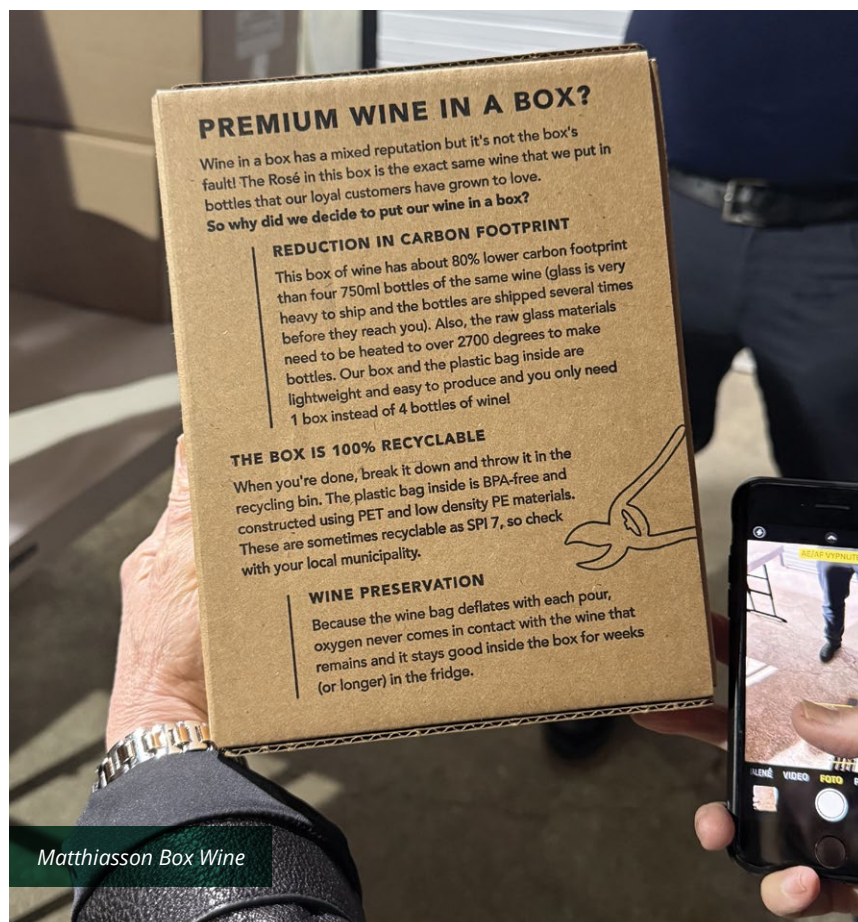
Can any of us call ourselves eco-conscious if we are unwilling to talk about ‘the elephant in the vineyard’? Our over-reliance on glass bottles — the majority of which are not recycled.

Let’s ask ourselves: what can we do to support eco-conscious sommellerie in its entirety? How can we bring eco-packaging into the fine dining world? Are kegs the answer?

Could we pour a can of wine at the table? Would it be wrong to serve a decanter full of wine that had been poured off from a bag-in-box?

Just maybe, an outside-the-box idea for helping mitigate our impact on climate change is — quite literally — inside the box.

Cheers

Matthiasson Box Wine



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Guest Editors

ISABELLE LEGERON MW, ANNE JONES, THÉO LEROUX, JOB SEUREN

A DISCUSSION WITH...



Isabelle Legeron MW

The Natural Path to Sustainability

With Isabelle Legeron MW

Isabelle Legeron MW has become a symbol of the natural wine movement. Her commitment to natural wine is in her roots. Legeron was born into wine, growing up on a vineyard in Cognac. As a result, Legeron says, "I have always been interested in and attuned to the environment around me." Over time, she witnessed vineyards becoming increasingly industrialised, the damage it was doing to the environment, and how exposure to pesticides and herbicides were impacting the health of her family.

"I remember feeling incensed and deeply saddened when I finally put it all together and it really solidified my desire to help raise awareness about better farming. I then had a second epiphany moment when I realised that what had happened in the vineyard had also happened in the cellar, and that the wines I was really drawn to, the wines I found most interesting, most captivating, were those that had been made very traditionally - without a lot of additives or human moulding. In fact, they were wines that all shared a common denominator - more

wild, less human. And so it was that I stumbled on the world of natural wine before it really had a name."

As Legeron was witnessing the adverse effects of over-industrialisation of wine, she also recognised how consumers were by in large oblivious to it, particularly as it relates to what we drink. As she was working in the UK restaurant scene as a consultant, she noticed a rising awareness of organic foods, and the beginning of an awareness of natural wine. "Though I could see there was an emerging natural

wine scene, I was aware that there were simply no events to support that interest. The first fair, RAW WINE London, was a way to bring the people from this scene together into a single community. Now, we've grown that into a global community, with events taking place year-round, all over the world - New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Copenhagen, Berlin, Verona, Tokyo and Shanghai. The RAW WINE website has also grown and become a platform in itself, with some 50,000 people using it every month to find information on natural wine producers."

Isabelle Legeron MW, Anne Jones, Théo Leroux and Job Seuren



rawwine.com

ASI: One of the biggest debates in natural wine is the lack of a strict, universal definition. Do you think this ambiguity helps or hinders sommeliers when introducing natural wine to consumers?

Isabelle Legeron (IL): Ambiguity is definitely a problem. I have noticed people talk about wine being natural when what they really mean is that it is produced with minimal intervention in the cellar but conventional farming practices (you can after all produce low-intervention wine using conventionally farmed grapes but the resulting wine will be less complex and definitely not natural). Similarly, I've heard people mention natural wine when they really mean that it is organically farmed but conventionally made in the cellar. Again, this isn't a natural wine.

A universally accepted definition would certainly be helpful for everyone, but it is more complicated than it may seem at first glance. Yes, natural wine is pure fermented grape juice from organically farmed grapes (nothing added, nothing removed), which should be pretty simple to accept on the face of it. But what about temperature control or the use of

dry ice? What about doing a cold maceration or using the winter months to cold-stabilise? And what about gross filtration (used to remove flies and the like that might have fallen into the fermenting juice) or the use of a *pied de cuve*? Are these processes acceptable? In my book I talk about naturalness being like ripples on a pond - the bullseye (or where the pebble hits the surface) is easy to pinpoint but as you apply interventions you move away from this epicentre becoming less and less natural, the more and more you do to eliminate life. Eventually at the edge of the ripples you are indistinguishable from the conventional but working out where this edge is and what processing and/or additives are acceptable for each level or ripple, is tricky.

At RAW WINE we are a community of completely natural wine producers and low-intervention organic and biodynamic wine producers, so the way we deal with the ambiguity is to not only have a Charter of Quality that spells out the boundary of what we consider acceptable manipulation (i.e. the outer reaches of the ripples after which there really is very little

“In the end, natural wine is all about the living. It is a drink that successfully translates the livingness and its sense of place from vineyard to glass.”

naturalness left in the bottle) but also a strict vetting process (for producers wanting to become part of the community) and an insistence on full disclosure and transparency on every wine shown (everything we know about a wine we include on the producer and/or wine profile online). It is only through accurate, transparent reporting of information that we - the wine world - can have any clarity about what is going on.

We also include tasting in our vetting process because on paper some wineries can look as though they tick all the boxes, but when you get the wine in a glass, you find it lacks the authenticity of a wine that is truly alive.

In the end, natural wine is all about the living. It is a drink that successfully translates the livingness and its sense of place from vineyard to glass. And this aliveness is meant quite literally, so maybe there's a way of defining it on a microbiological level - it's a question that I have been actively seeking an answer to with producer friends of mine but we have yet to find the answer.

ASI: With the rise in demand for natural wine, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z, larger wine companies are increasingly

marketing wines as "natural." Do you see this as a negative development, or could it be positive if it encourages these companies to reassess their winemaking practices?

IL: Certainly, a lot of wineries are jumping on the bandwagon - we see this in our fairs, with producers wanting to pour their drinks which are clearly not natural or even low intervention. What we see most often is wineries making a single tokenistic 'natural wine' - while maintaining conventional methods across the rest of their range. Again, this can be confusing for consumers, as they might think they're drinking natural wine when really, they're not. At the same time, it's important to remember that the only reason these wineries are feeling encouraged to try making and selling 'natural wine' is because of its increase in popularity. Whether it's for the right reasons or not, if a big winery converts to organics, it's still better for the environment, better for the consumer and still something to be celebrated. People falsely marketing their wine as natural, though, is a different conversation entirely.

ASI: At one time, natural wine was quite polarising. Some enthusiasts were willing to overlook technical faults in a wine if it was made "naturally." Do you think there should be some latitude in how

natural wines are judged compared to more conventional wines?

IL: I've worked for Michelin star restaurants, casual eateries and wine bars, putting together and managing teams and wine lists and, for me, for the restaurant to truly get behind natural wine, you must be really behind it yourself. When picking wines for a list, it's more work to choose natural wines because they're often very different from one year to the next. With a conventional list, it's easier in a sense because you know that year on year, the wine may be slightly different, but you can get away without tasting them as often. Natural wine is so vastly different, you must be willing to really understand the wines. Faults are also subjective and there are differing levels of what's considered acceptable. For example, if a wine has a little volatile acidity or a dash of brett, some people might consider these things to be faults, while others wouldn't. Provided a 'fault' doesn't distract from the wine, it shouldn't be considered an issue.

Natural wine may be a bit cloudy or have some sediment or tartrate crystals in the glass, but these characteristics - otherwise removed by conventional winemaking methods - are all part of the wine and its authenticity. These are traits that also work well with food. A little volatile acidity can be a great advantage for a lot of dishes, so it's also about understanding a wine in relation to the food it's being served with.

Having said that, there are instances when faults are beyond acceptable. A case in point for me is 'mousiness', a type of bacterial imbalance that can happen with natural wine. I am sensitive to it, and it completely ruins my enjoyment of a wine. What's more, it is usually due to a grower struggling with stability (because they or their vineyard are not actually ready to go fully natural),





RAW WINE Berlin - Tasters

high pH or because the wine is being released, or rather drunk, too early (mousy wines given time to settle post bottling often lose their mousiness altogether). If a wine must be sold earlier than it should, rather than cross fingers and hope that a customer doesn't notice, I

would personally prefer the producer add a little bit of sulphites during the winemaking. Perfection in wine can often mean flirting with faults but that doesn't mean that every faulty wine is perfect!

ASI: Do you think sommeliers focus too much on natural wine in terms of production processes? Should they be equally— if not more— concerned with vineyard practices?

For example, is natural wine just one step in the right direction, and should sommeliers also prioritise organic, biodynamic, and regenerative agriculture?

IL: As an industry, we're much more focussed on winemaking, which

reduces the conversation to the level of sulfites and how a wine looks. The natural wine movement is guilty of favouring loud, 'funky' labels, clear glass bottles and fluorescent liquids. All of this means that we forget about the most important factor - the vineyard practices. Without great practices, you can't make great wine. There's a lot more education required around this issue. It's hard to communicate what goes on in a vineyard and the costs involved in farming well when you look at a bottle of wine. It's heartbreaking to see some genuinely phenomenal natural wine producers - who use classic, old fashioned labels and green glass - selling less than someone who plays into consumer trends.

A greater focus on the vineyards is much needed right now, and it can start with the questions we're asking our suppliers. How is the vineyard farmed? Is it certified? If not, why is that? It's easy to trust all the stories you're fed by suppliers - and I'm not saying they don't tell the truth - but someone can easily say their wine is sustainable. What does that sustainability actually mean on a practical level? It's important to drill down into these practices, so we can include farming in the stories we share with the consumer.

"It is only through accurate, transparent reporting of information that we - the wine world - can have any clarity about what is going on."

ASI: To that end, do you think a wine can truly be considered "natural" if the producer is not also the farmer, nurturing their own grapes?

IL: Of course, you can make natural wine with grapes you've purchased so long as they're organic. What's more, the majority of people who buy-in grapes are still involved in the growing process in some way, and are often part of the team looking after the vines. But to my mind, in order to make truly fantastic, terroir-driven wines, I think it's incredibly important to be in the vineyard, amongst the vines, getting to know them and imparting your own energy. We each bring something different to the equation. It's important to remember that plants are alive. Each plant is an individual, has its own feeling and way of being, and unless you walk in your vineyard every day and spend time trying to understand each one, it's hard to build that deep relationship with the juice they create. Winemaking doesn't just happen in the cellar but in the vineyard as well. Great wine is made in the vineyard!

ASI: How does packaging and transportation factor into the natural wine movement? If natural wine aims to be more ecological and environmentally friendly, should there be a greater push for alternative packaging like cans, boxes, or other eco-friendly solutions that reduce the carbon footprint? Do you support this shift, and how?

IL: I do support this shift and it would be great to see more restaurants serving keg or bag in box wines. We're seeing more quality wines being packaged this way for restaurants, which is encouraging. It also keeps better as a by the glass option. When you're looking at wines that are meant to

be matured over a number of years, glass is still the best option, but when you're making wine for quick consumption, why not consider putting some of it in a can or a box?

ASI: With the growing emphasis on sustainability in the restaurant industry, do you believe natural wine will eventually become the norm rather than the exception?

IL: That would be amazing if it were to happen although given the limited nature of natural wine production it is sadly unlikely. What would be a great start, though, would be to see all restaurants with even just a few lines of properly natural wine on their lists. Even if it was just 5 per cent, that would be amazing! It would be great to see the remainder of their lists given over to wines that while not natural have at least been made from clean healthy grapes, and made properly. I would love to see a world where all wine grapes everywhere are farmed at least organically as there really is no good reason not to.

ASI: When curating wine lists for restaurants, resorts, and other establishments, how do you balance a commitment to natural and eco-conscious selections with the expectation that some guests will still look for familiar, classic wines and appellations?

IL: It's a tricky balance to achieve, but I'd say it's becoming easier as we're seeing natural wine being produced everywhere, including the classic appellations. For instance, it's easy to curate a strong list of champagnes made by small growers and still cover all styles, grape varieties and vintages. We're at a stage now where you can build a solid wine list with classic names - Burgundy, Bordeaux, classic regions of the Rhône, Loire, Rioja and Tuscany - and still include natural wines.

Yes, some producers will opt for the Vin de France label rather than the appellation system, but you can explain to the consumer that the grower is still located in that area and just because what they're producing doesn't suit the typical appellation palate or jury, doesn't mean it shouldn't be called a Pouilly-Fumé, for instance. The key to getting this right is all in your team, how they're trained and their commitment to the wine list. If they're not behind what you're pouring, they'll never be able to communicate it effectively to your guests. I think it's also important to not be scared to pick wines that are flirting with a little bit of fault but are ultimately very good wines. It's about being smart in your approach, considering your audience and tailoring the wine list to your offering.

ASI: Finally, how does packaging and transportation factor into the natural wine movement? If natural wine aims to be more ecological and environmentally friendly, should there be a greater push for alternative packaging like cans, boxes, or other eco-friendly solutions that reduce the carbon footprint? Do you support this shift, and how?

IL: I do support this shift and it would be great to see more restaurants serving keg or bag in box wines. We're seeing more quality wines being packaged this way for restaurants, which is encouraging. It also keeps better as a by the glass option. That said, when you are looking at wines that are meant to be matured over a number of years, glass is still the best option. When you're making wine for quick consumption, why not consider putting some of it in a can or a box?



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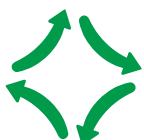
were collected to be cleaned for future usage.

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The Value of Sustainability

With Anne Jones

Anne Jones is a passionate advocate for sustainability in wine, whose journey from retail to sustainability consulting—via her business Limestone & Jones—reflects both deep industry insight and a long-standing personal commitment to environmental responsibility. Having spent a significant part of her career in the buying team at Waitrose, one of the UK's most sustainability-minded retailers, she found herself increasingly drawn to the urgent challenges facing the wine world—from packaging waste to soil health.

While taking time off to raise her daughter, Anne began to refocus her efforts, building expertise through work with the Sustainable Wine Roundtable and WineGB. Realising the limitations of effecting meaningful change within a large corporate environment, she made the leap into consultancy, aiming to support producers directly in creating and executing impactful sustainability strategies.

Today, she divides her time between her consultancy practice and her role with the Regenerative Viticulture Foundation, helping producers navigate the complexities of emissions and supply chain sustainability. With a unique perspective shaped by her experience in retail, Anne brings valuable insight into the intersection of producer and consumer—working to connect the dots between environmental stewardship, commercial realities, and industry-wide impact. Insights rooted in pragmatism. As she says, “Without the sales and without the wine industry, then there is no sustainable industry. So, you know, we have to make sure that we’re evangelical about the right things, and not actually trying to hamper our own abilities by making decisions that are not based in fact.”

ASI asked Anne Jones to translate some of her wisdom to sommellerie. How can sommeliers seeking to do their part to be eco-conscious be more mindful when creating beverage programmes?



Anne Jones



A DISCUSSION WITH...

Isabelle Legeron MW, Anne Jones, Théo Leroux and Job Seuren

regenerativeviticulture.org



“They want you, the sommelier, to have done that homework for them. They’ll come to your establishment because it aligns with their values and because they trust you.”

ASI: Deciding what meets a sustainability standard to have on a wine list can be daunting. Any tips, ideas, or suggestions for those sommeliers seeking to add more ‘sustainable’ wines to their list?

Anne Jones (AJ): It is hugely complicated. I think the way carbon has led the discussion can get people really confused, because you’re having to look at everything from the soil to production, to shipping, to recycling and beyond. It can feel overwhelming.

Where I would come back to is: what are you, as a sommelier, trying to achieve? What values are you trying to present to the customer? Customers, by and large, love sustainability—but they also, by and large, do not want to know the details. Mostly, they want you, the sommelier, to have done that homework for them. They’ll come to your establishment because it aligns with their values and because they trust you.

So, if you’re trying to present something that’s clear, simple, and easy—where people can make a quick choice—certifications are great. It doesn’t even have to be organic, biodynamic, or

regenerative. It could be something like Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand, Sustainable Wines South Africa, or Napa Green. Make a list of certifications you can trust and choose from there.

That’s a relatively easy way of doing it, which also avoids getting too bogged down in the organic/biodynamic/regenerative debate. However, there’s a challenge: you’ll probably find producers you desperately want to include who might not have one of those certifications. Then you think to yourself, ‘but I know they’re doing great things—so now what?’ I think in that case, it depends on the kind of establishment and the service you’re providing. If your restaurant centres around having conversations with guests, it’s a different story. Then you can say with confidence: ‘I know they’re doing great stuff in the vineyard. I know they don’t use herbicides. I know they’re employing agroforestry. I know they’re reducing their carbon footprint—whether through bottle weights or other initiatives.’

If you know the stories of your producers and work in an environment that encourages dialogue, embrace that. This is where sommeliers can be amazing. It’s all about the time commitment to fully understand the methods behind the wines you list, versus wanting that safety net of saying “it’s certified.”

ASI: Are there other elements of sustainability we should be thinking about?

AJ: One of the big debates now is whether certifications should include social and labour standards. Again, it probably comes down to the particular sommelier or establishment. Do you want to make sure everything you list meets labour standards? Or are you more focused on environmental credentials? That’s a choice. The good news: you have a choice. The bad news: you have to make a choice.

ASI: Another hot topic, which you alluded to earlier, is the carbon footprint related to packaging.

AJ: We all know that glass makes up a significant portion of a wine’s total carbon footprint. There are many parts to this, such as the weight of the packaging and the distribution channel.

That said, the shipping method is often more important—and more impactful—than distance. I’m a fan of alternative formats and think there’s a real place for them. We’re at a point now where it could be seen as lazy not to consider alternatives such as kegs. They’re great from an efficiency, quality, and waste-reduction point of view—not to mention positive from the consumer perspective.

If you don’t have the volume for kegs, you can still prevent wastage through better handling and technology like Enomatics and Coravin.

I'd say: yes, there's alternative packaging, but also consider the impact of glass itself. The glass industry is working hard to decarbonise—its future depends on it. We've also seen many retailers globally signing the Bottle Weight Accord, aiming to reduce bottle weights to under 420 grams by the end of 2027. It wouldn't take much for a sommelier to look at their list and determine which producers are using lightweight bottles. Just weigh them. Start conversations with your suppliers. Ask what they're doing to reduce bottle weights. Ask if they have lighter-weight options from other markets.

ASI: Do you think consumers are ready for changes in packaging?

AJ: I think there's still a bit of fear about consumer perception, especially in very high-end establishments—and not without reason. That said, I don't think bottles are necessary throughout the list, even at the premium level. I don't know any restaurant that only sells top icon wines.

Take your by-the-glass options. Have a house wine from a keg. There are lots of beautiful 50ml carafes sommeliers can use. You don't have to serve all wine at the table.

No one bats an eye when you bring a Cognac or single malt, often hundreds of pounds a pour, pre-poured into a beautiful glass. Not to mention, by using carafes, you reduce wastage and overpouring at the same time.



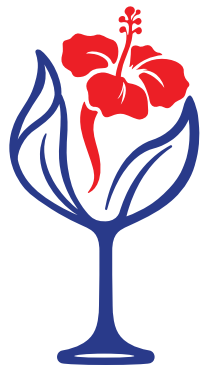
ASI: How do we address the comparative expense of 'sustainable' versus conventional wines?

AJ: I know some people still think sustainability adds cost because you're adding extra processes. But in many cases, you're removing inputs and simplifying practices—the cost of transition is often the real hurdle.

That said, be confident people will pay. Plenty of research supports the idea that consumers are willing to pay more for sustainability. There's a premium some people will pay for wines they trust.

Ultimately, it's about values as well as value. If you're delivering great service and able to explain what your producers are doing for the planet, that can command a premium. Just sticking a label on a list probably won't.

“Start conversations with your suppliers. Ask what they're doing to reduce bottle weights. Ask if they have lighter-weight options from other markets.”



ASI Contest Best Sommelier of **Asia Pacific 2025**

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | Sept. 7 – 10





Pouring with Purpose:
building a sustainable neighbourhood wine culture

With Théo Leroux

A DISCUSSION WITH...

Isabelle Legeron MW, Anne Jones, Théo Leroux and Job Seuren



Théo Leroux is a sommelier and co-owner of *La Famille Mamie*, a family of hospitality businesses based in Montreal's vibrant Rosemont district. Comprising Bar Mamie, *La Cave de Mamie*, and *La Boucherie*, each establishment offers a distinct concept but shares a unified philosophy: a commitment to artisanal food and drink rooted in sustainability, quality, and community. Their venues have become neighbourhood favourites for their welcoming spirit and dedication to natural, low-intervention wines — styles that align with a growing global appetite for transparency, provenance, and authenticity in both food and drink.

ASI: *La Famille Mamie* has built a strong reputation for championing natural and sustainable wines. What drew you to these styles, and why do you think they resonate so strongly with today's diners?

Théo Leroux (TL): From the very beginning of Mamie, we — that is Jules, Maxime, and myself — have always wanted to explore natural wines made by a diverse range of producers. When selecting wines, we made a conscious decision to buy across an entire winemaker's portfolio rather than picking isolated wines. This approach allowed us to appreciate the full breadth of their work.

Of course, our palates and approach have evolved over time. Nowadays, we strive for a well-balanced selection for our guests — wines that vary in price, style, and complexity. Some are more classic or 'serious', while others lean towards the avant-garde.

Natural wines have an energy and vibrancy that really speak to today's dining culture. There is a parallel between these wines and the food we serve — often locally

“In contemporary hospitality, there’s a growing emphasis on products that are living, expressive, and deeply connected to place.”

sourced from farmers working in harmony with the land. In contemporary hospitality, there's a growing emphasis on products that are living, expressive, and deeply connected to place.

ASI: Sustainable and natural wines can sometimes carry a higher price tag due to smaller production and labour-intensive farming. How do you balance affordability with your commitment to these wines?

TL: Affordability is part of Mamie's DNA. As a neighbourhood restaurant, it's essential that our guests feel comfortable coming two or even three times a week. At the same time, we deeply respect the labour and skill of vigneron — the work behind every bottle.

We've developed several practices to keep prices accessible while staying true to the styles of wine we love. One is buying 20-litre kegs from natural winemakers, which allows us to offer wines by the glass — or even up to a double Jeroboam — at very fair prices.

Another strategy is keeping minimal stock with high rotation. Our core wine list is compact — around four options for each colour — but it changes almost daily, with affordability being a key selection criterion. We also purchase some more expensive wines to age in our cellar, offering them to guests looking for something special or more complex.

ASI: Are there particular regions or styles you've found offer great value while adhering to sustainable and natural practices?

TL: Muscadet is always my go-to region for value. Producers like Marc Pesnot's Domaine de la Sénéchalière, Domaine de la Pépière, David Landron's Domaines Landron, and Vincent Caillé's Domaine Le Fay d'Homme offer exceptional quality-to-price ratios. There are also regions where sustainably-minded winemakers

operate within broader industries dominated by mass production. Chile and Spain come to mind — places where, generally, wine prices are so low that even natural producers can't raise their prices too high. Portugal also offers excellent value for sustainably-produced wines.

Unfortunately, some regions have become victims of speculation, especially in the natural wine world. The Jura is a perfect example. Fifteen years ago, Jura wines were affordable; now, due to climate change, global inflation, supply and demand pressures — and not least, hype — prices have surged. Many winemakers aren't happy about this situation, as it runs counter to the spirit of accessibility.

ASI: Are there strategies that help keep costs reasonable for guests while maintaining a solid wine programme?

TL: Operating in Quebec, we're subject to the SAQ (Société des alcools du Québec), a state monopoly that regulates wine pricing, stock, and availability for restaurants and retail. This creates some limitations but also opportunities.

To offer flexibility, we keep a constantly changing wine list and store special bottles for guests

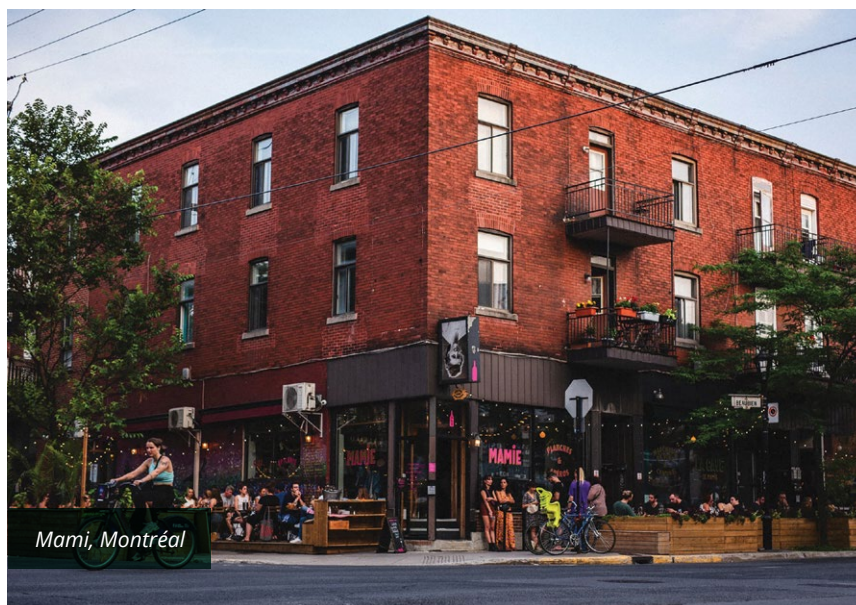
seeking rarer or more complex wines. We also opened a wine cave with around 200 labels available for takeaway. The retail option allows us to offer wines at a reduced markup, as there's less service involved.

In addition to the SAQ, there are around 400 private import agencies in Quebec, each with their own portfolio of winemakers. As buyers, we keep a close eye on new listings and opportunities from these agencies. This hybrid system gives us access to wines that might be unavailable in other markets.

ASI: What advice would you give other restaurateurs seeking to build a natural, sustainable wine list that is both qualitative and profitable?

TL: Always be hunting for wines that no one else knows about. Don't get caught up in chasing labels — price does not always equate to quality. Be curious. The world of wine is vast, and building a list is about finding your audience and satisfying their thirst with your personal selections.

Adjust your prices to reflect your clientele and remember: don't be too greedy. Wine and hospitality should always be rooted in pleasure, generosity, and community — not just profit.





Job Seuren

Balance not Dogma: the pros and cons of natural wine lists

With Job Seuren

Job Seuren is a sommelier and the owner of Zoldering, one of Amsterdam’s most popular and respected wine destinations. His path into the wine and sommelier world began while studying International Relations at university. During this time, he took a part-time job at a wine shop, and his parents purchased a home in south-western France, near Bergerac. Following many visits to local wineries, he made the decision to choose wine over politics, beginning with wine importation before moving into the restaurant world. Eventually, he would earn the position of sommelier at *De Librije* (3-star Michelin), which he says was the turning point: “That’s when everything really took off, leading to now, 15 years later, with me owning my own restaurants and wine shop.”

ASI: You’ve suggested in the past that restaurants and wine bars should have some conventional, traditional wines on the list. Why not all natural wines?

Job Seuren (JS): In theory, I wish that all wines were naturally made and fantastic (and perhaps also without alcohol), but that’s an illusion. Few winemakers have the skill or the desire to make wine like that flawlessly. Plus, I must admit that, in general, I prefer a more stable wine with some *élevage* (many natural wines have a very short *élevage*), but that’s my personal preference.

I like it when both chefs and sommeliers have conviction and a clear idea. That could be a commitment to cuisine focused on local ingredients or a wine list focused on natural wines. With respect to the latter, some fully natural wine lists can be great, but only when the selection consists of

great wines that happen to be made naturally — not a list dedicated to being natural for its own sake.

That said, more often than not, I find that most restaurants and wine bars serving only natural wines have staff whose knowledge is limited to the producers they list. They often lack general wine knowledge. This is an upside-down world. I believe you should understand the bigger picture first, then choose to focus on your preference. It’s like a surgeon — you can’t specialise in heart surgery, for example, without first understanding the basics of surgery and medicine. When a sommelier knows the broader wine world, curating an all-natural wine list is not an issue. However, lacking that knowledge and choosing to narrow your list — while ignoring winemaking faults — alienates people.

“I’m confident you can create an entire wine list from natural wines without any of them having faults — but you need to know what you’re doing as a sommelier.”

ASI: There was a time when natural wine equated to funky, often faulted wines. Is this still an issue?

JS: Yes — it's still an issue, though less than it used to be. Again, I have nothing against natural wines, but I do have something against over-the-top volatility, mousiness, 'Brett', and the producers, sommeliers, and customers who defend that as part of being natural. Worse yet are those who create a cult culture around wines that are turbid, cloudy, and smell of vinegar.

Let's be honest — many naturally made wines that dominate the shelves of natural wine retailers and feature at many wine bars have serious issues. At the same time, both producers and consumers are beginning to realise that too many faulty wines were accepted in the past. With better winemaking knowledge, these wines are becoming more precise and less faulted. I'm confident you can create an entire wine list from natural wines without any of them having faults — but you need to know what you're doing as a sommelier.

That said, there are many conventional wines with faults — for example, excessive sulphur, making them undrinkable. Even 'great wine' can play on this edge. I've found 1990 Montrose to have brett; there is a general greenness to many Burgundy wines from the 2021 vintage; and many traditional Barolo show varying levels of



volatility, which can be a fault — but at its best, adds tension, excitement, and complexity.

ASI: With the rise in consumer consciousness about organic and biodynamic agriculture, how does this factor into your wine purchasing?

JS: The first wine shop and importer I worked for focused on organic, biodynamic, and sustainable wines. In general, I find my palate prefers wines made by artisanal winemakers who work biodynamically and with less sulphur. So naturally, these wines are more represented on my wine list — but I never mention this on the list. Nor do I indicate if a wine is 'natural'. A wine needs to be good — preferably great — and it's a bonus if it's also made in the most natural way possible.

ASI: Why don't you mention how a wine is made on your lists?

JS: I've never done so because of my conviction that a wine needs to be great first — biodynamic, organic, or natural second. However, with our new restaurant, we want to appeal more to a younger generation

"It's more important to build a wine list that consumers can trust. They should trust you — not a label stating a wine is 'organic'."

— and I can't always be in the restaurant to explain every detail. In this case, we will indicate on the list if a wine is made naturally, simply because younger consumers are asking for that. The wines will still meet our standards, but it will be clearer for the guest.

Putting organic or biodynamic on the menu implies that organic is good and non-organic is bad — as if nothing can be added to an organic or biodynamic wine. I'm not willing to support that misconception. It's more important to build a wine list that consumers can trust. They should trust you — not a label stating a wine is 'organic'.

ASI: When looking to put a wine on your list, do you have a mental checklist of what's most important?

JS: The most important rule for me is: do I like it? My guests trust me and my palate. That said, we think about a range of aspects before listing a wine. I think it's really important to have some affordable wines on the list. I want our restaurants to be inclusive. That's why I also list big, bold, oaky wines I wouldn't normally drink myself — but I know many of my guests like them.

A sommelier is in the hospitality industry, after all. He or she is there to serve and please — not the other way around. If that means deviating from your personal preference to make people feel at home, that's fine — just make sure you don't lose your personality in both the service and the wine selection.



No one is interested in another anonymous hotel lobby menu — whether it's food or wine. Sometimes you choose a wine over another because it is made using more natural methods; sometimes because it has more recognition; sometimes because it's better value-for-money. But the most important thing is that your selection has personality — something your guests can relate to, that sets you apart.



Perlage Water

Elevates ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas Perlage Gala Dinner



In February, Sonoma, California, played host to the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas — a showcase of talent, precision, and passion from the best sommeliers of North, South and Central Americas. Capping off the prestigious event was the Perlage Gala Dinner, an evening of celebration and refinement, proudly hosted by Perlage Water.

As a brand synonymous with elegance, sustainability, and fine dining partnerships, Perlage Water provided the perfect complement to an evening that honoured the artistry of sommelierie. The Perlage Gala Dinner brought together contestants, judges, international sommeliers, and wine professionals from across the Americas for a night of food, wine, and

camaraderie — all elevated by Perlage's commitment to purity and balance.

Perlage Water, sourced from the pristine springs of Poland's Sudetes Mountains, is renowned for its delicate minerality and fine, persistent bubbles — qualities that mirror the finesse and precision celebrated throughout the sommelier competition. Its presence at the Perlage Gala Dinner underscored the role of water not only as a palate cleanser but as an integral part of the dining experience.

As the official water sponsor of the Gala and ASI, Perlage reinforced its global positioning within the fine dining and luxury hospitality world — aligning with sommeliers who understand that every element on the table contributes to the guest experience.

In a setting like Sonoma, where terroir and craftsmanship are paramount, Perlage Water's sponsorship was more than symbolic. It was a celebration of shared values — refinement, authenticity, and a commitment to excellence. The Perlage Gala Dinner was not only a toast to Canadian Joris Garica, the newly crowned ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas, but also a reminder that behind every dining experience are great drink pairings, including fine water.

Perlage was represented at the dinner by **Sylwia Mikiel** - Marketing Director, **Tadeusz Kwacz** - Vineyard Manager, **Monika Kuziola** - Export manager and their US importers **Ryszard Nieborowski** and **Magdalena Pawlak**.

Joris Garcia's Road to Victory



FEATURE ARTICLE

“That ability to step back, remember the privilege of being part of a global community, and staying grounded helped Garcia keep his composure under pressure.”

In February 2024, **Joris Garcia**, ASI Diploma Gold recipient, and sommelier at Montreal’s (Canada) Le Club Chasse et Pêche became one of the youngest-ever winners of the ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas competition. While his age (31) might suggest a meteoric rise, Garcia’s path to the top was anything but instant. It took years of effort, setbacks, mentorship, and personal growth to bring him to that moment.

Garcia’s path to continental success began at home in Canada, where sommeliers must first earn the right to represent their province before vying for the national title. In Quebec, the provincial competition occurs every three years, and for Garcia, it took four attempts to finally clinch the title of Best Sommelier of Quebec.

“It really was step by step for me,” Garcia explained. **“The first time I reached the semi-finals, then third place, then second — and finally, I won.”**

Each experience became a valuable lesson, aided by the supportive and tightly knit sommelier communities of Montreal, Quebec, and Toronto.

Once crowned Best Sommelier of Canada, the Americas stage beckoned — and the level of competition only increased. **Preparation for such a contest requires mastery not only of wine but of an entire universe of beverages, including sake, spirits, beer, and tea.** The latter, Garcia admitted, was a wake-up call during a pre-contest competitive event held in Scandinavia, where tea knowledge and service featured prominently.

While technical knowledge is crucial, Garcia has learned that mindset can often be the deciding factor on the competition floor. Inspired by advice from one of his mentors and former Best Sommelier of Canada winner Carl Villeneuve Lepage, Garcia enlisted the help of a sports coach. This mental training became a game-changer for Garcia.

Joris Garcia's Road to Victory



“It also reminded me that we’re not just competitors; we’re a global community helping each other improve.”

“The coach asked me questions I’d never thought about — like why I do this,” Garcia said. “We also worked on breathing exercises, mindfulness, and keeping competitions in perspective.” That ability to step back, remember the privilege of being part of a global community, and staying grounded helped Garcia keep his composure under pressure. As Garcia put it, “Of course, we all want to win. But in the end, it’s just a competition. That constant reminder helped lower my stress levels; especially during the finale.”



Physical preparation also plays a role, though Garcia admitted that injury limited his training before the Americas contest. Still, he recognized that feeling physically strong helps clear the mind, especially during grueling multi-day competitions filled with tastings, masterclasses, winery visits, and networking dinners — all while battling jet lag and nerves.

“The schedule is exhausting,” Garcia said. “You’re always surrounded by people, rarely sleep well, and must stay sharp for long days. Arriving physically prepared is essential.” For Garcia, attending ASI Bootcamp in Malaysia was a transformative experience. The intense training, high-level lecturers, and camaraderie among top sommeliers from around the world not only sharpened his skills but also boosted his confidence.

“Being asked to do a full organoleptic tasting in front of Master Sommeliers and Best Sommeliers of the World is intimidating — but it’s incredible preparation,” Garcia said. “It also reminded me that we’re not just competitors; we’re a global community helping each other improve.”

Garcia’s preparation for the world contest will build on his Americas experience, but also on his recent success earning the ASI Diploma Gold — which in 2024, was offered for the first time in Canada. While competitions can be unpredictable, the diploma offered valuable insights into ASI’s judging criteria, giving Garcia a clearer sense of what to expect at future contests. “It was an amazing opportunity

to practice and understand the format,” Garcia said. The ASI Guidelines and ASI Tutorials have become the standard for global sommellerie and an invaluable tool for sommeliers around the world to calibrate their service and how they describe wine and other beverage.

Despite winning the Americas title, Garcia found faults in his own performance. He recalled the nerve-wracking opening station at the final — making a Bellini cocktail under the glare of spotlights and the scrutiny of judges. Garcia conceded the pressure of these contests usually displays itself most for him in the first task of a finale.

“I knew the recipe, but I’d never actually made one before,” he confessed. “That was a mistake I won’t make again.”



L-R: Mark Guillaudeau, Joris Garcia, Nicolas Reines

“Even after the World contest, he envisions a future where his focus shifts from competitions to deep-dive explorations of his favourite regions.”

He also struggled with the final task which asked the competitors to identify famous figures from the industry's past. Despite having studied most of them, the pressure and fatigue clouded his memory. “Eight out of ten of the people shown were in my books — I knew them — but stress got in the way.”

As for what's next, with the ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest looming in 2026, Garcia plans only a short break before diving back into study. His preparation will include completing the WSET Diploma and working toward his Master Sommelier theory exam.

“It's all connected,” he said. “The more I study for those, the better prepared I'll be for the World contest.”

While he would eventually like to win the title of ASI Best Sommelier of the World, for Garcia, there's no such thing as being 'done' when it comes to learning about wine and hospitality. Even after the World contest, he envisions a future where his focus shifts from competitions to deep-dive explorations of his favourite regions. One day, he might even write a book.”

Ultimately, his dream is a simple one: “A small vineyard, a few animals, living in the countryside with my family. That would be the perfect ending; but the learning never stops.”

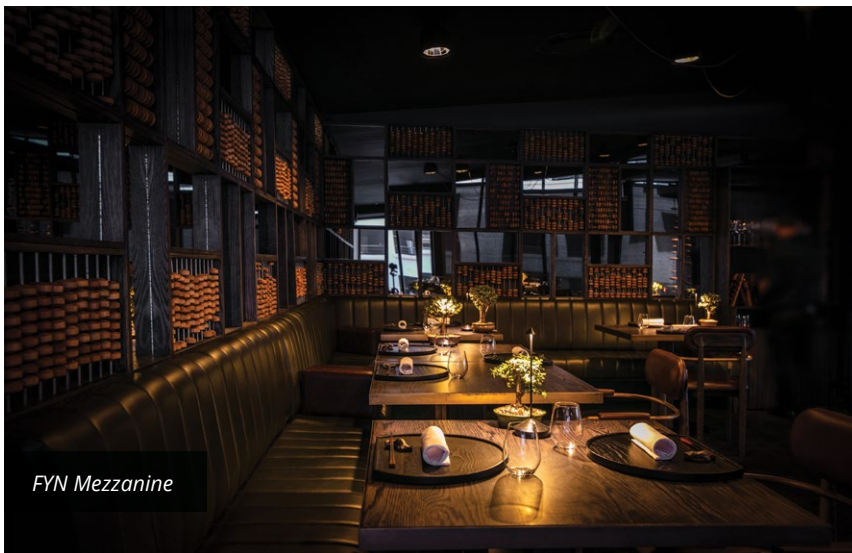
As for what he drank after his Americas victory, Garcia indicated his celebrations were modest — a bottle of Pierre Gerbais Champagne shared with family over sushi. Since winning the title there has been little time to soak in the accomplishment. The day after returning to Montreal from Sonoma, he was busy at work doing inventory and getting set for a busy week of events. However, when he has time, he looks forward to celebrating with friends. Garcia promises, there will be a fine bottle of Barolo, Riesling, or Loire Cabernet Franc along and a well-earned chance to reflect before the next challenge begins.



Responsible Gastronomy:

5 leaders of eco-conscious hospitality

Sustainability in hospitality is no longer a niche concept. It is reshaping how leading restaurants around the world operate, from the cellar to the kitchen. While zero-waste cooking and local sourcing often take centre stage, a growing number of restaurants are applying the same thoughtful approach to their beverage programmes. From hyper-local wine lists to house-made non-alcoholic pairings and innovative waste reduction in the bar, these establishments are proving that sustainability extends far beyond the plate. In this article, we explore five restaurants from around the world whose commitment to eco-conscious practices sets a new standard for responsible gastronomy.



FYN Mezzanine

and foraged fynbos, the beverage programme—helmed by French-born wine authority **Jennifer Hugé**—elevates sustainability with equal creativity and conviction. “Selecting the best the world has to offer naturally supports artisans who are preserving their heritage,” Hugé explains. “But we also keep focus on hyper-local ingredients and techniques, often using heirloom plants and forgotten fruits.”

South Africa’s evolving viticultural landscape offers fertile ground for this philosophy. Hugé champions wines from winemakers actively adopting regenerative practices, water conservation, and reduced chemical inputs. A standout is Eben Sadie’s *Grillo*, made from a drought-tolerant Sicilian variety now cultivated sustainably in the Cape. “These wines might cost more, but they align with our ethos. They’re not mass-produced—they’re meaningful,” she adds.

Beyond wine, the bar is a sandbox for sustainable experimentation. From lemon buchu to mint pelargonium, ingredients grown in the gardens at beyond (FYN’s sister restaurant on the Buitenverwachting estate) are transformed into



South Africa’s FYN: Ancient Africa on the Plate and In the Glass

In the shadow of Table Mountain in Cape Town, FYN has redefined what sustainability means in fine dining—not just on the plate, but in the glass. Awarded the 2023 Flor de Caña Sustainable Restaurant Award by The World’s 50 Best Restaurants, FYN has become a beacon of eco-conscious gastronomy, weaving local tradition, ancestral ingredients, and thoughtful innovation into every aspect of its offering.

While Chef **Peter Tempelhoff’s** dishes speak of ancient South Africa through endemic seafood

syrops, infusions, and house-made sodas—like the naturally carbonated grapetiser made from hanepoot grapes. “We’re slowly eliminating global soft drink brands,” Hugé says. “We want every beverage to reflect our land and values.”

Even the concept of waste has been reimaged. Coffee grounds are upcycled into a non-alcoholic liqueur, while fruit offcuts find new life in kombuchas and cordials. “Many of our methods feel like a return to ancestral ways,” Hugé notes. “We’re just elevating them for a modern fine dining context.”

Waste management is no afterthought. FYN’s recycling and composting programmes ensure

organic and packaging waste is properly redirected. A water filtration system drastically reduces the need for bottled water, cutting down significantly on glass waste and transport emissions.

“These are small changes, but they create a ripple effect,” says Hugé.

Still, sustainability at FYN isn’t just about systems—it’s about stories. Staff are trained to gently engage guests who show interest, offering insight into how each beverage—from the estate-made soda to the low-intervention Chenin—reflects a commitment to purpose. “We lead with actions, not statements,” Hugé says. “Guests are thrilled to know what’s in their glass was often crafted just metres away.”

As the future of sustainable beverage service continues to evolve, Hugé is most excited by the rise in hyper-local sourcing, eco-conscious viticulture, and experimental distillations. “It’s not just about reducing landfill,” she concludes. “It’s about inspiring our guests, team, and suppliers to think differently—because every pour is a chance to make an impact.”

At FYN, sustainability isn’t a side note—it’s the main ingredient in every bottle uncorked and every sip savoured.



Gašperov Mlyn

Slovakia’s Gašperov Mlyn: Holistic Sustainable Hospitality

Nestled in the Slovak countryside, Gašperov Mlyn is redefining what it means to be a sustainable fine dining restaurant. Under the leadership of restaurant manager and head sommelier **Slavomíra Raškovič**, the team is proving that luxury hospitality and environmental responsibility can go hand in hand — not just in the kitchen, but throughout the entire guest experience, including the beverage programme.

At its core, Gašperov Mlyn operates with a near zero-waste philosophy. The kitchen transforms ingredients

from head to tail — creating imaginative components for its tasting menu from parts of produce and proteins often discarded.

Potato peels, fish skins, vegetable stems, and bones all find new life on the plate. This commitment to resourcefulness was even featured in the HBO Max series *Zero Waste Chef*.

This ethos extends seamlessly to the beverage programme. An impressive 98% of the restaurant’s wines come from local Slovak winemakers. While not every producer is certified low-intervention, selection is driven by sustainability and ethics — focusing on producers who prioritise



responsible vineyard management, biodiversity, and environmentally-friendly cellar practices.

“Our wine list is not just about local pride,” says Raškovič. “It’s about supporting winemakers who work in harmony with their environment — whether that’s through organic farming, low-input viticulture, or thoughtful winemaking processes.”

In addition to wine, Gašperov Mlyn crafts a large portion of its own non-alcoholic beverages. House-made kombuchas, TIBI lemonades, infusions, and syrups form the backbone of their alcohol-free pairings — a reflection of their drive to reduce transport emissions and packaging waste, while offering guests flavours rooted in place. Beers, spirits, and teas also come from Slovak producers who share this sustainable vision.



Beyond food and drink, the restaurant’s environmental efforts are impressive. **The building is energy independent, powered by its own hydroelectric plant, solar panels, and heat pump, while water is sourced from an on-site well and purified through their treatment system.** Waste management is equally rigorous, with staff trained to recycle and repurpose materials,

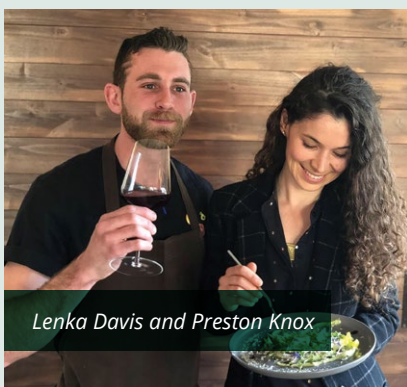
giving glass, paper, and plastic a second life.

Gašperov Mlyn is a rare example of holistic sustainability — where every element of the operation, from wine list to energy systems, is designed to minimise environmental impact while elevating guest experience. It’s proof that fine dining can be rooted in responsibility without sacrificing creativity or quality.

California’s Barbareño: Sustainability Beyond the Plate

At Barbareño in Santa Barbara, sustainability isn’t a marketing slogan — it’s embedded in every aspect of the restaurant’s operations. According to Wine Director **Lenka Davis**, **“we strive to implement thoughtful practices across all aspects of the restaurant, starting with ingredient sourcing and waste reduction.”**

That begins with a commitment to working with local growers



Lenka Davis and Preston Knox

and purveyors, ensuring not only the freshest ingredients but also reducing the environmental footprint. **“Any waste generated is carefully sorted for recycling or composting,”** Davis explains.

The restaurant’s beverage programme reflects the same ethos. Their by-the-glass wine offerings are preserved using an air evacuation system to minimise waste, and all bottles and packaging are recycled. “Most of our beer sales come from tap beer, which helps reduce packaging waste,” she adds.

Even the dishwashing system has been rethought for efficiency. Rather than rely on energy-intensive machines, Barbareño uses a three-compartment sink and a Spülboy system for glassware — a method Davis describes as “not only energy-efficient but also just as fast as a traditional dishwasher.”

Paper waste reduction is another small but meaningful step. Wine lists are reprinted only once or twice a week, and leftover blank paper is turned into notepads for service.

Yet for Davis, the biggest impact comes from wine sourcing. “I firmly believe that 80% of sustainability in a restaurant’s wine programme comes down to wine sourcing — it’s a crucial factor that cannot be overlooked,” she notes. The restaurant prioritises wines from organic, regenerative, or biodynamic producers and favours bottles with a lower carbon footprint — whether through lighter packaging or local distribution.

“By focusing on these sourcing standards, we believe we can make the greatest environmental impact,” Davis concludes — proof that sustainability at Barbareño runs far deeper than what’s on the plate.



Chantelle Nicholson
(Photo: Paul Richardson)



Apricity
(Photo: Ben Carpenter)



England's Apricity: Conscious Cooking, Sustainable Living

In the heart of London's Mayfair, Apricity is quietly redefining the future of fine dining through an unwavering commitment to sustainability. The restaurant, helmed by chef-owner **Chantelle Nicholson**, brings the concept of "conscious cooking" to life in a way that goes well beyond buzzwords. From the sourcing of ingredients to energy use and wine service, Apricity is built on principles that honour the planet, its people, and the broader purpose of hospitality.

"At Apricity, sourcing of ingredients and produce is very much at the forefront of what we do," explains Nicholson. "We seek out growers, farmers, and makers that align with our ethos and produce delicious things." This conscious selection process favours regenerative agriculture, sustainable fishing, and minimal-impact production, creating a menu that is deeply seasonal and intrinsically respectful of nature.

But sustainability at Apricity extends far beyond what appears on the plate. The restaurant's interiors are thoughtfully designed with reclaimed materials, such as chairs crafted from recycled Coca-Cola bottles and lighting fixtures made from oyster shells and coffee grounds. Energy-efficient equipment, VOC-free paints, and a digital-only menu system are just a few examples of how Apricity's ethos permeates every detail.

"There are so many layers to 'sustainability'," Nicholson says. "They involve people, planet and purpose, meaning each element is analysed to try and get the best possible outcome, in line with these pillars." This philosophy guides not only how Apricity operates

internally, but also how it engages with suppliers and staff, fostering a culture of transparency and shared responsibility.

The beverage programme at Apricity is equally forward-thinking. Low-intervention wines from producers practising regenerative viticulture dominate the wine list, chosen with the same care as the ingredients in the kitchen. "Our wine list focuses on wines that hero the ecosystem they exist in," says Nicholson, "as well as biodiversity and regenerative viticulture." Meanwhile, cocktails and soft drinks are often infused with ingredients repurposed from the kitchen—poaching liquids, apple cores, citrus peels—minimising waste while creating depth of flavour.

Apricity also embraces alternative packaging, with several wines served from bag-in-box or cans. "It means single serves with no waste, which opens up the wine programme so much," Nicholson adds. Plans are even underway to launch a custom bag-in-box wine, a move that reflects Apricity's drive to innovate sustainably without sacrificing quality or experience.

Apricity's accolades include a Michelin Green Star and a three-star rating from the Sustainable Restaurant Association's Food Made Good standard. But perhaps the clearest testament to its impact is the way it reimagines luxury—not as excess, but as excellence aligned with ethics.

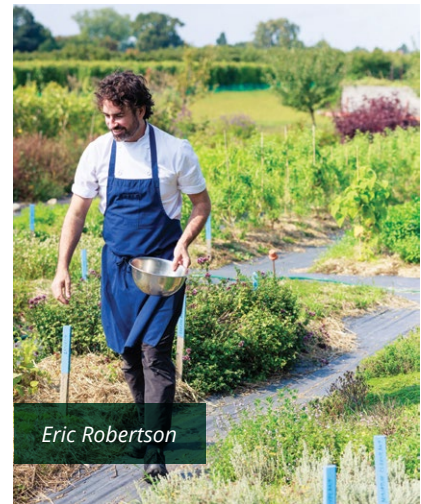
In a world where diners are increasingly seeking experiences that align with their values, Apricity offers something rare: a meal with meaning, rooted in care, craft, and conscious choices.



Pearl Morisette



Daniel Hadida



Eric Robertson

Canada's Pearl Morisette: A Quietly Radical Hospitality Experience

Michelin Green Star restaurant Pearl Morisette in Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada sustainability isn't a marketing catchphrase — it's a guiding principle woven into the fabric the business. The 42-acre property is home to a restaurant, winery, orchard, farm, and bakery, reflecting a deeply considered approach to food, hospitality, and community that chef/owners **Daniel Hadida** and **Eric Robertson** describe as intentionally understated.

According to Hadida, the restaurant doesn't preach its sustainability. At the core of their philosophy isn't eco-consciousness as dogma, there is also a practicality to it, and shared understanding amongst staff of their purpose.

When Hadida landed at Pearl Morisette a little less than a decade ago, it was a necessary reprieve from the intense kitchens of Michel-star European restaurants to deal with some family issues back home in Ontario. What started as cooking staff meals, occasional events, and small group dinners turned into an opportunity to create a more permanent elevated culinary dining experience. The seed of The Restaurant at Pearl Morisette was born.

The winery and vineyards were already in place at the time. Quebec-born sommelier turned

vigneron François Morisette, along with business partner Mel Pearl, established the property in Ontario's Niagara Peninsula in 2007. François integrated his knowledge of natural winemaking, and sustainable viticulture into the very being of the landscape changing Ontario winery. This meant integrating biodiversity and animals on the property.

Pearl Morisette's regenerative two-acre garden provides the backbone of their highly seasonal tasting menus, bolstered by foraging, preservation techniques like fermenting, pickling and drying, and close relationships with Canadian farmers and producers — 90% of which are based in Ontario. For Hadida it's about quality first, and "it's about community and relationships — using the property extensively and working with artisans who share our values."

While the restaurant takes a hyper-local approach, it does so with pragmatism and respect for quality over ideology. "Canada has some of the best grass-fed livestock, and we have amazing producers across the country who understand what we're doing," says Hadida.

Minimising food waste is integral to their kitchen culture. From raising chickens on-site for eggs to using bio-adjusting enzymes in their septic system and eliminating plastic packaging, waste is viewed not as inevitable but as a creative

challenge. "Unused ingredients are intentionally reframed — there's an implicit understanding here that we use things pragmatically and efficiently," says Hadida. Even floral arrangements for the dining room are grown and dried on-site for winter use.

This ethos extends beyond the kitchen to Pearl Morisette's beverage programme, where an equally thoughtful approach guides selections. "We look for producers — whether wine, coffee or spirits — who share a similar style and philosophy to us," says Hadida. "Often, that means farmers, owner-winemakers, people producing in a way that aligns with how we see the world."

Eco-conscious practices at Pearl Morisette go beyond sourcing. From low-impact packaging to renewable energy considerations, every decision is seen as part of a larger responsibility, but it is done through a lens of practicality, and intention. "Anyone trying to support care for the environment is doing something to be proud of," says Hadida.

Pearl Morisette doesn't shout its sustainability credentials from the rooftops — it lets its actions, food, and relationships speak for themselves. The result is a refined, quietly radical hospitality experience that shows what's possible when creativity meets care for the land.

Hamel Family Wines: Raising the Bar for Eco-Conscious Hospitality



John Hamel

Competitors, judges, the ASI Board and other attendees of the recent ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas enjoyed the hospitality of Hamel Family Wines in Sonoma Valley, where creating meaningful, lasting environmental change lies at the heart of the business. According to John Hamel, “sustainability is at the core of all our winegrowing practices and extends throughout every facet of our business.”

Since opening their Estate House and adjacent winery in 2014, the Hamel family has focused on creating guest experiences that reflect their commitment to environmental responsibility. “It is a natural extension to present our wines in a context that reflects our values and the way the wine was made,” says Hamel.

Designed by architect Douglas Thornley, the Estate House embraces eco-friendly design principles, featuring rammed-earth walls, a living roof, and FSC-certified wood. While Hamel chose not to pursue formal LEED certification, these features help integrate the building into its natural surroundings while reducing energy use. The winery caves also provide a naturally stable environment for wine ageing, reducing the need for artificial cooling.

While Hamel notes that sustainability in the vineyard and winemaking processes is guided by clear organic and biodynamic certifications, he acknowledges that creating a sustainable hospitality experience is more complex. “The scope of considerations can be so multifaceted and complex that it can feel overwhelming... the hospitality and business operations side is less standardised in terms of what sustainability means and which elements are most important to prioritise. Additionally, some decisions come with higher costs

FEATURE ARTICLE

Hamel Family Wines: Raising the Bar for Eco-Conscious Hospitality



Verenadohmen Photography

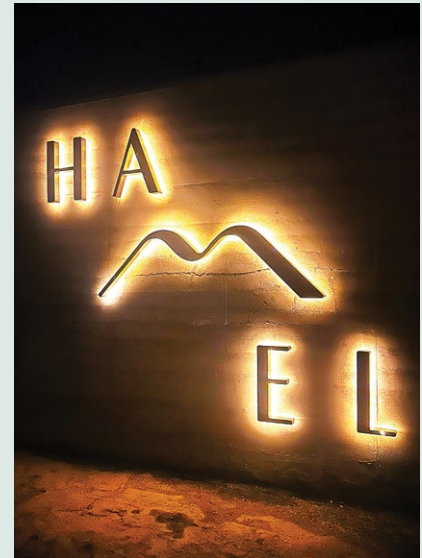
that need to be carefully weighed and managed to ensure the long-term sustainability of the business itself.”

Currently, the winery has yet to certify its hospitality programme against formal benchmarks, but Hamel adds, “we’re planning to explore measures like carbon neutrality in the future.”

Beyond the building’s design and energy use considerations, the philosophy extends to the estate’s kitchen, which focuses on seasonal produce grown onsite, expertly transformed into world-class cuisine by Chef Thomas Mendel and his team.

Ultimately, for Hamel, eco-conscious hospitality isn’t just about the environment —

it’s about creating lasting value for the land, the business, and every guest who visits. As those attending the recent ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas contest can attest, that commitment to sustainability translates into an unforgettable food and wine experience.



Si Sommeliers INTERNATIONAL



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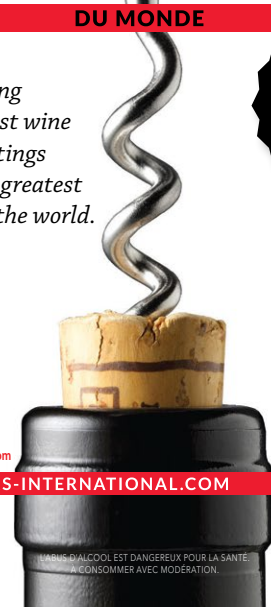
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Which Sustainability Standard Speaks to Your Wine Philosophy?

From organic to regenerative, biodynamic to sustainability-focused, today's wine world is awash with eco-certifications—each reflecting a different philosophy of land stewardship and transparency. EU Organic and USDA Organic set strict rules on synthetic inputs. Biodyvin, Demeter and Respekt Biodyn align with biodynamic principles. Haute Valeur Environnementale and Terra Vitis champion holistic French sustainability. Programmes like Sustainable Wine South Africa, New Zealand Sustainable Winegrowing, and Australia's version echo regional environmental efforts. California and Chile boast their own sustainability seals, while Regenerative Organic Certified, Certified Regenerative by Regenified, and the Regenerative Viticulture Alliance aim to restore ecosystems. As a sommelier, which standard inspires you most?

BIODYVIN

A biodynamic certification for European wine estates, requiring full Demeter-compliant biodynamic practices and regular audits.

HAUTE VALEUR ENVIRONNEMENTALE (HVE)

A French government-backed certification promoting biodiversity, reduced inputs, and environmental balance in viticulture.

USDA ORGANIC

A North American certification that prohibits synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, requiring full organic farming practices.

DEMETER

The global benchmark for biodynamic certification, based on Rudolf

Steiner's principles, encompassing soil health, composting, and holistic farm systems.

TERRE VITIS

A French sustainability label focused on traceability, integrated farming practices, and reducing environmental impact.

RESPEKT BIODYN

A biodynamic certification for Central European winegrowers that combines Steiner's methods with scientific and ecological approaches.

SUSTAINABLE WINE SOUTH AFRICA

A rigorous programme integrating environmental, social, and economic criteria for sustainable winegrowing.

NEW ZEALAND SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING

A pioneering national scheme requiring ongoing environmental improvements across vineyard and winery operations.

SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING AUSTRALIA

A voluntary programme based on continuous improvement in land, water, biodiversity, and business sustainability.

CALIFORNIA SUSTAINABLE WINEGROWING ALLIANCE

A comprehensive certification covering water, energy, pest management, and social equity in California vineyards and wineries.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Which Sustainability Standard Speaks to Your Wine Philosophy?



ASI Celebrates New Wave of ASI Diploma Recipients



Edoardo Jobet
Monett
Italy



Jai Singh
India/Italy



Shirley Tan Shu Wen
Malaysia



Yong Yi Ying
Malaysia



Miyazaki Mari
Japan



Nomura Sotaro
Japan



Dejan Nešković
Serbia



Daniele Arcangeli
*United Kingdom/
Italy*



Kaneko Toshiyuki
Japan



Grace Shih
United Kingdom



Léonard Lievin
United Kingdom



Luca Bocca
United Kingdom



Maria Boumpa
United Kingdom



Gabriel Marquez
Venezuela



The Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI) continues to raise the global standard of excellence in drinks service, with its latest round of ASI Diploma recipients announced this April. Out of 67 candidates who attempted the rigorous examination, 49 sommeliers from around the world successfully achieved certification — an impressive testament to the dedication and skill required to meet ASI’s internationally recognised standards.

Among the successful candidates, 14 sommeliers achieved the prestigious Gold Medal level, awarded to those who demonstrated exceptional mastery across theory, practical service, and blind tasting. These recipients represent a diverse cross-section of the global sommelier community, reflecting the ASI’s commitment to fostering talent worldwide.

The United Kingdom continued to demonstrate its strength in international sommellerie, with five sommeliers earning Gold, including Daniele Arcangeli, Grace Shih, Léonard Lievin, Luca Bocca, and Maria Boumpa. Likewise, Japan had another strong showing with three recipients, including Miyazaki Mari, Nomuro Sotaro and Kaneko Toshiyuki each achieving the ‘Gold’ standard.

Success was not limited to candidates from traditional sommelier powerhouse countries, as also amongst the top 14 was India native Jai Singh, who currently works in Italy, Serbian Dejan Nešković, and Venezuelan Gabriel Marquez the lone candidate from Americas to achieve this lofty achievement.

The ASI Diploma is regarded as one of the world’s most demanding sommelier certifications, with exams conducted in multiple languages and designed to test both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in a real-world service environment. The success of these 49 candidates underscores the passion and commitment driving today’s sommelier community — a group increasingly defined by its global reach, diverse backgrounds, and shared pursuit of excellence.

The Evolving Grid: Integrating Sake and Beer into Sommelier Training

With Sören Polonius

FEATURE ARTICLE

The Evolving Grid: Integrating Sake and Beer into Sommelier Training

In the ever-expanding world of beverages, the role of the sommelier is no longer confined to wine alone. As global tastes shift and the beverage landscape diversifies, the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI) has taken bold steps to reflect this evolution in its training and examination frameworks. One of the most significant recent developments has been the introduction of dedicated tasting grids for sake and beer—an initiative that aims to equip sommeliers with the tools to evaluate these beverages with the same rigour as wine.

To understand the thinking behind this move, ASI spoke with **Sören Polonius**, Co-Director of the ASI Education Committee and a driving force behind the updated grids. In this interview, Sören outlines why sake and beer deserve a place alongside wine in sommelier education, how the new tools were designed to align with existing frameworks, and why descriptors like esters, fermentation methods, and cultural context matter. His insights reveal a future in which sommeliers are expected to move fluidly across beverage categories—grounded in deep knowledge, yet adaptable to changing global demands.



Sören Polonius

ASI: Updates to the ASI Guidelines came out recently. Tell us why that is important?

Sören Polonius (SP): The ASI Guidelines will always be a work in progress because we are constantly reviewing our own and others' frameworks to see how they can be improved. As part of the process, we gather feedback from colleagues who use our grids and others. Initially, it's a lot of input, but over time you learn to manage it in a very simple, structured way.

The goal for the new sake and beer grids, for example, was to align them with our wine grids. Sommeliers shouldn't be forced to learn in a completely new way. The tasting grids are structured like the wine grids, so we're not asking sommeliers to adopt an entirely new language. They've simply been adapted to suit beer and sake more appropriately.

ASI: What was the motivation for adding sake and beer?

SP: I believe this sends a clear message that sommeliers must focus on more than just wine. Sommeliers today are working across a wide range of beverages. Having only one blind tasting grid for wine implies that beer and sake aren't worth considering, which is no longer reflective of reality. Both are hugely important globally. I use sake often in trainings and beverage menus, and we use a wide range of beers too—from entry-level restaurants to Michelin-starred ones. You now see sake on wine lists and a broader variety of beers. It's not just a "one lager world" anymore.

From a competition perspective, blind tasting sake shouldn't stop at "what is the raw material?"—everyone knows it's rice. We now need to go one or two steps further with full organoleptic descriptions. The same applies to beer. We should be able to describe beer in as much detail as wine, and we

need grids to support that. That's why we've been working on these for several years now.

ASI: Did creating the beer grids present any challenges for you and the team?

SP: Yes, particularly around some of the descriptors. For example, esters don't come up much in wine discussions but are important in beer. We also needed to address the different fermentation styles in beer—something not typically discussed in wine, although perhaps it should be. The same goes for sake. Fermentation is key: if you're making a Ginjo-style sake, it requires low fermentation temperatures, but a Junmai might not. Different temperatures achieve different styles and goals.



“The same applies to beer. We should be able to describe beer in as much detail as wine, and we need grids to support that. That’s why we’ve been working on these for several years now.”

ASI: Should we be speaking more about fermentation in blind wine tastings?

SP: I’d be happy to see that. It wasn’t our aim, but if these developments raise awareness and lead us to rethink how we analyse wine, I’d fully welcome that.

ASI: How many people have been involved in these developments?

SP: Too many to list. For the sake grid, we received tremendous support from the JSS (Japanese Sake and Shochu Makers Association), who connected us with experts and brewers in Japan and helped review our work. It was important to involve people based in Japan.

For beer, I spoke to contacts around the world—great brewers in Sweden, some in the US, and a strong connection in Ecuador via ASI Bootcamp. We consulted people from both small and large breweries, and from different cultures and backgrounds. I also worked with beer judges and Cicerones to adapt the grid in line with how beers are assessed professionally.

Internally, we shared the grids with the Exam and Education Committee—not for a full hands-on-deck situation, which would be a logistical mess—but for focused feedback. Regarding the ASI Contests Committee, I’m not saying we’ll see a full organoleptic blind tasting of beer or sake at the next Best Sommelier of the World or Europe contest, but this at least gives them the opportunity to include it.





ASI: What future developments do you envision for the grids?

SP: I'd love to include a grid for essay writing. It's a requirement in many exams and competitions, but many sommeliers haven't studied at university and aren't necessarily familiar with academic writing. That's like throwing someone into the deep end. A structured guide on how to write an effective essay would not only help for contests but is also a valuable life skill.

ASI: While tasting grids help us understand beverages technically, how do we translate that into meaningful communication with guests in a restaurant or wine bar?

SP: That's the real goal. We don't want robotic responses like "acidity is high, body is medium."

The grids are meant to encourage fluent, natural language. Ultimately, this is about communication. We need to be able to engage the guest, so they understand what we're describing. I believe future developments should include more support in expressing nuance—the soft details, not just the technical ones.

"We received tremendous support from the Japanese Sake and Shochu Makers Association, who connected us with experts and brewers in Japan and helped review our work."



Message in a Bottle:

One Winery's Digital Leap Toward Transparent Sustainability

In an age where consumers increasingly demand more than just quality from their wines, Message in a Bottle (MiB) is offering something deeper: a window into authenticity, origin, and sustainability. Spearheaded by Lyrarakis Winery, a family-run estate in Crete celebrated for its dedication to indigenous grape varieties and local heritage, MiB is a digital platform designed to tell the full story of a wine—from vineyard to bottle and beyond.



Bart Lyrarakis

“MiB supports this by presenting detailed, verifiable information through stories, imagery, and even a security feature that confirms whether a bottle has indeed been filled at the winery.”

Born from a collaboration with the Foundation for Research and Technology (FORTH) and private partners, MiB is a response to a new era of consumer expectations.

“The idea was to bridge the gap between producers and professionals or consumers by offering transparent, engaging narratives about each bottle’s journey,” explains Bart Lyrarakis.

“The platform integrates data from various stages of wine production, accessible via a QR code on the label, allowing consumers to connect with the wine’s origin, production practices, and the people behind it.”

While MiB doesn’t aim to highlight a gap per se, it does recognise the often-overlooked richness of what happens behind the scenes in a winery—work that is too often reduced to certifications or marketing buzzwords. The goal, according to Lyrarakis, is to offer **“a more interactive, honest way to showcase this work to both wine professionals and curious consumers.”**

Transparency and authenticity are central pillars of MiB. For Lyrarakis, transparency means clearly sharing details on cultivation methods,

production processes, and sustainability practices. Authenticity, meanwhile, is about staying true to their roots—championing indigenous varieties, supporting local growers, and respecting Cretan winemaking traditions. MiB supports this by presenting detailed, verifiable information through stories, imagery, and even a security feature that confirms whether a bottle has indeed been filled at the winery.

Importantly, MiB positions sustainability as a multifaceted commitment—not just a matter of organic farming. The platform highlights energy use, water conservation, waste management, and social engagement, including efforts to reduce emissions and support the local economy.

“It helps us show that sustainability is holistic,” says Lyrarakis, “and equips sommeliers with the tools to communicate this richness clearly.”

In doing so, MiB becomes more than a marketing tool—it’s a bridge between origin and enjoyment, between a producer’s values and the glass in the consumer’s hand. And for Lyrarakis Winery, it’s a bold step toward a more transparent, trust-based future for wine.



mib.lyrarakis.com

Regional Correspondent Reports

How Lebanon's Indigenous Grapes Are Reshaping Its Wine Identity

REGIONAL CORRESPONDENT REPORTS



Lebanon is home to one of the world's oldest winemaking traditions. Yet, in modern times, its wines have often been associated with international grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Chardonnay. In recent years, however, a new movement has emerged — one that rooted in reviving the country's indigenous grape varieties and producing wines that speak authentically of Lebanese terroir. This aligns with a growing global trend in the wine industry that favours distinctiveness, heritage, and growing interest in historic varietals for their ability to better adapt to climate change.

Among the grapes leading this revival in Lebanon are Obaideh and Merwah — ancient varieties long part of the country's viticultural heritage yet long overshadowed by French cultivars. Thanks to pioneering producers such as Sept Winery, Château Ksara, Château Musar, and Domaine des Tourelles, these grapes are being rediscovered. Interest in Lebanese indigenous varietals is now gaining momentum both locally and internationally.

“Sommeliers help shape global wine trends, and ASLIB has made it its mission to promote Lebanese wines, particularly those made from native grapes.”

What's Driving the Interest in Indigenous Varietals?

Terroir and authenticity have become central to the global wine conversation. Consumers and professionals alike are seeking wines that reflect their origin — and Lebanon is no different. With its diverse topography, high-altitude vineyards, and limestone-rich soils, Lebanon offers immense potential for site-specific, terroir-driven wines made from local grape varietals.

Secondly, there is growing international curiosity about Mediterranean wine cultures. As Greece and Georgia have successfully placed their indigenous varieties on the global wine map, there is a natural question — why not Lebanon?

Finally, the role of sommeliers and the Association des Sommeliers du Liban (ASLIB) has been instrumental. Sommeliers help shape global wine trends, and ASLIB has made it its mission to promote Lebanese wines, particularly those made from native grapes. Through competitions, education programmes, and international representation, ASLIB is encouraging a new generation of Lebanese sommeliers to embrace and champion their country's winemaking identity.

Elevating Lebanese' Historic Varietals Through Sommeliers

Since its founding, ASLIB has worked to elevate both knowledge and appreciation of Lebanese wines. Through tastings, masterclasses, and the national sommelier competition, ASLIB ensures Lebanese wine professionals are not only technically skilled but deeply rooted in their country's unique wine culture.

One of its most important initiatives is the Best Sommelier of Lebanon competition, which serves as a platform to showcase indigenous

wines, ensuring they are not overlooked in the pursuit of global excellence. ASLIB's professional education programmes also place emphasis on pairing Lebanese wines — especially those from native grapes — with local dishes. Moreover, by participating in global sommelier events, ASLIB members act as ambassadors for Lebanese wine, advocating for its rightful place on international wine lists.

From Tradition to Innovation

Historically, Obaideh and Merwah were primarily used as base grapes for Lebanon's national spirit, arak. Today, innovative winemakers are exploring new vinification techniques that highlight their potential in fine winemaking.

Some producers are ageing Obaideh in oak, drawing comparisons with Chardonnay due to its rounder, creamier texture. Others prefer stainless steel fermentation to preserve the grape's vibrant acidity and mineral-driven character. Merwah, prized for its naturally high acidity and aromatic complexity, is now being crafted into fresh, fruit-forward white wines, as well as macerated orange wines with notable tannin structure and depth.

A Bright Future

With sommeliers introducing guests to Obaideh and Merwah through compelling narratives of history, terroir, craft, and food and wine pairing, there is undoubtedly a bright future for these historic varietals.

If Obaideh and Merwah can successfully establish themselves on the local and international stage, what other Lebanese indigenous grapes might follow? Could varieties like Meksassi or Bouteillan experience their own renaissance?

Lebanon's future in the global wine industry does not lie in imitating Bordeaux or the Rhône. Rather, its strength is in authenticity — in embracing its heritage and producing wines that are unmistakably Lebanese. Thanks to the dedication of winemakers, sommeliers, and the tireless work of ASLIB, Lebanon's indigenous grape varieties are finally stepping into the global spotlight.

The country's wine future looks not only promising — it looks distinct, proud, and deeply rooted in tradition.



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent
Joseph Mounayer (Middle East)

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Jerez region: tradition meets climate change

By Maria Demidovich with César Saldaña



César Saldaña

Talk of climate change and its impact on wines and wine styles are less rarely spoken about in the context of fortified wines compared to their non-fortified counterparts. Perhaps we are guilty of thinking that the impact to the nuances of flavour of the final product less impacted by changes to their environment. Yet, even if that may in some ways be true, ultimately it is the very viability of production that is in question, as changes in the environment not only impact style, they can also impact the very viability of an industry. **María Demidovich** interviewed **César Saldaña**, president of the Regulatory Council of the Jerez-Xeres-Sherry, Manzanilla-Sanlúcar de Barrameda and Vinegar of Jerez Denominations of Origin about how they are adapting to this global crisis.

María Demidovich (MD): What effects does climate change have on winemaking and viticulture in the Jerez wine region?

César Saldaña (CS): For several decades, we have been able to see the effects of climate change here in the Jerez region, and these effects have intensified over the last few years, especially in the vineyards. The main effect of climate change is the shortening of the natural vine cycle, which can shorten grapes ripening and affect the quality of the base wine.

MD: What are the new "historic" grape varieties recently approved by the Regulatory Council? How will you be using those varieties to support sustainable viticultural practices and as a way of adapting to climate change?

CS: The vineyards are where we can see the most significant effects of climate change and a few years ago the grape varieties Beba, Vigiriega and Perruno were approved and authorised for the production of Sherry. Of course, Palomino will continue to be a "great variety of Jerez," the most important variety in the region, but these newly approved varieties with the longest cycles that were used here before the phylloxera plague, but over time abandoned and marginalised at the beginning of the 20th century, will be important for adapting to climate change.



“Soon the temperature and the humidity inside wineries will need to be controlled and regulated using technology, but also it’s important to consider that, unlike vineyards, this interior space offers more options to control the environment.”



These varieties were approved only in 2022; therefore, it hasn't been enough time yet to obtain sherry wines aged in the Criaderas and Solera systems. We are also conducting studies on how they adapt to climate change and working with several observation and study groups on these measures, conducting technical trials with rootstocks on experimental plots at IFAPA (the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research and Training), to see how they can withstand drought on the experimental plantation.

MD: Can we consider the traditional Aserpia technique as a viable sustainable practice for coping with climate change in the future?

CS: Aserpia is a very effective and sustainable method that has been used for hundreds of years in the Jerez region to retain water. We have several unique and important factors in the Jerez region: there is the albariza soil, with its very high chalk content, providing it a great capacity to accumulate and retain water. Furthermore, the slopes here are not very steep, which allows us to use the Aserpia technique. The Aserpia technique which consists of making ridges, little trenches, about eighty centimetres in width down the slope. This helps to retain rainwater, aiding the albariza soil absorb as much rain as possible. Another function of Aserpia is to prevent soil ‘runoff’ from the upper part of the vineyard to the lower part.

MD: How does the current temperature increase impact biological aging and the famous ‘velo de flor’ (veil of flor yeast)?

CS: The Criaderas and Solera System is an effective and

completely sustainable aging method that has been used for centuries to ensure uniform wine aging. However, we must also keep in mind that each winery has its own microclimate, and different factors affect the wine's aging potential. The aging cellars for each winery are unique.

The global temperature increase affects the “*velo de flor*” and it's obvious that soon the temperature and the humidity inside wineries will need to be controlled and regulated using technology, but also it's important to consider that, unlike vineyards, this interior space offers more options to control the environment.

The Jerez area has developed a particular style of architecture. The wine cellars in Jerez are called “the cathedrals of wine.” They boast very high 15-metre-tall ceilings, thick walls that keep out the heat, and the albero (the “yellow soil”, sandy clay, or gravel that's used to pave the floors of wine cellars in Jerez) needed to regulate the temperature and the humidity. All these factors contribute to the preservation of a special microclimate crucial for aging wine in the Criaderas and Solera System. As a result, watering the albero once or twice a week during the summer, when the highest temperatures occur, is now common practice.

Nowadays, more and more wineries are using technological advances and humidification, but for now, by enlarge, it is our traditional practices being used in the Jerez region that are our way of combating against climate change.



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent
Maria Demidovich (Spain)

ReadyToWrite

In Memoriam

Piero Tenca, an Endearing Figure in the Sommelier World, Has Left Us



Illness prevented **Piero Tenca** from celebrating the anniversary of the Ticino Sommelier Association, the organisation he founded 40 years ago. As fate would have it, the anniversary fell on the very day of his funeral.

Piero will be remembered as a highly professional man of rare elegance and kindness, faithful to his convictions and to his friends. The Swiss sommelier community is now doubly orphaned, as Tenca's passing comes just one year after the loss of Myriam Broggi.

Tenca will be greatly missed by the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI), as he and his wife Lisa were familiar faces at most ASI events, accompanying the ASI team all over the world. In the past, he also served on the ASI Executive Board as Treasurer.

Who better to speak about him than Giuseppe Vaccarini, "his" ASI President between 1996 and 2004?

"Piero Tenca was a great catering professional with exceptional qualities of kindness and hospitality — virtues that are rare today. He believed in and developed sommellerie, first in the canton of Ticino, then in other cantons through his confederal presidency, while also collaborating at an international level as Treasurer of the ASI with precision and transparency during my presidency.

Above all, I remember him for his generous and fraternal friendship, and for the historic moments we shared together in our respective associations to develop and promote the future of young people in the sommelier profession, in which he believed so strongly.

Thank you, Piero — you will always remain an important reference point for all sommeliers."

Member News

International Qvevri Day: Honouring Georgia's Ancient Winemaking Heart

With the initiative of the Georgian Sommelier Association and support from the National Wine Agency of Georgia, International Qvevri Day was officially celebrated on the last Sunday of April. This global celebration honoured not a grape, but a vessel—the Qvevri, Georgia's iconic clay amphora used to ferment and age wine for over 8,000 years.

In 2025, International Qvevri Day fell on 27 April, marking the symbolic awakening of Qvevris in spring, when wine breathes its first story. More than just a winemaking tool, the Qvevri has long represented Georgian identity, tradition, and a deep connection to the land. Buried underground to naturally regulate temperature, these vessels embody a unique winemaking method recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

International Qvevri Day was created to spotlight Georgia's ancient enological practices and to share the uniqueness of Qvevri wines with the world. It aimed to build greater awareness of regional wine styles, native grape varieties, and the distinctive aromas and flavours imparted by Qvevri fermentation. It called upon sommeliers, winemakers, historians, and wine lovers globally to celebrate a timeless tradition.

This year's celebrations featured a rich programme of cultural and educational events, including:

- The International Qvevri Conference;
- A ceremonial simultaneous Qvevri-opening across Georgian wine regions;
- The unveiling of a dedicated Qvevri wine glass created in partnership with the Shalva Khetsuriani Sommelier School;
- An Honorary Sommelier Award ceremony recognising global ambassadors of Georgian wine;
- A "Musical Qvevri Performance," offering an artistic interpretation of the vessel's role.

From the vineyards of Kakheti to wine bars in New York, Paris or Tokyo, glasses were raised in celebration of Georgia, where wine's story began—and where its future still flows from the earth.



Shalva Khetsuriani

MEMBER NEWS



საქართველოს
სომელიერთა
ასოციაცია
GEORGIAN
SOMMELIER
ASSOCIATION



New Executive Board of the Polish Sommelier Association

Kamil Wojtasiak has been elected President of the Polish Sommelier Association. Supported during his campaign by Piotr Kamecki, ASI Vice-President for Europe, Wojtasiak secured a majority in an online vote held during the Association's assembly on 6 February. Aged 34, Wojtasiak is the 2018 Best Polish Sommelier and has represented Poland at the ASI Best Sommelier of Europe & Africa (2021) and the ASI Best Sommelier of the World (2023). He has served as General Manager and Sommelier at Butchery & Wine in Warsaw for 13 years. Within the Association, he previously headed the competition committee and, since last year, has been coaching **Tomasz Żak**, who placed fifth at the 2024 ASI Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa and the Middle East.



Kamil Wojtasiak

The newly appointed Vice-Presidents are **Adam Tomczak**, 2021 Polish Sommelier Champion, known for his work at Mielżyński Wine & Spirits in Poznań, and **Paweł Zduniak**, owner of the import company Mega Vino and former Head Sommelier and General Manager at Arco by Paco Pérez and Treinta y Tres. Other board members include **Jan Bester**, **Grzegorz Jach**, **Jerzy Kruk**, **Maciej Sokołowski**, and **Sylwester Szymczak**.

The new leadership will focus on education and the integration of Poland's sommelier community. Priorities include expanding training within the organisation and raising awareness of the profession in culinary schools. More meetings and tastings will be held across Polish cities, and young members will be offered internships at Michelin-starred Polish restaurants. The board's term of office is three years.



Heo Su-hyeon (right)

Heo Su-hyeon Wins 20th Korea National Sommelier Competition

Heo Su-hyeon, Head Sommelier at the Michelin two-starred Restaurant Allen, has been crowned champion of the 20th Korea National Sommelier Competition. Organised by the Korea International Sommelier Association and hosted by the Daejeon Tourism Organization, the event highlighted the top talent in Korean wine service.

Silver and bronze medals were awarded to **Kim Min-jun** (Jeongsikdang) and **Bae Jeong-hwan** (Shinsegae Department Store), respectively. Additional encouragement awards went to sommeliers from Bicena, the Shilla Hotel Seoul, and Lotte Hotel Seoul.

Competitors faced nine rigorous challenges, including blind tastings, food and wine pairing, and multilingual service simulations. The top finalists now qualify for selection to represent Korea at the 2025 ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Asia & Oceania and the 2026 ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the World in Portugal.

Prize winners received an array of rewards such as wine accessories, scholarships, and overseas trips. Heo also earned a visit to Portugal and an invitation to the 2025 Hungarian Wine Summit. The 2024 edition, celebrating the competition's 20th anniversary, further cemented Daejeon's reputation as Korea's "wine city."



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