

ASI MAGAZINE

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ISSUE #17



SOMMELLERIE & AI



**THE FUTURE OF AI, WINE,
AND SOMMELLERIE**
Robert Joseph, Arvid Rosengren, ChatGPT



SPOTLIGHT ON SERBIA
Dejan Živkoski



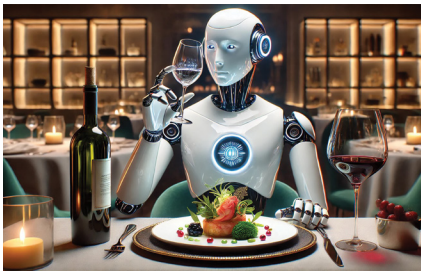


ASI Contest Best Sommelier of the Americas

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Welcome!



*William Wouters,
President ASI*

Embracing Technology: it's not if, but when and how

The question is no longer if we should embrace technology, but when and how we do so to remain relevant in an ever-evolving world. The sommelier's role has been deeply rooted in knowledge and personal connection. The allure of this profession lies in the stories and knowledge shared during the service of wine and other beverages, nuanced recommendations, and the ability to elevate a dining experience through curated pairings. Yet, despite the richness of this tradition, the wine industry and sommelier profession are facing unprecedented challenges. Ironically at a time when there has never been more knowledgeable and well-trained sommeliers, and better wine being made wine consumption is on the decline in many parts of the world. Simultaneously, the traditional notions of fine dining are being challenged by new, innovative ways of experiencing elevated food and drink.

This shift can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the modern consumer has changed. Millennials and Gen Z, who represent the future of the market, are more experimental and less tied to the conventions that once defined the wine world. They seek authenticity, experiences, and value over prestige. They embrace

moderation over indulgence. They are more inclined to explore wine by the glass at a bar than a bottle at a fine dining restaurant. They are willing to view a food truck, or a pop-up experience that offers something unique as an experiential experience on par with a formal, multi-course dinner. For this generation, the traditional fine dining model, with its white tablecloths and expansive wine lists, is no longer the default choice for a special night out.

In fact, particularly in the western world, dramatic rises in living expenses compared to income are pricing some of these traditional vestiges of sommellerie out of the reach of the many. Arguably the exclusivity we created as a beverage and fine dining restaurant industry alike to appeal to an affluent clientele has in some ways been too effective, limiting experiences to those that have money without embracing those that may not have it now, but could in the future.



While these demographic and economic realities morph how and where we work, the future provides opportunities. The rise of digital technology has revolutionised the way we discover, learn about, and purchase wine. Online platforms offer consumers access to a global selection of wines at the click of a button, often driven by algorithm-based and AI (artificial intelligence) recommendations. The mystique of the sommelier, once a gatekeeper of wine knowledge, is now accessible to anyone with an internet connection. This democratisation of information has led to a more informed, yet less reliant, consumer base.

In the face of these changes, the wine industry stands at a crossroads. It's crucial to acknowledge that while tradition is our foundation, innovation is our future. Embracing technology does not mean abandoning the essence of what we do; rather, it means finding new ways to connect, particularly our younger audiences, and meet them where they are. One promising avenue is the integration of technology in enhancing the customer experience. Digital wine lists, equipped with tasting notes, food pairing suggestions, and interactive features, can help demystify wine for the novice while providing deeper insights for the enthusiast. Furthermore, data analytics can be a powerful tool in understanding consumer preferences and predicting trends. By analysing purchasing patterns, sommeliers can curate more relevant selections and personalise recommendations, thereby enhancing the overall dining experience, whilst simultaneously supporting the bottom line of the restaurant. Social media and digital content also provide platforms for sommeliers to share their knowledge and passion, reaching a broader audience beyond the restaurant floor.

However, technology should not be seen as a replacement for the human touch but as a complement to it. The role of the sommelier will continue to be one of storytelling, curation, and education. The challenge lies in leveraging technology to enhance these aspects, not overshadow them. As we move forward, the key to sustaining the relevance of our profession lies in striking a balance between tradition and innovation. We must remain rooted in the values that have defined our craft while being open to new ideas and approaches. By doing so, we can continue to provide meaningful, memorable experiences that resonate with the modern consumer.

The crossroads at which we find ourselves is not a cause for alarm but an opportunity for growth. The decline in traditional wine consumption and the changing landscape of fine dining call for a reimagining of our role. By embracing technology thoughtfully and strategically, we can ensure that the art of wine and dining not only survives but thrives in the years to come. The journey ahead is one of adaptation and evolution, and it is a journey well worth embarking on. In this edition of ASI Magazine, we talk to some of the people trying to utilise new technologies, including AI, to change the way wine is purchased, even how it is made. The latter opening up new questions regarding the potential manipulation of wine, and the very real possibility of "wine-like" beverages being created in a lab. It sounds like fiction, and indeed in this issue, editor Mark DeWolf talks to hotelier **Steven Laine** about his recent book *Jupiter's Blood*, which beneath the murders, kidnapping and espionage, questions whether we can live in a wine, sommelier world that embraces both history and technology? We speak with **Katherine Axellson**, of Tastry, about how her technology is changing the way wine is made. Is it the future or finish of fine wine?

"Embracing technology does not mean abandoning the essence of what we do; rather, it means finding new ways to connect."



We speak with sommeliers, such as **Arvid Rosengren**, who both values technology but also identify the gaps that exist between machine generated recommendations and those rooted in human connection. Finally, we are privileged to speak with **Robert Joseph**, about his vision of AI in our futures.

Fitting this publication comes on the eve of our ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa & Middle East 2024 in Belgrade, where we will witness a new generation of sommeliers compete on the world stage. How will they embrace technology? How will they push sommellerie into new paths forward?

In My Glass



Mark DeWolf

Mark DeWolf, Content Manager ASI

Editor, ASI Magazine

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How will sommeliers balance tradition and technology?

Over the last half-century, we've witnessed a cycle in the wine industry. With the rise of innovation emerging in the 1970s and 80s, a global industry embraced modern techniques, technology, and scientific advancements to improve consistency, efficiency, and quality control. However, over time, there has been a renewed appreciation for traditional methods, such as organic and regenerative farming, minimal intervention, and natural fermentation, which prioritise authenticity, terroir expression, and a deeper connection to the land. This latest shift, particularly amongst our fine wine community, has been building as a sort of rejection of the manipulation and adulteration of wine, running in tandem with broader global trends towards food security and farm-to-table dining. It reflects a desire to balance the benefits of modern technology with the artistry and heritage of winemaking.

Yet, even while modern winemakers seek reflection in the past, it is only possible with a deeper understanding of the science of winemaking. It's perhaps a dangerous line to draw, suggesting there are traditionalists and modernists, when in fact many of our best wines are blends of the two. I encourage you to read my interview with Katerina Axelsson, who has pioneered the use of AI for wineries and retailers to better

understand the taste preferences of consumers. Is it manipulation, or simply a modern way to push a traditional industry forward?

Similarly, in the world of sommellerie, technology and AI are being increasingly integrated to enhance the wine selection process, provide personalised recommendations, and democratise wine knowledge. Tools like AI-driven recommendation systems and data analytics can offer immense benefits by making wine more accessible to a broader audience, much like how modern winemaking techniques have improved accessibility and quality. However, just as fine winemakers have returned to their roots to preserve the human touch and unique character of their wines, sommeliers are recognising that while technology can be a powerful tool, it cannot replace the human element of their craft. The art of storytelling, the ability to connect emotionally with guests, and the nuanced understanding of context and experience are aspects of sommellerie that remain irreplaceable by technology.

AI and technology can recommend a wine that aligns with our tastes, but a computer cannot add the nuance of flavour that a sommelier can through stories of the people and places behind those wines. Nor can it—at least not yet—understand

the complex emotional context of the dining experience. It doesn't see the tear of joy running down a parent's face while celebrating their child's university graduation dinner, nor does it empathise or understand the dinner out after the death of a pet.

The future of sommellerie, much like winemaking, will likely involve a harmonious integration of both worlds—leveraging the precision and efficiency of AI to enhance the sommelier's ability to provide personalised service while preserving the unique, human-centric elements that make the role so special. Just as winemakers use modern tools to achieve the best expression of their traditional craft, sommeliers can use technology to complement their expertise, ultimately enriching the wine experience for consumers without losing the personal touch that defines the profession. Our humanity is our essence, but we must be willing to embrace technology for the future.

Cheers

Welcome to Serbia



ASI contest
BEST SOMMELIER
of EUROPE, AFRICA and MIDDLE EAST
SERBIA 2024

Dejan Živkoski,

President, Serbian Sommelier Association



On behalf of the Serbian Sommelier Association, it is my distinct honour and pleasure to welcome the world to Serbia this November for the prestigious **ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa and Middle East 2024**. We are truly privileged to host this remarkable event in the vibrant city of Belgrade, a hub of culture, history, and gastronomy.

The contest, scheduled from November 11th to 15th, will not only showcase the exceptional talents of sommeliers from across three continents but also offer an opportunity for all participants to immerse themselves in the rich heritage and hospitality of Serbia. We are delighted to welcome the candidates, judges, ASI board and all distinguished guests to what promises to be an unforgettable celebration of our shared passion for wine and the sommelier profession.

We will begin our programme with a Wine & Gastronomy Welcome Salon at the Crystal Ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Belgrade. This will be a perfect opportunity to meet fellow delegates and experience some of Serbia's finest wines and culinary delights. A masterclass on Serbian wines will follow. I am excited to share with our guests the very best of Serbian wine. We've been making wine in Serbia for thousands of years, but I am most excited to showcase the new generation of winemakers who are pushing our wine industry to new

heights, and beginning to receive the international attention they deserve. Throughout the week, participants will engage in a series of rigorous competitions and enriching activities. The quarterfinals will take place on Tuesday, November 12th, accompanied by a captivating city tour of Belgrade for our delegates and guests, providing a glimpse into the city's unique blend of tradition and modernity. The day will conclude with a delightful dinner at Restaurant Corso, where we will also announce the semi-finalists.

As the contest progresses, we will witness the semi-finals on November 13th, followed by an exclusive tour of Serbian wineries on November 14th, where we will strengthen friendships within our ASI community. The grand finals on November 15th will see the finest sommeliers compete for the prestigious title, and the week will culminate with the Gala dinner and awards ceremony, celebrating excellence, dedication, and camaraderie within our profession.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the ASI board, its ASI partners and our event sponsors. Without their support an event like this can't be produced. While we put a spotlight on our competitors during this exciting week, I would be remiss not to take this opportunity to thank, and highlight, the invaluable contributions of our volunteers here in Serbia, from ASI, and all

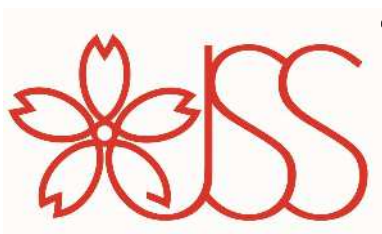
the sommeliers who traveled from near and far to help execute all the activities that we have carefully planned. While there are too many to identify individually, a nod to those that have gone above and beyond in their efforts to help this come together. You know who you are. Their collective dedication ensures that we deliver an event that reflects the spirit of unity and excellence that the ASI embodies.

We are committed to providing an exceptional experience for all our guests and participants, showcasing the best of Serbian hospitality. It is our hope that, beyond the contest, those in attendance will leave with cherished memories, new friendships, and a deeper appreciation for Serbian hospitality, and the art of sommellerie. For those that cannot join us at the event, we wait with open arms. As our good friend William Wouters says ASI is a family. We warmly invite you to Serbia, where we look forward to welcoming you into our home and treating you to the finest local food and drink.

Once again, welcome to Belgrade. We look forward to sharing this extraordinary journey with you and celebrating the outstanding talents and achievements of our global sommelier community.

Cheers

Dejan Živkoski, President, Serbian Sommelier Association



Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association (JSS)
represents not only SAKE but also

SHOCHU

What is Shochu?

Shochu (*shōchū*) is Japan's indigenous distilled spirit, and it has been around for about 500 years. It is most predominantly made in the southern regions of Okinawa and Kyushu, where it was first developed.

Shochu typically has about 20-25% ABV (alcohol by volume), though it can officially be anything up to 45% ABV.

With over 50 possible base ingredients to choose from and dozens of ways to serve it, shochu is an all-rounder that can be served independently or with a wide variety of foods.

HONKAKU “authentic” SHOCHU

is the traditional type of shochu, using **KOJI** mold for fermentation and a **SINGLE POT STILL** for distillation. It retains the flavors of the ingredients, creating a wealth of flavor profiles. The most typical base ingredients are: ***RICE, BARLEY, SWEET POTATO, BACKWHEAT, or BROWN SUGAR.***

AWAMORI

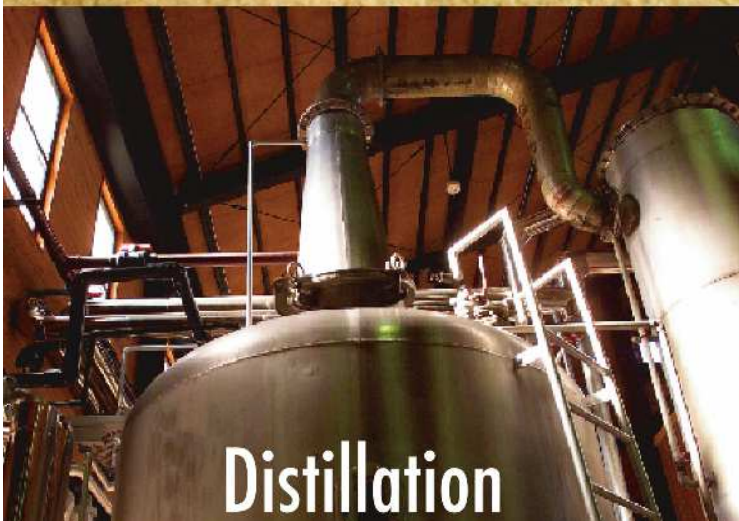
is a honkaku shochu made exclusively in Okinawa using an original method and only uses **BLACK KOJI** mold.



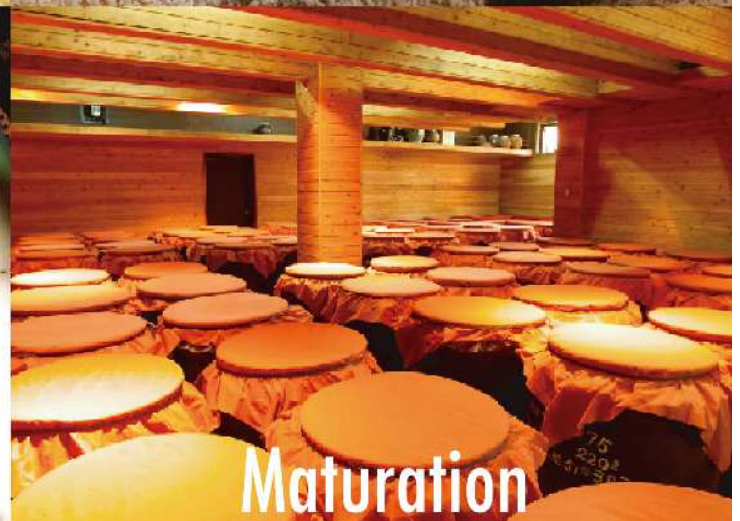
Koji



Fermentation



Distillation



Maturation

Guest Editors

ROBERT JOSEPH, ARVID ROSENGREN, CHATGPT

AI is a Necessary Tool: it's all about how to use it

An interview with Robert Joseph



thewinepeoplebook.com



winethinker.com

Robert Joseph, also known as *The Wine Thinker*, is an author, business owner, wine judge, and consultant. Through his consultancy, he has worked with notable clients such as Accolade, Château Brane-Cantenac, Château Malartic-Lagravière, McGuigan Wines, Torres, Esterhazy, Origin Wines, and the marketing organisations of Australia, Brazil, Georgia, Moldova, and Portugal.

He describes himself as a futurist. In his own words: "Over nearly four decades, I was among the first to identify the likely growth of New World brands in the UK (United Kingdom), the evolution of varietal wines in Europe, the impact of the internet, and the move towards alternative packaging and closures." He is also a proponent of the use of Artificial Intelligence. He most recently launched *The Wine People* (). Using AI, he created a vast number of personas that represent the wine world as a whole.

Of the book, Joseph says: "In wine, as in so many other parts of our lives today, we live in bubbles based on where we happen to be located, our experiences and tastes, the people we know, and the work we

do. People who live in the US and buy premium wine from a local specialist struggle to imagine having to do one's shopping in a Swedish monopoly store or choosing to do so in a German discount supermarket. And vice versa. Those who imagine that 'big wine' refers to California giants like Gallo rarely know anything of the vast cooperatives that process nearly half of Europe's grapes. Persuading people to buy one wine rather than another, how many people pause to consider the label designer and the person behind the product? This book is an attempt to burst some of those bubbles and introduce the people in them to each other—and to the reader who can then imagine for themselves the relationships that might exist between them."

In this interview with Robert Joseph, we ask about the future of AI in our wine and sommellerie worlds. What advantages does AI bring? Where is the line between advances in technology and the elimination of the humanity and artistry of wine? What is the future for sommellerie in a world where, as Robert suggests, larger retailers will have dedicated, virtual wine and lifestyle assistants? He asks, "Will the future advisor look like a robot, or will it look like you or me? And will it sound like you or me?"

"AI signals the end of industrialisation... Where industrialisation allowed humans to make the same product over and over at speed, AI offers the promise of individualisation. When it comes to agriculture, AI will let viticulturists consider the needs of each individual plant. It will also allow businesses to craft individual messages for each customer." — Hans-Christian Boos, Founder and CEO of Arago, a leading AI company that helps businesses automate their IT processes, from a speech at Meininger's Wine Goes Tech conference.

"There are some really exciting wines being made throughout Moldova. It's an ideal place to grow grapes, to make wine, and it's a very easy place to do it."

ASI: Do you agree with the statement?

Robert Joseph (RJ): There are two sides to this we need to consider. The first one is the vineyard. I think the use of AI here is fascinating. We are currently spraying large areas with products of one kind or another. Regardless of whether we're working organically or conventionally, we're using a lot of products. To make an analogy, it's like we are going into a town and giving everyone the same medical treatment. That works with vaccines, but it doesn't necessarily work with other kinds of medicine. You'd expect your doctor to look at your records on their computer and say, actually, you need this dose of this medicine, and somebody else needs that dose. We've not been able to do that, even with small vineyards, and certainly not with large ones. Now, with sensors, drones, satellites, and robots going through the vineyards, it is getting easier and easier to identify individual vines that need specific treatments, whether for pests, fungus, or even irrigation. All sorts of things can actually be worked on individually using AI technology.

This is also very relevant because we are currently facing a labour crisis, something we're not talking about enough. In Europe, wineries are struggling to get people to come and prune their vines. And if they do get labour from Turkey or elsewhere, they need to be trained. Now we have glasses that we can wear. Going back to AI, we can give an untrained person special glasses that tell them how to prune a vine and where to cut. It's not hard to imagine those glass-wearing humans being replaced by robots doing the same thing. And if the robots aren't very good at pruning today, they will learn from every mistake and improve. The same labour issues exist in California, especially since the legalisation of cannabis. Many Mexican workers prefer to work in the cannabis industry rather than in vineyards, especially when it comes to pruning in the cold months. Cannabis companies are making more money, and they're able to pay more. So, on that side of the AI picture, I think its use in the wine industry is almost inevitable. Now, who is going to be able to pay for it? Which growers, which wineries? That's a whole other story.

ASI: Speaking of the use of AI in the production side, tell us a little about the AI-related project you were working on in Moldova?

RJ: For the past decade, I have been working on and off as a consultant for Moldova. It's like a lot of countries in Eastern Europe in the sense that it doesn't get the attention it deserves. There are some really exciting wines being made throughout that region. It's an ideal place to grow grapes, to make wine, and it's a very easy place to do it. They have international grapes, a lot of them, but they also have interesting grapes of their own. There is Fetească Neagră and two white Fetească (Alba, Regală) varieties, and you've got Rara Neagră, creating an entire set of unique varieties. What I find fascinating are the blends. You can make both blends of local grapes and blends of local and international varieties.

With the AI project, we didn't use AI in every sense. It didn't control harvesting and so on, but it provided advice on that. What AI was really used for was the blending and marketing. AI actually came up with labels. We did a tasting of the AI blend versus the human blend at Prowein in Germany. The AI blends generally impressed tasters more in the blind tasting than the human-created blend.

The point about it, and this is very relevant when you talk about AI, is that we need to be careful. I think if you talk about AI without talking about the errors, what it gets wrong, you would be remiss. AI is like a new employee. It's very bright but hasn't worked in the business for very long. You need to watch over what it does. Secondly, it's only as good as what goes in. In the context of the Moldova project, it needed to learn about Moldovan varieties. Any AI system can tell you what Bordeaux-style blend you should make because there is a lot of data on Bordeaux blends. When

you ask about Moldovan grape varieties, AI doesn't know where to begin. We had to create our own dedicated AI system for that project. This is relevant to all sorts of other wine projects that will need us to build a body of information. That will help us keep the data input clean and accurate because we'll have put the information in.

ASI: Does the introduction of AI into wine production bring with it a risk of homogeneity? Or is this just the romanticism of a sommelier coming out?

RJ: You gave my answer at the end of your question. In a sense, it really depends on which side of the market you're looking at. A lot of sommeliers and other people will say it all went wrong with Parker. His points system made everyone make Parker-style wines. What a lot of those people tend to overlook is that those Parker

wines gave a lot of people a lot of pleasure. Wine drinking in America went up significantly during that period. It's the same in the movie business and in the book publishing business. The book market is being largely financed by the success of romance fiction at the moment, a section of the market that is probably not being looked at, let alone read, by most of the critics who would love to see us all reading great, adventurous, complex, new novels. In that sense, yes, of course, technology will in some ways facilitate homogenisation, but this might not necessarily be a bad thing if it is giving people what they want.

ASI: In this issue, we also interview Katerina Axelsson of Tasty. I reference the potential of homogeneity, somewhat in reference not to what that project is or does but what it could on same level encourage.



RJ: I think Tastry is fascinating. Essentially, they are helping producers make wine that will sell in the places to the people most likely to buy them, which is no different from helping a film distributor know which movies to show at their particular cinemas in their particular towns. I think we as an industry are not looking at what Tastry is doing as much as we probably should be. We're looking much more at some of the models which are based on the consumer downloading an app that is going to tell them what wine to order. I don't think the average consumer has downloaded an app to tell them which books they want to read. I don't think they are going to download an app that tells them what wine to order. To me, the Tastry model is something that's very relevant.

ASI: We are interviewing the founders of a couple of those AI-driven wine recommendation platforms. Ultimately, is not the effectiveness of these related to both the quality of the data and, in a way, the human influence of the people who build the original algorithms?

RJ: Bear in mind that we're all looking at data every day, whether it's surveys or whatever. We, as human beings, are often looking at questionable data and sometimes repeating it or using it in what we do. All we're doing now is saying we're going to rely on a machine, an algorithm, or a robot, or whatever you want to call it, that is using the same data that we've been using badly. There's enough fake news out there generated by bad data. With AI, we can find ourselves using bad data without knowing it because we're trusting whatever the screen has told us. For example, recently I asked Google who wrote Mr. Bojangles, and Google answered Bob Dylan. This is actually not the case. If I put that in my

social media feed, and then ten or 100 people repeated it, multiply that again, and eventually that untruth becomes real to people. It becomes a fact.

ASI: You spoke to the Spotify example in terms of a positive use of AI to predict consumer preferences. Does that apply to how we deliver the message of wine? Will there be individualisation of wine?

RJ: In terms of individual messaging, this is second element of AI we need to consider. There have always been some very sophisticated online retailers. Even before we went online, there were retailers sending out mail with different messaging targeted at different people. One person might get something in the mail focusing on describing a wine in terms of style, while another would receive the whole history of the estate, because that's what they react to better. Now, the difference is today, it's in real time.

"We did a tasting of the AI blend versus the human blend at Prowein in Germany. The AI blends generally impressed tasters more in the blind tasting than the human-created blend."



A great example is the messaging delivered by politicians. Campaign managers are able to send different messages to different people based on what AI has learned about them. I foresee not only retailers saying, "If I've got wine X, I'm going to present wine X in a different way to different people," but also providing a virtual assistant. I'll choose what my assistant looks and sounds like. Are they male or female? What age are they? What accent do I want their voice to have? That assistant is going to know what I've bought, know a lot about what I'm doing, and say, "Robert, I think you're going to like this." It's going to be the Spotify of wine retailing. Spotify doesn't always get it right, but it gets it right more times than it is wrong. I can't see why that assistant won't do the same.

In terms of individualisation of the product to meet consumer demands, Levi's jeans can be customised for you, putting a

pocket here or there, for example, the same way Audi, as a motor vehicle manufacturer, can customise to your specifications. It's possible, but you're going to pay for it. Wine is not quite so easy. We have to pick grapes from a certain amount of acreage. There are no mini tanks that allow us to micro-vinify to that level. I do see a future for blending wine for particular people. It's going to be a small niche and you're going to pay a lot for it.

From another perspective, going back to my Spotify model and my use of it, certainly every week, I am being introduced to very obscure artists via Spotify. I could see a lazy sommelier, for argument's sake, saying to the system, "Please give me as many adventurous new wines from Turkey and Georgia and Uruguay and so on." I can't see why

the system would not do that as effectively as it would tell a winery that you need exactly this profile of Cabernet or whatever blend to appeal to the market.

ASI: So this brings in the element of the human touch versus technology? And how can sommeliers embrace it?

RJ: We always have this vision of the sommelier as the man or woman in one place with one room, with 80 diners or 100 diners or whatever. But in reality, we also have group sommeliers and beverage directors who are responsible for choosing the wine that may be served in dozens of different establishments across various states or in different countries. The menu may be the same, but people in Texas may want a different wine with a particular dish than people in Boston, for argument's sake. To actually be able to customise your selections based on geography, demographics, etc., is actually easier and more straightforward, so this technology can be a great tool. For sommeliers reading this, this isn't something foreign or new. The restaurant you are working in was probably designed using computer modelling. The architect didn't just have a piece of paper like in the old days. They were looking at a screen saying, "This is what it's going to look like. Let's put a window here. Let's make that green.



Let's do this, let's do that." They are building a virtual environment before we actually go in and make that restaurant look the way it does. So, in a sense, it's not quite as outlandish as we might like to think.

ASI: Do you have a final statement about AI and its future in our industry?

RJ: To use another analogy, I was an early adopter of an electric car. I had a Nissan Leaf, which at the time you drove 50 or 60 miles at a time. That was about as far as you would go before you began to panic about where you could get it charged. Somehow, in the first year of having that car, we managed to drive 10,000 miles in it on short journeys. We are now on our third electric car, which can drive 200 or 220 miles. I am sure the next one will be able to go 350 or 400 miles. That's what's going to happen with AI. I've been using AI to generate images for some time. In doing so, I have made images in the past of people with six fingers or ears in the wrong places. That doesn't happen very often anymore. I think we'll forget how short a time we've had AI and how fast it has evolved. We went from not very good images to videos, to videos with sound. There are all sorts of implications in terms of the energy we're using for this. That remains a huge question, especially for those like me who worry about the environment and our carbon footprint. I think we're going to talk about that as we go forward. However, that said, AI is here, it's improving, and it's not going to go away.

Remember, AI is a tool. I think you need to have that tool just like one needs to have an electric drill. Depending on the bit, you can drill a great big hole, or you can drill very, very small holes. You can do all sorts of things with it. It's how it's used rather than the tool itself.

"That remains a huge question, especially for those like me who worry about the environment and our carbon footprint. However, that said, AI is here, it's improving, and it's not going to go away."

The Intersection of Science and Sommellerie:

Arvid Rosengren on the Future of Wine and Technology

A DISCUSSION WITH...



Arvid Rosengren

Arvid Rosengren's foray into the world of wine, food, and sommellerie began in a rather humble manner. As a young boy in Sweden, he often found himself preparing meals for his siblings. These early culinary experiments, though simple, sparked a lifelong passion for flavours and ingredients. Despite his burgeoning interest in food, societal expectations led him down a more conventional path, and he embarked on a degree in Nanotech Engineering.



"Midway through my programme, I started to question whether this was the life for me," Rosengren recalls. His doubts led him to take a job at a wine shop, where his love for food and drink was rekindled. It wasn't long before he enrolled in culinary school, dedicating two years to studying food and wine while honing his skills in various restaurants.

After graduating in 2008, Rosengren moved to Copenhagen, where he gained experience in both fine dining and casual, wine-focused establishments. It was there that he met his future wife and competed in the 2009 Best Sommelier of Sweden competition, securing second place. This experience ignited his passion for competitions, and he went on

to win the Best Sommelier in the Nordic Countries title the same year. His accolades continued to accumulate, culminating in his victory as ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe in 2013 and, eventually, the prestigious title of ASI Best Sommelier of the World in 2016.

Reflecting on his journey, Rosengren acknowledges that his scientific background has been beneficial, even if he never practised in the field. "It gives me enough knowledge to read and comprehend scientific studies and helps when discussing technical aspects of winemaking with producers," he says. This analytical mindset was particularly useful during his competition years.

Robert Joseph, Arvid Rosengren and ChatGPT

"I used a scientific methodology for preparation. It made me a better taster and competitor, but at some point, I had to let go of this approach. Now, I focus more on the emotional and subjective aspects of wine tasting."

Despite his scientific training, Rosengren believes that technology has its limitations, particularly when it comes to predicting a consumer's wine preferences. "Most approaches are too simplistic. Putting wine into language terms is challenging, and describing it accurately enough for a customer to understand is even harder," he explains. While some platforms use associative methods—suggesting wines based on previous preferences—these systems are still inherently biased due to human input. "All AI is built on the data and variables provided by humans, so bias is inevitable."

The future of AI in the wine industry, according to Rosengren, may lie in bridging the gap between human expertise and technological convenience. "If people trust the person behind the recommendations, why use technology? You could just ask a sommelier." He points out that wine is not just a collection of data points; it has an emotional aspect that technology might never fully understand. "Even with all our experience and training, we can't quantify why we like certain wines. Describing wines in terms of feelings—happy, cerebral, meditative—often resonates more with people than technical descriptions."



When it comes to food and wine pairings, Rosengren sees similar challenges. "Food and wine pairings involve cultural influences, preparation methods, and personal emotions, making the task even more complex for technology to handle. Building a database of successful pairings can become self-referential. If enough people say oysters and Barolo work, it will become a standard."

As for the prospect of robot sommeliers, Rosengren remains skeptical. "I hope not, but many jobs are more easily replaced by technology than we think. For now, sommeliers serve as translators, helping people understand what's in the bottle. We must be vigilant because people will try to replicate what we do with technology."

Ultimately, Rosengren believes that the human touch is irreplaceable in the world of sommellerie.

"There's a depth and emotion to wine that technology may never fully capture. We need to continue emphasising the human aspect of our profession." For Rosengren, it's clear that while technology can assist, it cannot replace the unique blend of knowledge, intuition, and passion that defines the role of a sommelier.

"It's clear that while technology can assist, it cannot replace the unique blend of knowledge, intuition, and passion that defines the role of a sommelier."





Sommellerie in the Age of AI and Technology

Written by Guest Editor, ChatGPT

The world of sommellerie has long been defined by its traditions, steeped in a rich heritage of wine knowledge, sensory analysis, and the art of storytelling. Yet, as the wine and spirits industry enters an era of rapid technological advancement, driven by artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, the role of the sommelier is evolving in ways that were once unimaginable. While there are concerns about technology encroaching on the sommelier's domain, the reality is more nuanced and promising. The future of sommellerie, far from being supplanted by AI, will likely see a harmonious integration of human expertise and technological innovation, leading to an enhanced experience for both professionals and consumers.

The Technological Transformation in Wine and Spirits

Over the past decade, the wine and spirits industry has seen significant technological advancements. From AI-powered recommendation engines to blockchain-based provenance tracking, technology is reshaping how producers, retailers, and consumers interact with wine. Platforms like Preferabli and Vivino use AI to help consumers navigate the overwhelming selection of wines available, making personalized recommendations based on individual preferences and purchase history. These tools, leveraging vast databases of wine characteristics and consumer feedback, are capable of providing tailored suggestions that rival, and sometimes even surpass, the recommendations of a less experienced sommelier.

Moreover, AI is being used to analyze and predict consumer trends, helping producers and retailers optimize their portfolios. Big data analytics, combined with machine learning algorithms, can sift through millions of data points to identify emerging trends, such as the growing popularity of organic wines or the shifting preferences towards lower-alcohol options. This level of insight is invaluable for businesses looking to stay ahead in a competitive market.

The Evolving Role of the Sommelier

With these advancements, the role of the sommelier is poised for transformation. Traditionally, sommeliers have been the gatekeepers of wine knowledge in restaurants and retail environments, guiding customers through curated lists and offering expert pairings. While this role will

not disappear, its scope is likely to expand.

Sommeliers are increasingly becoming curators of experiences rather than just arbiters of taste. As AI handles more of the data-driven aspects of wine recommendation, sommeliers can focus on the storytelling and experiential elements that machines cannot replicate. This shift allows sommeliers to create memorable dining experiences that go beyond the glass, weaving narratives of terroir, producer stories, and the cultural significance of wine into their service. This is where human touch remains irreplaceable — the ability to connect emotionally with a guest, to understand their unspoken preferences, and to craft an experience that resonates on a personal level.

Furthermore, the sommelier of the future will likely be more tech-savvy, using digital tools to enhance their service. For instance, sommeliers can leverage AI platforms to manage and rotate their wine inventory more effectively, ensuring that they always have a dynamic and well-curated selection on hand. They can also use augmented reality (AR) to provide guests with interactive, immersive experiences, such as virtual vineyard tours or detailed visualizations of wine regions. This integration of technology will not only enhance the guest experience but also streamline the sommelier's workflow, allowing them to focus more on the art and less on the logistics.

Education and Skill Development

As the industry evolves, so too must the education and training of sommeliers. Traditional sommelier programs, which have focused primarily on wine theory and sensory evaluation, will need to broaden their curricula to include digital literacy and technology integration. Understanding the capabilities and limitations of AI,

data analysis, and digital marketing will become essential skills for the modern sommelier.

Moreover, there will be a growing emphasis on adaptability and continuous learning. The rapid pace of technological change means that sommeliers will need to stay updated on the latest tools and trends in the industry. This may involve ongoing education in new wine regions and styles, as well as training in emerging technologies that can aid in service and inventory management.

One potential avenue for education could be collaborations between sommelier organizations and tech companies. These partnerships could offer sommeliers access to cutting-edge tools and provide valuable feedback to developers working on industry-specific solutions. By working together, the wine and tech communities can ensure that new technologies enhance rather than detract from the art of sommellerie.

Consumer Experience: Enhanced, Not Replaced

From a consumer perspective, the integration of AI into the

wine experience can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it democratizes access to wine knowledge, making it easier for consumers to discover new wines and build their preferences without feeling intimidated by the traditional, often elitist, world of wine. On the other hand, there is a risk of over-reliance on technology, where the personal interaction and unique insights of a skilled sommelier are lost.

The future of sommellerie will lie in finding a balance. Technology can handle the initial stages of recommendation and information dissemination, allowing consumers to explore and learn at their own pace. Once a baseline understanding is established, the sommelier can step in to provide a deeper, more nuanced experience. This hybrid approach ensures that the consumer feels empowered by technology but still benefits from the expertise and personal touch of a human guide.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the potential for a symbiotic relationship between sommeliers and technology is immense, it is

"These partnerships could offer sommeliers access to cutting-edge tools and provide valuable feedback to developers working on industry-specific solutions."



not without challenges. One of the main concerns is the risk of job displacement. As AI becomes more sophisticated, there is a fear that it could render some roles obsolete, particularly in settings where cost-cutting measures prioritize automation over human service.

However, it's important to recognize

"Sommeliers are increasingly becoming curators of experiences rather than just arbiters of taste."

that while AI can handle many tasks, it cannot replicate the human element of hospitality — the warmth, intuition, and emotional intelligence that define great service.

For sommeliers, the key to staying relevant will be to embrace technology as a tool rather than a threat. By leveraging AI to handle routine tasks, sommeliers can free up time and mental energy

to focus on what they do best: creating exceptional experiences for their guests. This shift will require a mindset change, but for those willing to adapt, the future holds immense promise.

A New Golden Age of Sommellerie

The future of sommellerie is not about choosing between tradition and technology but about integrating the two in a way that enhances the role of the sommelier. As AI continues to evolve, it will complement and augment the sommelier's expertise, allowing them to provide even more personalized, insightful, and memorable experiences. This partnership between human and machine has the potential to usher in a new golden age of sommellerie, where the ancient art of wine service meets the cutting edge of innovation, and the result is something truly extraordinary.

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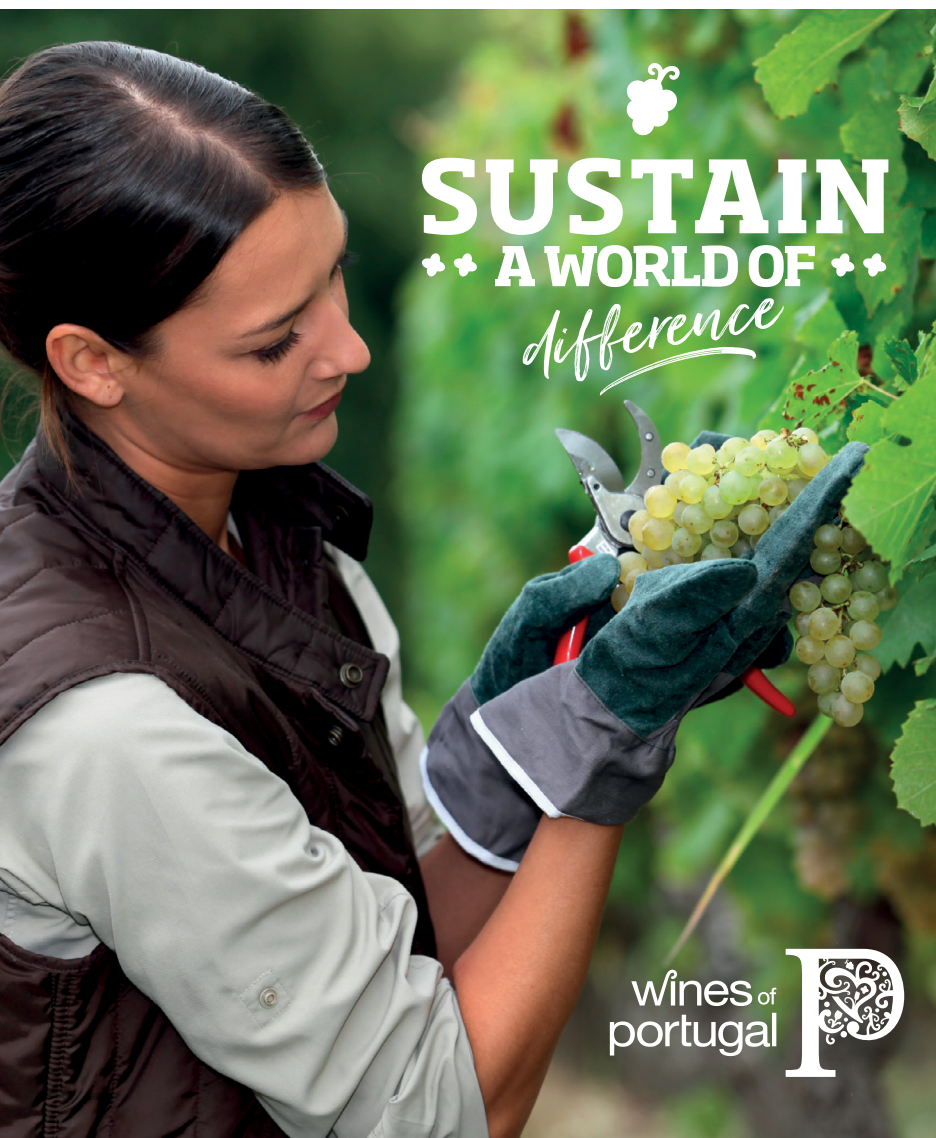
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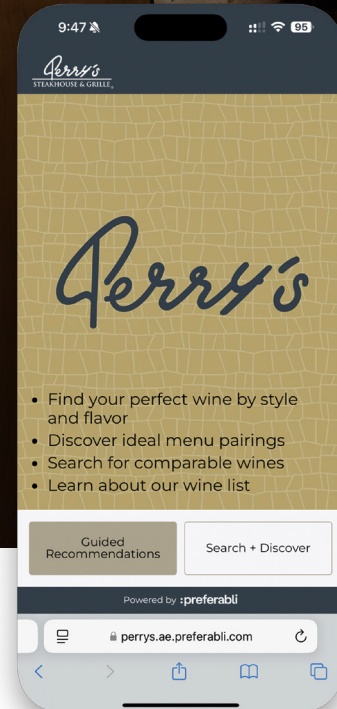
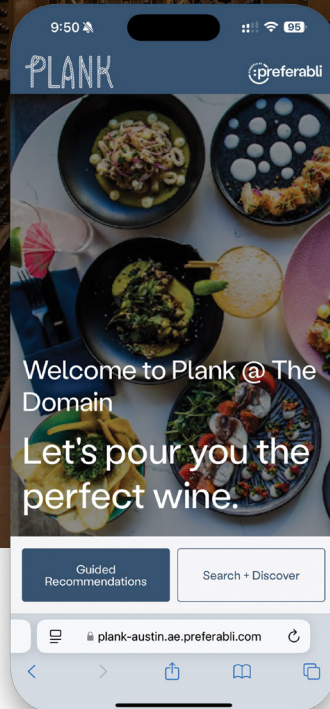
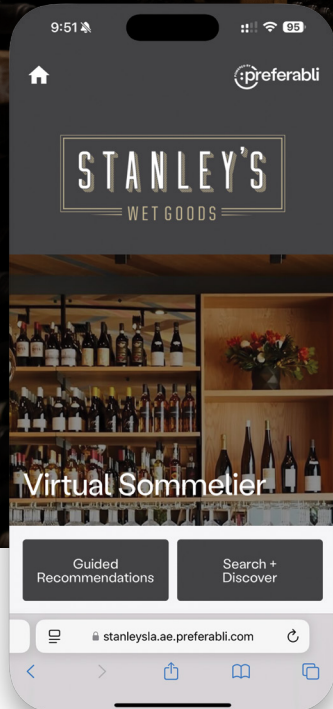
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Solving the Paradox of Choice?

In an industry where personalisation and connection are key, Preferabli is seeking to become a transformative force. The platform aims to reshape the ways sommeliers, retailers, and consumers engage with wine, spirits, and beyond by harnessing the power of AI. Preferabli's platform uses advanced algorithms created collaboratively by PhDs with expertise in various fields such as physiology, applied mathematics, and natural language processing and is protected by 12 patents. Their goal is to decode the complexities of individual tastes, based on 800 characteristics for each product as evaluated by the largest group of Master Sommeliers and Masters of Wine in the world, making tailored recommendations that go beyond the "if you liked that, try this" model. Their tagline is 'Like a Human Expert, At Scale.'



Is this a step back for sommellerie or a step forward to a new reality? Will platforms like this dehumanise our roles, or do they present an opportunity to enhance our own knowledge and service? Does Preferabli provide a tool that translates the art of taste into a digital language? While some may view the rise of AI in wine with scepticism, Preferabli is pushing boundaries, inviting the industry to consider how technology can complement, rather than replace, the human palate. The other question is: if they build it, will they come? It's a quandary that only time will answer. Is it the way existing wine enthusiasts want to engage with wine? Is it the way the wine industry must evolve to attract the Gen Z and Millennial consumers who are rejecting the old ways of the wine world?

To answer these questions, ASI interviewed Preferabli CEO and Co-Founder **Pam Dillon**, Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer **Andrew Sussman**, and **Will Costello**, who is a Master Sommelier and the Managing Director of Business Development at Preferabli.

ASI: What gap did you identify in the market, and how is Preferabli filling it?

Pam Dillon (PD): We aim to solve the paradox of choice, this idea that whether you're a business or a consumer, you face the same challenge. You have a world of wine and spirits, literally with well over a million – two million if you include beers – choices available. How do you narrow that down, in any single moment, to one? Our software works across the supply chain, from producers, to importers and distributors, through on and off-premises to consumer-facing platforms and businesses such as hospitality, retail, and grocery.

Ultimately, Preferabli's software is always about solving the paradox



Pam Dillon

of choice: what is the exact right product or handful of products to satisfy a business or consumer objective?

ASI: How does the software identify consumer preferences, especially for non-experts?

PD: We should take a step backwards to take a few steps forward. Andrew Sussman is my co-founding partner. Andrew and I met almost 20 years ago, building hardware and software platforms to integrate into destination hospitality and retail.

We could see personalisation software evolving dramatically in the near term. With the release of the iPhone, we envisioned writing code that mimicked a human expert, aiming to extend the role of a wine expert on the floor, whether in a store or restaurant. Our software models how a human expert would understand preferences, using data like buying history from hospitality platforms to create a digital signal.

“There was really a marriage of technical expertise on the wine and spirit side and technical expertise on the software side.”

– Pam Dillion

In many cases, there is no prior information, leading to dynamic situations influenced by guests or special occasions. Our software offers two types: one working off inventory with anonymous users through a web application and the other providing guided recommendations. It extends the expertise on the floor, assisting both guests and sommeliers.

The software can process up to 800 characteristics per product, allowing it to interact dynamically, regardless of the level of expertise available. When there's no expert, it bridges the gap by holding all the product information in its system, making personalised recommendations possible. If purchase history or digital signals are available, the software uses them to enhance profile generation, tailoring recommendations based on known preferences.

ASI: Through the process of developing this issue, one common point when speaking about AI is the value of good input. How did you

integrate the understanding of the science of consumer preferences with the expertise of MSs and MWs into your software?

PD: There was really a marriage of technical expertise on the wine and spirit side and technical expertise on the software side.

Andrew Sussman (AS): I'll share a little anecdote. When Pam and I started this company, there was one thing that was abundantly clear, and that was Pam's personal approach. At the time of starting the business, we were not focused online only, but her personal approach to understanding why people like things, why people gravitate towards certain things, why people might find something appealing or not.

It was much more about the person than it was about the product specifically, and so when we first set out to build this, we knew we needed, and this was way before AI was considered cool, to build a machine learning-based AI solution that could think, perform, and make

decisions and predictions the way that an expert in the field would.

Our first member of the tech team, our chief science officer, is particularly skilled in identifying patterns, and that was critical to what we needed. Then, once we started to develop what we called the black box—the algorithms that are able to make these decisions and predictions—we knew we then needed to architect an overall system because, from the very beginning, we knew that what we were building was not a closed environment. We needed something that could be integrated, whether through APIs, plugins, or SDKs (software development kits). We needed to be able to connect with existing systems to allow people and merchant partners to utilise our software in ways that would enhance their business.

We didn't want to change the way people did business; we wanted to make their lives easier and better. So we expanded our team with a number of PhDs in Applied Mathematics, and one with a focus specifically on natural language processing, which is actually critical in today's world with the proliferation of generative AI as a technology. It all came down to the people, which is why, back to Pam, it required connecting with the experts of the wine and tech worlds who could help feed and train the algorithms.

PD: We never would have been able to do it at the level of a human expert without bringing together what is now the largest group of Master Sommeliers and Masters of Wine in the world. We recruited based on a combination of elements, both qualitative and quantitative. One of the earliest partners we had on board was Will Costello (Master Sommelier), long before he ran business development for us. He was on our curation team and came with

Andrew Sussman





"We didn't want to change the way people did business; we wanted to make their lives easier and better."

– Andrew Sussman

an open mind on how technology could truly help floor operations. This open-mindedness was critical to working in a very dynamic team environment with new concepts. I underscore open-mindedness, as this had to be a person willing to bring technology to the one industry that almost counterintuitively shouldn't have been married to it. From a quantitative perspective, we had to ensure all these experts, all these Master Sommeliers and Masters of Wine—people of incredible achievement—came into the project with all the technical elements in place because, in the absence of the up to 800 different characteristics for every product being correct, the algorithm wouldn't work as a human expert at the necessary scale.

ASI: As sommeliers and restaurateurs, one of the challenging issues of platforms such as yours is integration into our existing systems. How do you solve that real-world problem?

PD: No question that's an issue because different hospitality

platforms use different software packages, with different architectures, and they're at different stages in their build. Some are very sophisticated, and some are just getting started on their journey, and we need to be able to meet them wherever they are. That's hard work from a technical perspective. There's no question about it. What I will say on Andrew's behalf is that there's never been a software package that Andrew has met that he can't integrate with. So ultimately, we've overcome that challenge. Technically speaking, the toughest challenge was to be able to read inventory or purchase history, or whatever digital signal we were getting from our partners, and rationalise that against our database so that we knew exactly the products we were working with.

The most difficult technical challenge was to integrate with the market. Overall, it was right up there with the ability to capture taste preference in the first instance. We could never have done that, no matter how fantastic our algorithms were and are, and they are fantastic.

ASI: To create complex algorithms like this requires large amounts of data. How hard was it to collect all the bits of data? How difficult was it to ensure that data and its end goal connected back to the human experience?

PD: We're talking millions of data points. I can echo what you suspect to be the case, which is that this was very hard work, certainly at the beginning. However, once we cracked the code, it became far easier. In the process, our frame of mind was, "What does a human expert do?" And what a human expert does when their goal is seek to understand the guest, seek to understand what the guest is looking to taste. They know their list, and they have expertise that they can call to mind. So fundamentally, they are starting

with the person; they're not starting with the product. Once we adopted that approach, once we took that frame of mind, everything after it was far easier. It was that shift. You could think of it as just a turn of phrase to flip the emphasis from a product to a person.

ASI: I think sommeliers' fear and apprehension about this technology might stem from the attempt to reduce wine to data points. What about the story, the romance, the intangibles?

PD: I fell for this industry as hard as anybody you've ever met. I fell in love with the stories, the romance, through visiting the vineyards. So it was difficult until we learned this rule of the road, which was to think the way a human expert would and then to build around it as a matter of scale to really be able to help the entire industry. To be clear, we work in partnership with our hospitality platforms and, for that matter, for all our clients. The environment we're creating is effectively amplifying the environment that is already there. We are in partnership with them. We have built-in functionality that can work with occasion and context in a number of different ways. Take, for example, the weather. Obviously, the temperature today is a digital signal that is extremely easy to get. Imagine amplifying that idea. Let's say your phone is usually based somewhere cool, such as New England, and then you get off the plane in Southern California in December. There is a very different kind of recommendation that will come in that context. That may or may not be part of what we do with a partner, but it may be part of what we do with our consumer app.

Will Costello (WC): So, it's important to consider the different market segments, like B2B2C and B2C, when approaching this topic. From my perspective, I'll address the expertise aspect because I've been part of the curation team

since 2017. Initially, we focused on cataloguing and curating the world of wine, but now our efforts encompass a much broader range of adult beverages.

The concept of expertise is relative. For instance, I often mention Grandma Betty, who lives in Edmond, Oklahoma. At 86, she's tech-savvy enough to use FaceTime and scan QR codes, but her wine knowledge is limited to preferences like "sweet wines" or boxed Franzia White Zinfandel. To her, my wife, who has visited vineyards in Italy and can distinguish between a German Riesling and a Californian Riesling, is considered an expert.

When you escalate to our team of Master Sommeliers (MS) and Masters of Wine (MW), the level of expertise involves nuanced distinctions, such as comparing a Méo-Camuzet 1996 with a Robert Chevillon 1996 from Nuits-Saint-Georges. One might be producing Les Cailles, and the other Aux Murgers, with unique characteristics tied to their terroir

and winemaking styles. For someone who appreciated the rustic, old-school Burgundian style of Robert Chevillon in the '90s, they would likely also enjoy the textural qualities of Méo-Camuzet from a neighbouring village.

The challenge and goal have been to codify this detailed understanding. We have team members like Jason Heller, who bring profound expertise in areas like Burgundy, but all of us contribute to the depth of our database. This allows us to cater to different levels of consumer knowledge, whether it's a casual drinker who likes "cherry flavours" like Grandma Betty or a connoisseur interested in the nuances of Brettanomyces levels and the interplay between earthiness, fruit concentration, use of whole-cluster fermentation, or the level of toast of the oak used in specific vintages. All of these can be codified through those 800 different clarifications that can go, "Cool, you like Robert Chevillon. There isn't any of that here right now, so let's try X wine instead."



Will Costello MS

Ultimately, whether we're discussing customer preferences or the intricacies of certain producers, the aim is to translate our collective expertise into a system that can provide meaningful recommendations to both novices and enthusiasts. We don't need someone to have tried Robert Chevillon to understand their preferences; simple feedback on whether they love, like, are indifferent, or dislike a wine can inform our suggestions and help us navigate from broad preferences down to the fine details.

ASI: That's interesting, but how does the human element come into play here? In recent issues of ASI Magazine, we've discussed the subjectivity of taste. Our sense of smell, our saliva, our memories are unique.

PD: It's simply a matter of calibrating individual tasters. Take me as an example. I happen to need comparatively higher levels of acidity to perceive the acidity. Someone else may struggle to taste dill, for example. So we work as a team, and you can fill in the blanks. Keep in mind that Will (Costello) has worked with us for eight years, which, in the tech industry, is like 20. We're friends, even family, so there's no ego, no secrets. We're like brothers and sisters. We know exactly what each of us does well, how each of us tastes, etcetera.

ASI: How do you taste that much product?

PD: There are definitely certain middle-market wines that we don't need to taste every year. That said, we go to tastings all the time. We also taste wines as they age, not only to see how they were 10 or 20 years ago but also to observe how wines are evolving due to climate change or changes in winemaking techniques, or other factors. While there's no need to taste everything, we taste most of it, and our day-to-day routine shows it.

AS: To go back to your observation about individual mood, context, and this additional level of complexity, which is not just about what happens to the bottle but what happens to the person. Earlier, you used the example of being in the sunshine. You bought that bottle of white wine from Greece while you were visiting, and then you get home to Syracuse, New York, where I live, and it doesn't taste the same. Or you have it with food or without food, or you were just having a bad day—maybe it was a bad bottle. One of the things that our algorithms actually do is pick up on what we refer to as ambiguity, the mathematical outliers, where we're getting a signal that is not necessarily consistent with what we would predict. We often pick up on those kinds of things. Like an expert, our software isn't static, and it's not linear. Our algorithms are really fluid and constantly adjusting and learning based on the signals they receive from somebody, whether it be purchase history, search history, or actual ratings. It's able to make the same kind of nuanced adjustments based on the fact that people are inherently inconsistent in their opinions based on lots of factors that are not necessarily just what's in the model.

ASI: It's impressive to think about how you manage all the data and processes involved. Andrew and Will, can you explain how you handle the lifecycle of a wine in your system? For instance, when you input the details and tasting notes for a particular wine, it presumably remains in your database indefinitely. How do you then assess and predict how that wine will evolve over time, say in two, three, or even ten years?

WC: That's a great question. Availability and market sentiment play significant roles in determining when we revisit or reclassify a wine in our system. Take the 2004 Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc, for example. It was a wine that initially

made me fall in love with wine, although I don't drink much of it anymore. It's unlikely that you'd find a bottle of that vintage now. If I could find it, would I really want to?

There are two factors at play here. First, we use a "Do Not Recommend After" date for certain wines based on their typical lifespan and expected quality. For example, if a wine like Château d'Yquem had a "Do Not Recommend After" date of 2041, we might need to revisit and reassess it depending on how it has aged. The second factor is market sentiment. If a rare wine like Château d'Yquem 1900 is still available, it remains relevant in the market due to its historical value and desirability.

When we bring in a new partner or merchant, they might have unique offerings, like an old vintage of Château-Mayne Bordeaux from 1988. We ensure that the curation data is up-to-date, which might mean re-tasting or adjusting the information based on recent evaluations. It's never a static process; we continually update the data to reflect current conditions, except for products like Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc, which is no longer available and doesn't require current tasting data. In those cases, there's no value in maintaining outdated information on what it would taste like today.

ASI: In terms of working with your retail and restaurant partners, how do you prioritise your business model? Is your focus primarily on these partners, or do you also consider direct consumer engagement? Who is your key client?

PD: Our platform operates on a B2B2C model. We license our software to businesses across the supply chain—from specialty retail and grocery to hospitality and travel sectors. Our ultimate goal is to serve the consumer, but our primary clients are businesses. We

also have a consumer application that is free and has active users in almost 100 countries. This gives us a wealth of preference data, which helps refine our algorithms and improve the overall experience.

Our business model involves licensing our software on a subscription basis, and we're focused on integrating our solutions with the operations of our business partners. Some partnerships are straightforward and quick to launch, while others are more complex and require deeper, strategic builds. These projects often involve signing NDAs, as we're deeply embedded in helping companies solve their unique challenges holistically.

ASI: There's an inherent fear or insecurity around technology. I don't want technology to take away my job. Or I am better than technology. Just a few years ago, mentioning AI technologies such as this to sommeliers would likely have conjured visions of Arnold Schwarzenegger-like robots coming to eliminate the sommelier role. Are you finding that sommeliers, restaurateurs, and wine retailers are now more willing to embrace AI and technology and not see it as their competition, but as their friend?

WC: I'll jump in from a sommelier's perspective. I've spent a long career helping guests, and I can see how our software would have been a game-changer for me back in the day. Many times, I approached the decision-makers at restaurants and suggested hiring another sommelier. I would argue that the additional salary would quickly pay for itself by increasing our revenues over the next six to ten months. However, the response was often, "What else can you do? How can you be more creative?"

"It helps manage so many business perspectives, whether it's optimising for profit margins, moving slow inventory, or highlighting a private label."

– Will Costello

So, I'd focus on training the staff and getting them certified, but there's a limit to what you can do manually. Even with my close connection to the business, it's challenging to keep track of every single wine on a 1,200-selection list. I couldn't always remember what hadn't sold in the last 60 or 90 days. Ideally, I'd be able to recommend something like a Swiss Pinot Gris to Table 22 if they wanted a medium-bodied wine with a hint of residual sugar. But those are tough decisions to make on the spot.

This is where Preferabl's software can be a tremendous asset. It helps manage so many business perspectives, whether it's optimising for profit margins, moving slow inventory, or highlighting a private

label I personally sourced from Burgundy. The platform essentially multiplies my expertise at the table, while also offering a business case to those holding the purse strings. It supports the sommelier and elevates the overall experience without replacing the human touch.

PD: I'd like to add to that. Initially, we saw a shift with early adopters—those who immediately understood the value of what we were offering. They were curious and soon became true advocates of our technology. But now, it's different. Everyone recognises that adopting software like ours is no longer optional; it's essential for staying competitive.

The fear of technology replacing sommeliers has diminished, especially with the support and endorsement from Masters of Wine and Master Sommeliers. They see our platform as an extension of their expertise, not a replacement. We're taking over those repetitive, mundane tasks that no one wants to do, freeing up the sommeliers to focus on what they do best—creating exceptional experiences for their guests.

We've gone from a situation where some saw us as a threat to a point where businesses now understand that if they don't embrace this technology, they might not survive the next couple of years. That's the major shift we're seeing. It's no longer about whether to adopt AI; it's about how quickly and effectively you can integrate it into your operations.



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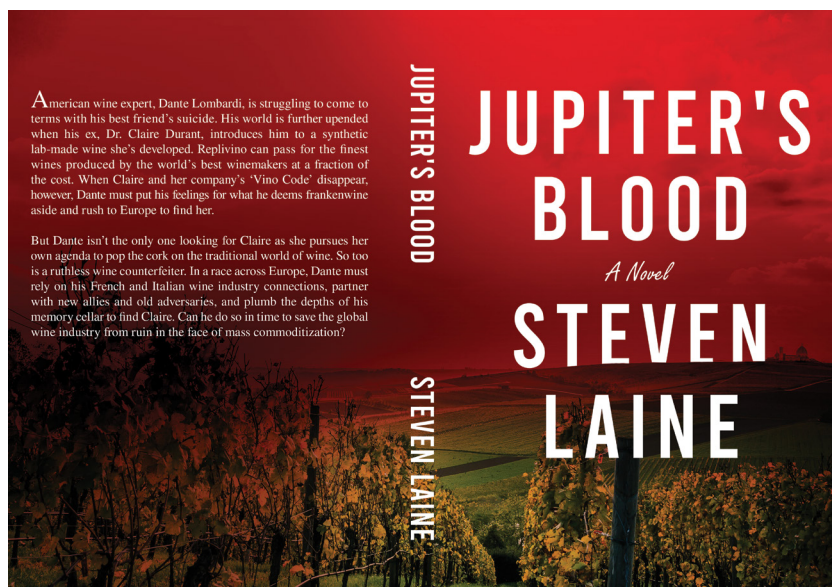


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Book Review



Available on Amazon, Waterstones, and Borders

"Steven has a great imagination and carries you along to different wine regions of the world through his novels."
- mywinepal

"Jupiter's Blood is a great read from start to finish."
- Travel, Wine & Shoes

"The storyline expertly weaves a cat-and-mouse dynamic in the quest for Claire, ensuring an immersive narrative filled with unexpected twists and turns that will undoubtedly captivate the readers."
- The US Review of Books, Amanda Hanson

Steven Laine's latest book, *Jupiter's Blood*, is a unique blend of intrigue, love, technology, kidnapping, and murder. It's also meant to provoke discussion about the wine industry's future and to what extent we, as sommeliers and industry professionals, should embrace technology.

Steven Laine has had a long career in the hospitality and hotel industry, most recently managing the luxurious Landmark London Hotel. He's also a wine expert with numerous experiences in the wine world and a bevy of credentials to his name. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when he decided to become a fiction writer, he chose the wine industry as his backdrop. In each of his novels, beyond the classic murder, kidnapping, and espionage, there is an underlying theme related to the wine industry. In his latest book, *Jupiter's Blood*, he explores the rising impact of technology in the wine industry but does so in the guise of a well-

written page-turner, with as many plot twists as there are aromas in a well-matured Bordeaux.

Reflecting on his career in hospitality, Laine admits that his introduction to wine was almost accidental. "At a hotel in London, I was put in charge of the wine list. It was a bit of a surprise. I didn't know a lot about wine, but I quickly started meeting with suppliers and tasting wines." **This serendipitous introduction sparked his love for wine. "It was trial by fire, essentially," Laine adds. "And I loved it."**

While Laine's career was flourishing in hospitality, his passion for writing persisted. His journey into fiction began when he met winemaker Joel Peterson of Ravenswood Winery at a wine tasting in London. "We got chatting about books and wine, and he recommended I read the book on phylloxera by Christy Campbell," Laine recalls. This sparked an idea. "What would happen if phylloxera returned in a mutated form and started attacking vineyards again?" From this intriguing concept, *Root Cause*, his debut novel, was born. Two more novels followed, including *Dragonvine* and his latest, *Jupiter's Blood*.

Jupiter's Blood explores the moral and ethical dilemmas of technology's growing influence in winemaking. **In the novel, a fictitious company called Replivino develops a way to replicate a wine's DNA and recreate those wines in a lab. While the idea may seem far-fetched, Laine is quick to point out that it isn't entirely beyond the realm of possibility.** "There are companies already experimenting with this kind of technology," he explains. "Modern wineries often have labs where they're testing and adjusting wines. When you think about it, what's in the bottle can be measured and recreated." Taking off the romantic blinders we may have about the industry, there is a reality that many, especially

highly commercialised brands, rely on manipulation, and in some cases adulteration, to achieve a taste standard.

In our recent interview, Laine suggests that technology, in the context of lab-created or manipulated wine, likely fails in the nature versus nurture department. To make an analogy, if you had identical twins separated at birth, they might share the same DNA, but how they're raised could lead them to become different people. As Laine mused, "Similarly, a wine recreated in a lab would just be a snapshot of that moment, but it wouldn't evolve like a natural wine."

Laine's protagonist, Dante Lombardi, is a Master of Wine, a Master Sommelier, and a former ASI Best Sommelier in the World. While Laine acknowledges that Dante wasn't directly inspired by anyone specific (the late great Gerard Basset was the only person ever to hold the three titles, and one of only five to become both a Master Sommelier and Master of Wine (the others being Doug Frost, Ron Wiegand, Eric Hemer and Benjamin Hoska), he does admit that his character's qualifications were intentional. "I wanted Dante to be as qualified as possible," Laine says. "On one end of the spectrum, you have someone who really understands and appreciates wine, and then on the other end, there's a scientist (Dr. Claire Durant) who sees wine as something that can be replicated."

One of the key challenges Laine faced while writing *Jupiter's Blood* was reconciling his own biases towards winemaking. "I'm a traditionalist. I don't want to think about wine being created in a lab," Laine admits. **"But I also understand that technology, if used ethically, can be very beneficial. That was probably one of the biggest challenges of the book—finding a way to balance tradition with innovation."**

Despite the seemingly heavy subject matter, Laine emphasises that his goal isn't to expose the wine industry's secrets but to entertain and educate readers. "I find the world of wine so fascinating," he says. **"There's so much great information and so many great stories that I love to weave into the narrative. But it's important that everything serves the story."**

Jupiter's Blood is available on major online bookstores, including Amazon, Waterstones, and Borders, in both paperback and Kindle formats. For those looking to immerse themselves in the world of *Jupiter's Blood*, we asked ChatGPT to provide a couple of pairings. Laine didn't disagree with them, as he says, "I wouldn't say no to enjoying a glass of Domaine Faiveley Gevrey-Chambertin or Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape while reading the book," he says, adding with a smile, "There's even a scene in the book set at Pichon Longueville in Bordeaux, so that would certainly work too (if you can afford it)."

Laine's ability to blend thrilling narratives with insightful reflections on the wine industry makes *Jupiter's Blood* a must-read for both wine enthusiasts and lovers of suspense.

W. & J.
GRAHAM'S
ESTABLISHED 1820
PORT



Graham's Port launches an exquisite 50 year Old Tawny Port as part of its prestigious 'Aged Tawny Collection'

Owned by the Symington family, port producers in the Douro Valley since 1882, Graham's Port has unveiled its 50 Year Old Tawny Port, an exquisite blend that joins the 40 Year Old as part of Graham's prestigious Aged Tawny Collection.

In the latest edition of "The World of Fine Wine" magazine, Richard Mayson has given a perfect 100 points to the Graham's 50 Year Old Tawny Port, describing the wine as *"Spellbindingly uplifting ... its overall delicacy, finesse, and perfect poise on the finish that really resonate"*. Mayson goes on to say the Graham's 50 Year Old is "A new entry in a category that has become one of fortified wine's biggest success stories"

The British journalist also awarded 98 points to Graham's 40 Year Old describing it as *"wonderfully effusive on the nose ... fresh and seamless all the way through to a long, oh so delicate, filigree finish"*.

Carefully watched over by two generations of Master Blenders – Peter Symington and his son, Charles, – Graham's 50 Year Old Tawny Port is a testament to the unparalleled craftsmanship and dedication that has gone into nurturing the wines that comprise this blend. These wines were among the very first produced by the Symington family after acquiring Graham's in 1970.

Charles Symington, Graham's Head Winemaker and Master Blender, selected two main components for the 50 Year Old blend. The first is a wine from 1969 known as 'CAS Reserve', which was originally set aside by Peter Symington to mark Charles' birth, giving the wine his initials. The second is comprised of wines from 1970 and 1973, which were blended in 1982. Since being set aside for long-term ageing, these wines have lost over 50% to evaporation, resulting in astonishing concentration.

Graham's 50 Year Old Tawny Port has a captivating deep orange-brown hue, framed by a dark walnut base and a pale green rim. It has complex aromas with layers of orange blossom, fruitcake and butterscotch, creating a balanced and concentrated sensory experience. The mouthfeel is substantial, rich and creamy with vibrant acidity, enchanting notes of seasoned wood, nutmeg, and cinnamon, and a lingering finish that endures on the palate.

The presentation of the Aged Tawny Collection is inspired by the age and scarcity of each of the 40 and 50 Year Old Tawny Ports. The illustrations, designed by Portuguese illustrator, Mariana Rodrigues, reflect some of the rarer flora and fauna found in the Douro Valley – a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2001. Each wine's wooden box, carefully lined with wallpaper and panelling on the back, helps to create a familiar sense of home and is reminiscent of British interior design dating back to the 16th century.

Charles Symington, a member of the fourth generation of the Symington family and Graham's Head Winemaker, said, *"This 50 Year Old Tawny Port is of particular significance to us as the blend is comprised of some of the first wines made by our family after the acquisition of Graham's in 1970. Blending a wine that was originally set aside by my father to commemorate the year in which I was born feels particularly poignant. I am extremely proud of this 50 Year Old, it has the exceptional concentration and complexity that can only be achieved by prolonged wood ageing."*

Available in 75cl and 450cl.

Harnessing the Semantics of Wine

An Interview with Angel Vossough,
Founder of VinoVoss

VINOVOSS

In an era where technology is rapidly transforming traditional industries, the wine world has found itself at a unique crossroads. Enter **Angel Vossough**, the CEO and Co-Founder of BetterAI and creator of VinoVoss, a semantic search and recommendation system that aims to revolutionise the way we choose and enjoy wine. ASI recently had the opportunity to speak with Angel from her home in Palo Alto, California, about her journey from tech entrepreneur to wine innovator, and the vision behind VinoVoss.

For Vossough, the inception of VinoVoss was serendipitous, blending her passion for technology with a newfound fascination for wine. "VinoVoss was originally an academic project," she explains. "It was my capstone project while I was studying data science at UC Berkeley. I was always fascinated by the world of wine and how complex it is, especially since I didn't have much background in it. The decision-making process in wine is incredibly intricate, and that

complexity was very interesting to me."

This complexity, combined with the subjectivity inherent in wine tasting, presented an intriguing challenge for someone deeply embedded in the tech world. "Wine and the subjectivity of wine is a very difficult data science problem to solve," Angel says. It was this very challenge that propelled her to delve into the creation of VinoVoss, seeking to marry artificial intelligence, semantic search, and recommendation systems with the nuanced world of wine.

Angel's goal with VinoVoss is clear: to make wine more accessible for everyone, regardless of their level of expertise. "Wine can be a very intimidating subject. How do you really make it accessible for everybody?" she asks. The answer, she believes, lies in using advanced natural language processing (NLP) technology to translate complex wine terminology into something more relatable and understandable for the average consumer.



Angel Vossough

"We focused on the search part of our system because anything available currently in the industry is mainly title-based search," Angel elaborates. "But you don't really understand the user's intent. The terminology is very important, but people like me, without much background in wine, might not get to the right answer. So the system needs to act like a human, to understand the user's intent and then translate that to the actual wine language."

This human-like interaction is at the core of VinoVoss's mission. Imagine walking into a wine shop and asking for a recommendation for your boss's 50th birthday. You know they love red wine from France, but that's all the information you have. VinoVoss aims to take that simple query and provide a tailored, informed suggestion, just as a knowledgeable sommelier would.

One of the features of VinoVoss is its ability to learn and adapt based on user preferences over time. "We learn about the user—what they like, what they add to their wish list, what they review. All these factors, combined with search and browsing history, help us refine our recommendations," says Angel. This continuous learning process allows the platform to become more attuned to the user's tastes, much like a digital wine recommender that remembers a user's preferences and suggests wines accordingly.

Angel compares the recommendation system to Netflix: "If you like XYZ, you might like this better." By leveraging this data-driven approach, VinoVoss attempts not only to enhance the wine selection process but also to encourage users to explore beyond their usual choices.

Wine is deeply influenced by cultural and geographical factors, but its traditional language has



often been shaped by an Anglicised, colonial perspective, limiting its global accessibility. To address this, VinoVoss has assembled a diverse team of wine experts from around the world to make their platform's recommendations more inclusive and relevant.

"We have a team of wine experts, including sommeliers, some dedicated solely to food pairing, helping us build accurate algorithms," Angel explains. "Our comprehensive dataset is generated in-house, incorporating the knowledge of these experts." This global perspective is key to creating a balanced system.

Angel highlights the need for diversification to combat bias: "We mitigate this by aggregating data from multiple sources and validating it against user feedback and expert opinions."

A significant challenge is the predominantly Anglicised

"VinoVoss has assembled a diverse team of wine experts from around the world to make their platform's recommendations more inclusive and relevant."

"She emphasises that while AI can assist in the recommendation process, the human element remains irreplaceable."

vocabulary of the wine industry, which can be alienating for those from different cultural backgrounds.

"The language of wine is based on aromas and flavours familiar in the Anglo world," she says. "But someone from Asia or Africa, with different food experiences, might not relate to these descriptors."

To bridge this gap, VinoVoss incorporates a broader range of cultural perspectives, encouraging users to explore wines outside their usual preferences. "We inject unexpected results to see if people are willing to try them," Angel reveals. This strategy aims to expand wine preferences and make the wine world more accessible to everyone.

With the rise of AI-driven solutions like VinoVoss, a pressing question

arises: should sommeliers fear for their jobs? Angel's response is clear and reassuring. "Technologies like VinoVoss are designed to complement, not replace, the expertise of sommeliers. It provides valuable support in making wine accessible and enjoyable for a broader audience, particularly in a digital setting where expert guidance is not available."

She emphasises that while AI can assist in the recommendation process, the human element remains irreplaceable, especially for a taste-based product like wine. "For a taste-based product like wine, the human element is completely irreplaceable."

As VinoVoss continues to evolve, Angel envisions expanding its capabilities beyond consumer recommendations to include partnerships with wine shops and wineries. "We would like to work with wine shops and wineries to establish partnerships," she says. The goal is to create a seamless experience for users, integrating the best of AI and human expertise.

For now, Angel encourages everyone to try the VinoVoss app, highlighting a new feature called "Smart Sub," which allows users to engage in a conversation with a virtual sommelier. "Imagine ChatGPT, but for wine. You can ask why a particular wine is being recommended and have that interactive experience."

In the end, Angel Vossough's journey with VinoVoss is not just about technology; it's about making the world of wine more accessible, more diverse, and more enjoyable for everyone. Whether you're a seasoned connoisseur or a curious newcomer, VinoVoss is here to help you navigate the vast, exciting world of wine with confidence and curiosity.



A sommelier assists a guest select a bottle of wine

Decoding the Palate Matrix

An Interview with Katerina Axelsson,
CEO and Founder of Tastry

"The goal is not to impose a particular style but to provide objective data that can answer whatever questions a winemaker might have."





Katerina Axelsson

In the rapidly evolving world of wine technology, few names stand out like **Katerina Axelsson**, the dynamic, young CEO and founder of Tasty. Axelsson's journey from a chemistry student at Cal Poly to leading an artificial intelligence (AI) and sensory science company is a story of innovation, curiosity, and a deep appreciation for the complexities of wine. During her time as a student in San Luis Obispo, close to renowned wine regions like the Edna Valley and Paso Robles, she worked at various wineries to fund her education. It was this experience that sparked the idea for Tasty.

Tasty is no ordinary tech company. It focuses on the wine and broader alcoholic beverage industry but has the potential to impact anything related to taste and smell. "We taught a computer how to taste," Axelsson explains, summing up the company's unique approach. Tasty uses machine learning and sensory science to predict consumer preferences and demands, working with all parts of the supply chain—from wineries to distributors and retailers.

"Currently, our work with wineries is where most of our traction is today," she says. "But we also work with distributors and retailers. They each use Tasty's data and technology in different ways."

The idea is to create a cohesive response to consumer demands across the entire supply chain.

For wineries, Tasty runs batches of wine through what Axelsson describes as "a big giant virtual focus group" of the drinking population in the US. The AI then provides insights on how to modify the crafting of those wines based on the uniqueness of their terroir to achieve the best possible outcomes.

For retailers, the same consumer heat map data can be used to identify gaps in their assortment and determine which wines will be most popular with their specific customer base. "In reality, we're trying to get the entire supply chain to react in unison to these ever-evolving consumer demands and preferences," she explains.

When asked about the origins of Tasty, Axelsson elaborates on the extensive research that went into understanding the flavour matrix and how consumers perceive it. "This was a very long, like four-year, \$10 million research project," she says. Initially, there was no business model in sight; it was purely a research endeavour inspired by her observations of the challenges in bringing such a complex product as wine to market.

The sheer volume of choice in the wine industry, with over 160,000 labels registered by the Alcohol Tobacco and Tax Bureau (TTB) in the US alone, is daunting for consumers and a unique challenge for producers. "It's not like ketchup where you have less than five brands to choose from," she points out. Wine is an agricultural product that often sees tension between the artistic and business elements of winemaking.





Tastry's technology is flexible enough to accommodate various winemaking philosophies. Whether a winery uses additives or opts for a non-interventionist approach, the data provided by Tastry helps make informed decisions. **For example, ultra-premium cult wineries might use the technology to simplify, and make more efficient, which barrel producer to use for aging their wines.** Larger producers may look for optimal blending strategies to maintain product consistency, or using Tastry to craft a wine to appeal to a certain market demographic.

"In this industry, every producer, every winery, every winemaker is so different. They come at different levels of sophistication and have completely different approaches," Axelsson notes. The goal is not to impose a particular style but to provide objective data that can answer whatever questions a winemaker might have.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the conversation is Axelsson's take on the potential tension between technology and traditional roles like sommeliers and critics. **She is adamant that technology isn't a replacement for the human component, which is essential for selling wine, especially to older generations.** However, the challenge lies in engaging millennial and Gen Z consumers, who are not as inclined to talk to sommeliers.

"For younger generations, wine is intimidating. It's not sexy. It's stuffy," she says. Many prefer to have a cocktail with dinner rather than navigate the complexities of wine. Axelsson believes that once Tastry becomes more consumer-facing, it can serve as a gateway for these younger consumers to explore wine comfortably.

"The problem with critic scores being an entry point for this new generation of wine drinkers is that

"Whether a winery uses additives or opts for a non-interventionist approach, the data provided by Tastry helps make informed decisions."



“She is adamant that technology isn’t a replacement for the human component, which is essential for selling wine, especially to older generations.”



these consumers are not as focused on points,” she explains. The language used by traditional scoring systems often doesn’t resonate with them. “People my age will look at a Wine Spectator score on a bin tab at Costco and ask themselves, ‘Is that Weight Watchers points?’ I’m not joking.”

Tastry’s focus isn’t just on making business decisions easier; it’s about preserving and enhancing the stories behind wines. The technology allows for the creation of a wine’s ‘fingerprint,’ a unique record of its characteristics that can be referenced or even recreated in the future. This is particularly valuable for rare wines that may never be produced again.

For Axelsson, it’s about finding a balance between innovation and tradition. “We need to embrace technology to preserve and enhance the stories behind the wines, not replace the human

element,” she says. Sommeliers and critics still have an essential role to play, and Tastry’s data can support them in telling more compelling narratives.

As Tastry expands its reach, including an anticipated rollout with a major big-box retail chain, the potential for its technology is vast. From improving customer loyalty to enhancing online wine club experiences, the company is poised to make a significant impact.

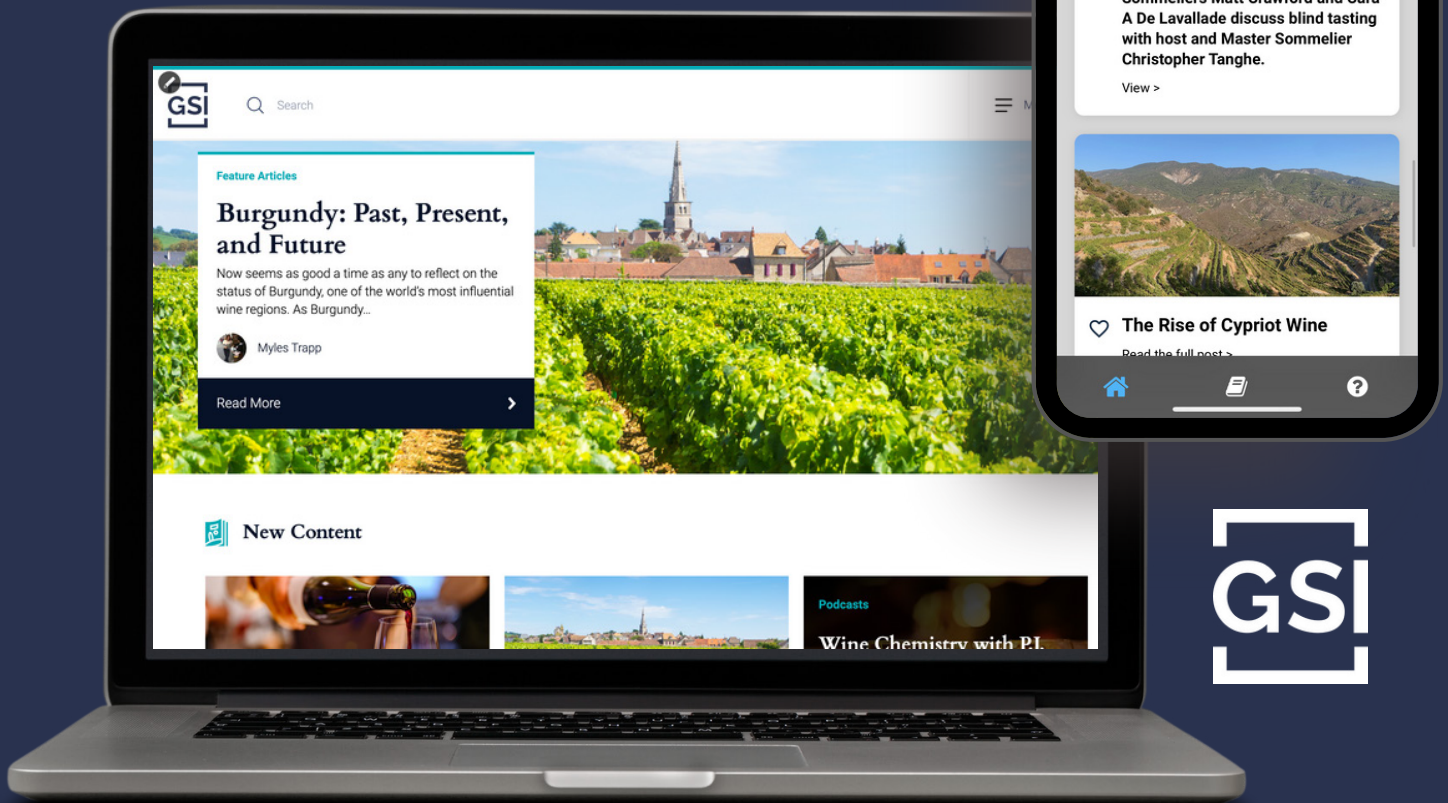
Axelsson believes that the future of wine will be a blend of tradition and technology. “Forty years ago, if you walked into an office building and someone told you needed to use a computer to do your job, you would be laughed out of the office. Now you can’t go anywhere without a cell phone or a computer,” she says. The same might be said of the wine industry in the future.

As the conversation comes to a close, it’s clear that Axelsson and Tastry are not just decoding the palate matrix—they’re rewriting the rules of how we make, understand and enjoy wine.



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Si | **SommelierS** INTERNATIONAL



SommelierS International, partner of the Union de la Sommellerie Française and the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale, is a quarterly bilingual (French/English) magazine dedicated to the world of wine, spirits, and sommellerie. Serving as a true bridge between sommeliers, winemakers, and wine enthusiasts, the magazine is an essential reference for anyone wishing to deepen their knowledge of wines from around the globe.

Through its various sections, SommelierS International highlights the latest trends, industry innovations, and, most notably, exceptional vintages, tasted by renowned sommeliers such as Raimonds Tomsons, ASI Best Sommelier of the World and Europe; Julie Dupouy, Best Sommelier of Ireland; Paz Levinson, ASI Best Sommelier of the Americas and Argentina; and Julia Scavo, Best Sommelier of Romania. These experts offer a unique perspective on wines that deserve to be discovered and savored.

News, Wine Tours, World Vineyards, Spirits and Other Nectars, Gastronomy and Escapades are among the sections that allow readers to explore the multifaceted, complex, and fascinating world of wine. SommelierS International also organizes prestigious wine fairs, where the featured vintages are accompanied by tasting notes exclusively written by sommeliers and published in the magazine.

Each edition of SommelierS International is a true invitation to travel through the world's terroirs while staying informed on emerging trends. Whether you're a professional or a knowledgeable enthusiast, this magazine is a valuable guide for exploring the many facets of wine.

Would you like to share information about your regional or national association?

Contact: aris@sommeliers-international.com and sandy@sommeliers-international.com



Tech-Savvy Rioja: From Vineyard to Glass

By Xeniya Volosnikova

We all know Rioja as one of the oldest and most traditional wine regions, often criticised for its long ageing periods, excessive use of oak, and lack of innovation. However, you might be surprised at how tech-savvy Rioja has become over the past decades, adopting cutting-edge technology to push the region forward.

With this ASI Magazine issue focused on information systems, technology, and AI, I'm eager to explore how a wine region like Rioja can adopt modern tools to enhance quality, management, and resource coordination, all while staying true to its roots.



A sunny day driving a segway

On a regional level, Rioja may indeed be a global leader in leveraging technology to ensure the quality of its wines. So, how exactly can technology and AI help produce exceptional wine? Let's trace the journey from vineyard to glass and uncover these practices in Spain's oldest DOCa.

"Great wine is born in the vineyard!" You'll hear this often from winemakers, but when managing over 65,000 hectares of vineyards and 14,000 growers, as Rioja DOCa does, how do you ensure quality and share data quickly with winegrowers? Even a few hours' delay in transmitting maturity data during harvest can impact the wine's final quality. The Regional Board oversees 60 reference parcels across the DOCa, sampling every few days before and during harvest. **Key technical data—such as potential alcohol, acidity, and pH—is shared almost instantly with all growers, which is especially helpful for smaller producers lacking the resources for such analyses.**

"While optical sorting machines are no longer a surprise, I found something impressive in its scale—an app used to monitor all fermenters at Campo Viejo winery."

A predictive vineyard monitoring model analyses over 1,600 variables from past campaigns, weather conditions, and multispectral satellite images to assist growers during harvest. While field technicians still play a crucial role in validating the data, the model improves yearly with more integrated information.

Once the healthy grapes arrive at the winery, where does technology come into play next? While optical sorting machines are no longer a surprise, I found something impressive in its scale—an app used to monitor all fermenters at Campo Viejo winery. This massive Rioja winery works with 5,000 plots covering 7,500 hectares, representing over 10% of the region's total vineyards. How do they manage such volumes? **AI-powered online tools and apps monitor, analyse, and aggregate data from each fermenter during the fermentation process—temperature, density, sugar levels, and more—sending updates to a team of eight winemakers every 20 seconds.** "Almost too much information," admits Campo Viejo's Chief Winemaker, Ignacio Lopez. Of course, final decisions on any manipulation are made by humans, not the app, but the time and resources saved during the harvest and fermentation—when time is gold—are immense.

Now that you have your Rioja wine, the next step is getting it

"Tasting notes are collected online, analysed, and grouped using AI, ensuring quick data collection and maintaining objectivity without altering the tasters' original assessments."

assessed and qualified for the DOCa label, a point of contention for many regions. Traditionally, the fairness and transparency of the tasting panels have been hotly debated. In the past, some wines from emerging winemakers were rejected for not meeting traditional "Rioja" standards based on colour, turbidity, and mouthfeel. To embrace more innovative styles—such as macerated whites, natural wines, and pét-nats—Rioja DOCa has revamped its evaluation process. The goal is now to analyse the qualities of the wine more deeply, rather than just determining whether it qualifies as "Rioja."

According to Pablo Franco, DOCa Rioja's technical director, the new system is "more reliable, objective, and transparent" than anything previously seen in the wine industry.

It's also comprehensive, with nearly 7,000 wine samples evaluated annually by 170 tasters, including oenologists, agronomists, researchers from the University of La Rioja, and, for the first time, 15 sommeliers. These tasters undergo rigorous training and evaluate wines using new qualitative parameters. To ensure fairness, each wine is tasted multiple times by different tasters, reducing personal bias. A major change in the process is the use of opaque glasses, removing any visual bias from colour and forcing tasters to rely solely on smell and taste. This makes the evaluations more objective than ever. Moreover, technology plays a significant role: tasting notes are collected online, analysed, and grouped using AI, ensuring quick data collection and maintaining objectivity without altering the tasters' original assessments.



Winery tank in Aldea Nueva



Finally, your Rioja wine is ready to meet the consumer. There are many ways (and countless apps) to achieve this, but my favourite is through wine tourism! Let's not forget the role of technology in wine tourism. We've already seen implementations like Segway or electric bike tours through vineyards in various regions.

As a frequent visitor to wine regions, I love places like the Vivanco museum, which offers interactive experiences to immerse visitors in the history, traditions, and winemaking of Rioja. What I particularly appreciate about Rioja's wine routes programme is the ability to "build" your own visit on .

You can choose the number of days, group size, activities, and mode of transport, and the system creates a custom tour—you just need to show up and indulge in your Rioja experience!

What I value most about technology is its fairness and lack of bias (or at least, it should be). It doesn't care about the winery's name, the winemaker's reputation, or the current trends.

In a perfect wine world, drones would send you images to assess the ripeness of your Tempranillo plot, fermenters would inform you of the sugar content in your must, tasting apps would analyse hundreds of tasting notes, and wine tourism websites would send your perfect customer directly to your cellar door.

There is still some scepticism and debate about the role of technology and AI in the wine industry. Some embrace it wholeheartedly, while others question its necessity. What's undeniable is that technology has already become an integral part of wine. However, there will always be roles in the vineyard, winery, sales, and service that require a human touch and can never be replaced by technology. It is entirely possible to embrace tradition while fostering innovation. What were once seen as conflicting ideas can now not only coexist but also propel each other forward. If a very traditional and classical region like Rioja managed to do so, I'm sure others will follow.



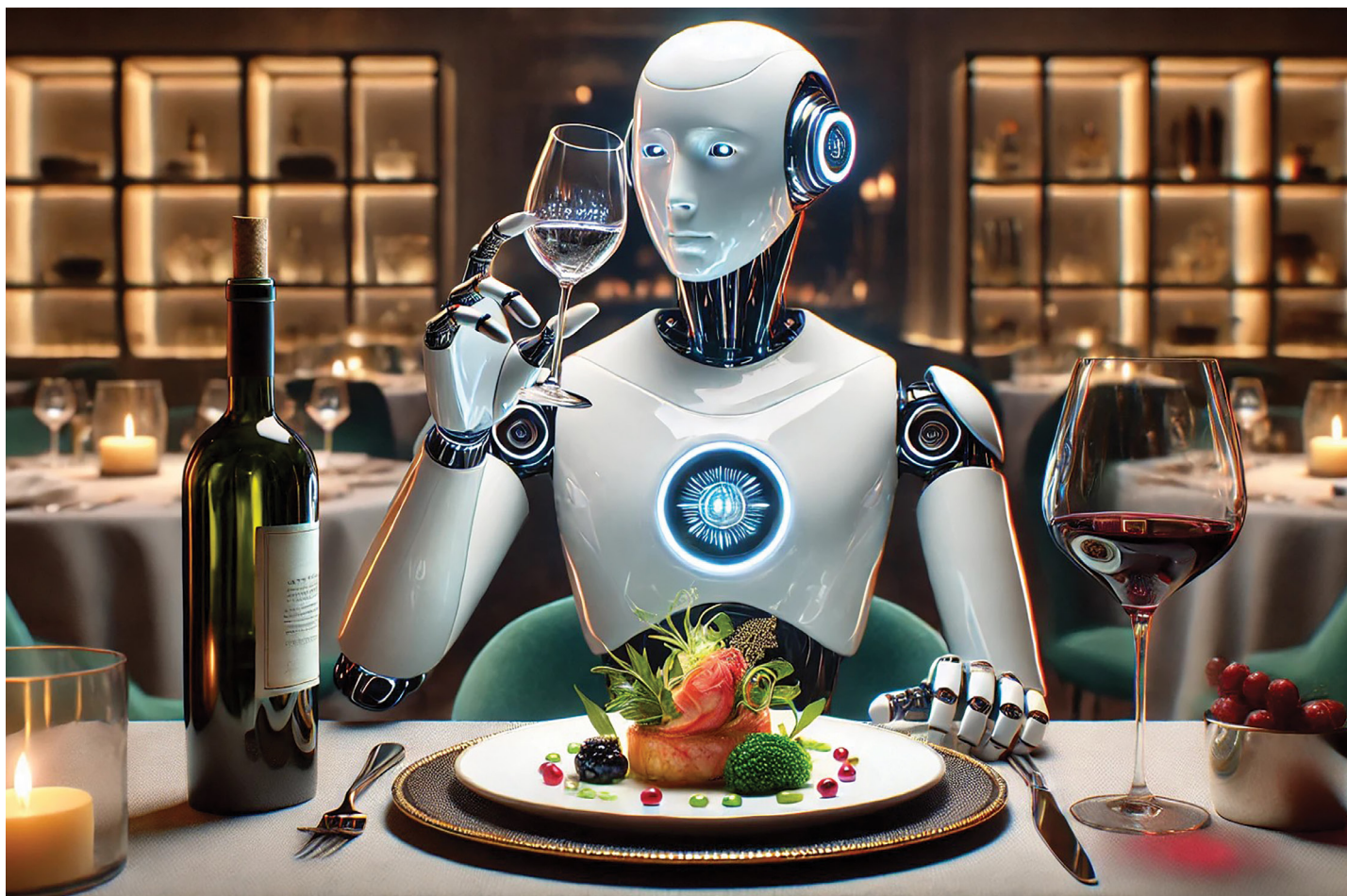
wineroutesofspain.com

Make Me a Match

The Art and AI of Pairings: Somm Versus Bot

In the world of fine dining, the art of pairing food and wine is as nuanced as it is essential. The right combination can elevate a dining experience, transforming a simple meal into a sensory masterpiece. Sommeliers and chefs from the best restaurants around the globe spend years honing their craft, using their expertise to curate pairings that enhance the flavours and textures of both the dish and the drink. But what happens when we bring artificial intelligence into the mix?

This simple experiment aims to explore the evolving intersection of technology and gastronomy by comparing pairing selections curated by renowned restaurants against those recommended by ChatGPT. The challenge: to see how an AI's algorithm-driven approach to pairing stacks up against the creative instincts and deep knowledge of some of the world's top culinary minds. You can decide how well AI performed. All restaurant selections were gathered from their website at time of writing and may not reflect the current dish or pairing on their menu.



The Restaurant:

Frantzen, Stockholm, Sweden

The Dish:

Onion Soup made from layering caramelised Roscoff onion puree, roasted almonds, velouté of onions, almond-infused milk, liquorice root flavoured cream, roasted almond oil and hint of liquorice powder.

The Pairings:

- A. Barbeito Rainwater 5 Year Old Reserva Madeira (Madeira, Portugal)
- B. Dassai 39 Junmai Daiginjo (Yamaguchi, Japan)

The Restaurant:

Osteria Francescana, Modena, Emilia Romagna, Italy

The Dish:

Think Green: Parmigiano Reggiano custard and seasonal vegetables with aromatic-herb miso sauce.

The Pairings:

- A. Cantina Terlano Vorberg Riserva Pinot Bianco 2019 (Alto Adige, Italy)
- B. Lo Triolet Marco Martin Petit Arvine 2022 (Valle D'Aosta, Italy)

The Restaurant:

Hawksworth, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

The Dish:

West Coast Mussels, served with halibut mousseline, farm spinach and velouté.

The Pairings:

- A. Meyer Family VQA Chardonnay 2022 (Okanagan Valley, British Columbia)
- B. Quails' Gate VQA Chenin Blanc 201 (Okanagan Valley, British Columbia)

The Restaurant:

Auberge de Soleil, Rutherford, Napa County, California

The Dish:

Spiced Local Lamb, served with eggplant, fermented black beans, heirloom tomato and lime sauce.

The Pairings:

- A. Corison St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley, California)
- B. Dominus Estate 'Dominus' 2018 (Napa Valley, California)



MAKE ME A MATCH!

The Restaurants' Pick:

Dish #1:

Barbeito Rainwater 5-Year Old Reserva Madeira (Madeira, Portugal)

Dish #2:

Lo Triolet Marco Martin Petit Arvine 2022 (Valle D'Aosta, Italy)

Dish #3:

Meyer Family VQA Chardonnay 2022 (Okanagan Valley, British Columbia)

Dish #4:

Corison St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon (Napa Valley, California)

ChatGPT's Pick:

Dish #1:

Dassai 39 Junmai Daiginjo (Yamaguchi, Japan)

Dish #2:

Cantina Terlano Vorberg Riserva Pinot Bianco 2019 (Alto Adige, Italy)

Dish #3:

Quails' Gate VQA Chenin Blanc 201 (Okanagan Valley, British Columbia)

Dish #4:

Dominus Estate 'Dominus' 2018 (Napa Valley, California)

The Art and AI of Pairings: Somm Versus Bot

Member Association **Spotlight**

MEMBER ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT

Serbia's Success in Sommellerie

The Serbian Sommelier Association (SERSA) was established in 2003 as a non-profit organisation in Belgrade. Starting with just a few passionate members, SERSA has grown considerably over the past two decades. Under the leadership of **Dejan Živkoski**, SERSA aims to unite Serbian sommeliers through professional training, promoting the trade across the country, introducing the profession to the public, and representing Serbia at regional and international sommelier competitions. On the eve of hosting the ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East competition, we asked Dejan for his thoughts on the development of sommellerie in Serbia.

Serbia's Success in Sommellerie



Dejan Živkoski

“We’re a small country, but we’re full of history, good wine, and great food. We’re pushing ourselves to the limit, but it’s all good stress.”

ASI: Dejan, how did you get into the sommelier profession?

Dejan Živkoski (DZ): It was a natural path for me. My parents, uncle, and grandfather were all in hospitality, but as a kid, I didn’t want to follow in their footsteps. I wanted to be a pilot! I passed the physical tests, but I was about fifteen kilos over the limit. So, I returned to the family business in hospitality.

ASI: 2003 was significant for Serbia, marking the unification with Montenegro and the founding of SERSA. What was the state of the hospitality industry at that time?

DZ: We had a good sense of hospitality, but it wasn’t delivered at a high level. So, a few of us in the food and beverage industry decided to start an association to promote wine culture and educate people in hospitality. Back then, the wine lists were quite basic. Restaurants would say, “We have a white, a red, and a rosé,” and if they were really good, they’d have sparkling wine too! We were starting from less than zero, with only a few ‘real’ wineries in Serbia. But we made the first steps. By 2004, we held our first national sommelier competition, and the difference between then and now is like night and day.

ASI: How has joining ASI helped SERSA grow?

DZ: It’s helped us a lot. At the time, our hospitality schools barely taught anything about wine – maybe two or three hours over six years. We received a lot of help from the Cyprus Sommelier Association, and I have to thank Michèle Chantôme and Sören Polonius for their support. Sören came nearly a decade ago and started training us from scratch. By 2019, one of our competitors reached the semi-finals of the ASI Best Sommelier of the World contest. It was a big moment for us – we celebrated for days!

ASI: How do you measure the success of SERSA?

DZ: There are many ways, but one of the best indicators is that restaurants now know they need a knowledgeable sommelier to help customers choose wine. It was a long battle, but we got there. We now have a strong association with many members, a solid communication strategy, a good website, and regular competitions, including two Balkan sommelier contests. Education has been key, as has collaboration with neighbouring countries like Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia.

ASI: Did COVID-19 cause sommeliers to leave Serbia, and how did you cope?

DZ: Every year, many sommeliers leave to work abroad, so we’ve always had to train new people. After COVID, starting in November 2020, our tourism and restaurant industries bounced back. Serbians, who were mostly vaccinated, stayed in the country for holidays, which improved our tourism offering. We also began attracting more foreign visitors, which helped the industry charge higher prices and retain more sommeliers.

ASI: Serbia is hosting the next ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa and Middle East. What does that mean for SERSA?

DZ: It means a lot! I wish we had more than five days to showcase everything Serbia has to offer. We’re a small country, but we’re full of history, good wine, and great food. We’re pushing ourselves to the limit, but it’s all good stress. Serbia and the region deserve to host this competition, and we have fantastic support from our wineries, distilleries, and the government. Our strong team makes it all possible. One person can have a good idea, but when we brainstorm together as a group, it leads to even better ideas.

Preparing for the Sommelier Job of the Future

With Dominik Kozlik, sommelier-jobs.com

FEATURE ARTICLE



Dominik Kozlik

In this question and answer, **Dominik Kozlik**, founder of sommelier-jobs.com, discusses the evolving landscape of the sommelier profession. From the initial inspiration behind his platform to the impact of technology and the pandemic on the industry, Dominik shares his thoughts on the skills and trends shaping the future of sommeliers worldwide. Discover how his platform supports sommeliers in navigating these changes and finding new opportunities.

ASI: When and why did you launch sommelier-jobs.com?

Dominik Kozlik (DK): I launched it in 2012 after dedicating over 13 years to travelling the world as a Sommelier, including an enriching 3.5-year stint in New Zealand, which ended in 2010. My journey began in 1995 in South Africa, and ever since, I have felt that there should be a platform focusing on job offers and resources for fellow Sommeliers. Initially, I wanted to help Sommeliers work abroad, and it was only in 2019 that I redesigned the site to operate more like a business, as costs began to escalate. Today, sommelier-jobs.com works with one mission—to contribute to the unique and specific needs of the Sommelier community, connecting talented professionals with prestigious

establishments and fostering career growth around the globe. That is to say, I was motivated by the realisation that Sommeliers needed a comprehensive, tailor-made resource to locate high-quality job opportunities worldwide.

ASI: How has the demand for Sommeliers changed over the past few years, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?

DK: At the beginning of the pandemic, the demand for Sommeliers decreased significantly because most hotels and restaurants were closed. However, as people adapted to the new reality, demand gradually began to recover. Online education about wine, virtual wine tastings, and other trends towards staying at home provided Sommeliers with new ways of creatively interacting with their clients. The pandemic accelerated certain trends, such as the focus on regional and sustainable wines, which have made Sommeliers more knowledgeable and flexible in the face of changing consumer preferences. There was a temporary dip, but demand has since picked up and continues to rise, with Sommeliers now playing an indispensable role in the growing wine and hospitality industry.

ASI: What trends are you noticing in the types of Sommelier jobs



sommelier-jobs.com

being advertised, especially with the increasing use of technology in the wine industry?

DK: The increasing use of technology has led to changes in the nature of Sommelier roles. There is a growing demand for tech-savvy Sommeliers who are proficient with various digital tools and platforms. Key trends that I believe are particularly noteworthy include:

- **Wine Inventory Software:** A Sommelier should be able to manage wine inventory software that can help monitor sales and track customer preferences.
- **E-commerce and Online Retail:** Digital literacy, particularly the ability to manage online platforms for wine sales, is essential. Many restaurants now sell pre-ordered wines via their online lists. Sommeliers are creating digital content to entertain and educate guests and using data insights to personalise recommendations and learn more about customer preferences.
- **Virtual and Remote Sommelier Services:** The rise of virtual wine tastings and online education has created new job opportunities and facilitated easier networking among Sommeliers worldwide.
- **Sustainability and Organic Wines:** Knowledge of sustainability and organic wines is highly sought after in today's world, where consumer preferences have shifted towards more environmentally conscious choices. Climate change is a major factor influencing wine consumption trends.

ASI: What skills or certifications are most sought after by employers looking for Sommeliers today?

DK: Employers today are looking for professional Sommeliers who also possess a range of social skills, including respect, effective communication, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Certain qualifications are more prestigious than others and can significantly enhance a Sommelier's employability. These include:

- **Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI):** ASI 1, ASI 2, and the ASI Diploma.
- **Court of Master Sommeliers (CMS):** Certified Sommelier, Advanced Sommelier, and Master Sommelier.
- **Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET):** WSET Level 3 Award in Wines and the WSET Diploma in Wines.
- **Certified Specialist of Wine (CSW):** Offered by the Society of Wine Educators, focusing on a comprehensive understanding of wine.

ASI: Can you share some insights into the global nature of Sommellerie and how it influences job opportunities and requirements? Are you seeing more seasonal Sommeliers who work in different places in the world for different seasons?

DK: In my view, sampling and assessing wines from all over the globe in the country where the wine is produced is one of the greatest experiences in the Sommelier profession. Besides the skills and abilities mentioned earlier, it is most important to have and show respect and adaptability to the cultural diversity in each country.

In most of the places I've worked, employers value Sommeliers with deep knowledge about wines from different regions, cultural sensitivity to cater to a cross-cultural clientele, and multilingualism, as this facilitates better interaction with guests and staff from around the world. Globally recognised qualifications and fluency in technological tools are also critical for better job opportunities abroad.

Being a Sommelier offers incredible opportunities for seasonal employment across different regions and peak seasons. For example, Sommeliers could work in the Southern Hemisphere

(Australia, New Zealand, South Africa) during their summer and move to the Northern Hemisphere (France, Italy, USA) for theirs. However, obtaining the right to work in those countries is another matter.

ASI: How do you see the role of Sommeliers evolving with advancements in technology, such as AI and digital wine databases?

DK: The advancement of technology significantly impacts the role of sommeliers, particularly in leveraging AI and adopting digital wine databases. These technologies enhance customer experiences, streamline operations, and provide innovative educational opportunities. Virtual and augmented reality create new ways to engage customers, and advanced CRM platforms improve customer relations. Ultimately, technology allows sommeliers to offer ultra-personalised, time-saving, and service-oriented products or services, making their role even more essential in the wine business.

ASI: What are the biggest challenges faced by Sommeliers seeking employment, and how does sommelier-jobs.com help address these challenges?

DK: The sommelier profession is highly competitive, with many top professionals vying for the best job openings. Some significant challenges include staying updated with industry trends, building a professional network, and proficiency in using digital tools. We at sommelier-jobs.com address these challenges by providing comprehensive job listings and search filters to find jobs based on location and the reputation of establishments, reducing the time spent on job hunting. We also offer a professional network via our social media groups comprised of over 25,000 industry professionals. Finally, we provide professional development resources in the form of articles, interviews, and information on new industry trends, technologies, and best practices in sommellerie.

Meet the Competitors

With competitors set to take the stage in Belgrade at the **ASI Contest Best Sommelier Europe, Africa & Middle East Serbia 2024**, we would like to introduce you to the competitors participating in the competition.



Bujar Tukuli
Albania



Suvad Zlatic
Austria



Antoine Lehebel
Belgium



Kristijan Harjač
Croatia



Iwona Hereda
Cyprus



Jakub Pribyl
Czech Republic



Jonathan Gouveia
Denmark



Mikk Parre
Estonia



Dmitrii Frolov
Finland



Pascaline Lepeltier
France



Koba Abramishvili
Georgia



Florian Richter
Germany



Eleftherios Hanialidis
Greece



Juan Sebastian Giraldo
Hungary



Oddný Ingólfssdóttir
Iceland



Anke Hartmann
Ireland



Francesco Cosci
Italy



Dmitrijs Sinkevičs
Latvia



Sylvana Haddad
Lebanon



Martynas Pravilonis
Lithuania



Giovanni Curcio
Luxembourg



Jeff Thomé
Mauritius



Dumitru Coslet
Moldova



Bojan Vukasojevic
Montenegro



Abdelkrim El Garrai
Morocco



Lukas Wiegman
Netherlands



Francesco Marzola
Norway



Tomasz Żak
Poland



Marc Pinto
Portugal



Mihai Ciucur
Romania



Vuk Vuletić
Serbia



Miroslav Pleško
Slovakia



Valentin Bufolin
Slovenia



Jo Wessels
South Africa



Gabriel Lucas
Spain



Emma Ziemann
Sweden



Mikaël Grou
Switzerland



Mustafa Zorluoğlu
Turkey



Maryna Revkova
Ukraine



Vincenzo Arnese
United Kingdom



Tawanda Marume
Zimbabwe

Regional Correspondent Reports

Spain's Autumnal Flavours



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent

Maria Demidovich (Spain)

ReadyToWrite

Maria Demidovich is a Spain-based sommelier, member of the Spanish Sommelier Association (UAES), who holds WSET 3 advanced qualification, Professional Tea Master Certification (Beijing Oriental Arts School, China); and is a contributor to wine magazines on various topics.

Autumn brings wine and grape harvest festivals celebrated in some of Spain's most important wine-producing regions: the San Mateo Rioja Wine Festival, the Harvest Festival of Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz), and CavaTast, a fair dedicated to cava and gastronomy. These wine festivals provide a fantastic opportunity to learn about Spanish wine traditions, history, and music, as well as to enjoy amazing regional food and wine pairings.

Many Spanish *pueblos* (small villages) also celebrate the end of the grape-gathering period. The mountain region of Axarquía, located in the Málaga wine region, is one of the best places to witness traditional mountain harvesting, commonly known as "heroic grape harvesting." The vineyards are situated at elevations of 450-900 metres, where grapes can only be handpicked into 8-12 kg boxes due to the extremely steep slopes, which limit the weight that mules or donkeys can carry.



Autumn is also considered a "study season" for Spanish sommeliers, as the temperature begins to decrease, marking the end of the summer heat waves and the busiest tourist season. Some of the top wine-producing regions offer online learning courses to explore their wine production, history, and gastronomy.

The Cava Academy offers national and international professionals the chance to study for the Cava Educator Certificate or Cava Expert Certificate online, and learn about the history of cava, its traditional production methods, grape varieties, and pairings. Alternatively, you can learn more about Málaga wine by taking short online training courses or attending the 3-day onsite Málaga Wine Educator Course, which combines wine tasting sessions with visits to vineyards and local wineries provided by the Málaga Designation of Origin. The Rioja Wine Academy and the Sherry Academy also offer online courses in Spanish and English, with official certification from their respective control boards.

Spanish Unity: South American sommeliers attend ASI Bootcamp in Spain

The 2024 edition of the ASI Bootcamp took place in Seville, Spain, and highlighted the presence of several emerging talents from South America. Among them was Lucas Di Pasquale, who achieved a commendable fifth place in the 2022 Best Sommelier of Argentina competition. Joining him was Pedro Guerrero, a talented Peruvian sommelier currently honing his craft in Norway. Also in attendance was Héctor Gascón, the reigning champion of the 2022 Best Sommelier of Venezuela competition, known for his deep expertise and passion for wine. Completing this distinguished group was Giorgio Vecchiola from Chile, who currently serves as the National Sales Account at Clos Terroir, demonstrating his proficiency in wine sales and marketing. Their participation at the bootcamp not only showcased their individual talents and dedication to the profession but also highlighted the growing influence of South American sommeliers on the global wine stage.

Masters of their Field: recognising France's new Master Sommeliers



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent

Henri Chapon MS (France)

ReadyToWrite

In August, two French sommeliers, while working in France, earned their Master Sommelier titles in Klosterneuburg, Austria.

Paul Fauvel and **Paul Robineau** have successfully completed all the tasks of one of the most challenging sommelier diplomas in the world. While most new Master Sommeliers are working in the UK, USA, or Asia, this is the first time that two sommeliers working in France have passed in the same year.

Paul Fauvel MS discovered the Master Sommelier programme while working in New Zealand ten years ago, before moving to London to work in some of the best wine programme restaurants. He is now Head Sommelier & Wine Buyer at the Michelin-starred restaurant Gaya By Pierre Gagnaire in Châtelailon-Plage. Paul says he is thrilled to have obtained the Master Sommelier diploma after three years of hard work, revisions, resilience, and sacrifices. He will now take some time to savour his brand-new title but still has projects in mind, including the WSET Sake and the ASI Diploma. He would also love to be more involved with the Court, helping young French sommeliers discover this exam and assisting them in their preparation.

It was while working at The Fat Duck in the UK with Isa Bal MS,

ASI Contest Best Sommelier of Europe, Africa and Middle East, that Paul Robineau MS was inspired to enter the Master Sommelier programme. In 2019, he received the prize for the best score at the Advanced Sommelier Certificate with the European Court of Master Sommeliers. It is therefore no surprise that, being a sportsman with a competitive spirit and surrounded by a circle of friends providing him with all the necessary support, he has achieved the grail he so sought after. He feels relieved but, above all, very proud to have obtained this title while working in France, which has barely ten Master Sommeliers. His next challenge? He would like to try for the title of MOF (*Meilleur Ouvrier de France*), a prestigious competition that crowns the best French professionals in several manual and service disciplines, including sommelier. Today, Paul works as Executive Director of Sommelierie for the Gardinier Group, which includes the renowned Parisian restaurant Taillevent.

Ronan Sayburn MS, CEO at The Court of Master Sommeliers Europe, says, "We are delighted to see sommeliers in France passing the exam and keen to bring our programme and standards to the new generation of sommeliers in France."

Serving Up Legacy and Sustainability in Lebanon

Situated in the high-altitude plateau of the Beqaa Valley, where all its vineyards are planted, Domaine Wardy, which traces its roots to 1881, produces 18 wines, two araks, and verjuice. In 2019, the winery adapted to the changing climate by planting new vineyards at higher altitudes (1,200 metres and above) on both the eastern and western slopes of the Beqaa Valley. Grape varieties better suited to the hotter, drier climate, such as Cinsault and the indigenous Obeidi, began to take centre stage in the winery's portfolio, while Grenache and Tempranillo were introduced for the first time with great success.

The winery made a significant transformation in 2017, which included a major restructuring and rebranding that emphasised sustainability and a circular economy, ensuring that nothing is wasted and everything is reused—demonstrating the winery's commitment to the environment. It's a positive step forward for the industry, and for local sommeliers seeking to serve fine wine grown and made sustainably.



ASI Mag Regional Correspondent

Joseph Mounayer (Middle East)

ReadyToWrite

Member News

Spain Welcomes the World to Seville at ASI Bootcamp

The Union of Spanish Sommelier Associations hosted the ASI Bootcamp in Seville this past month, marking a vibrant celebration of sommelier talent and expertise. Set against the backdrop of this historic Andalusian city, the event, organised by ASI, brought together sommeliers from around the globe for an intensive three days of training, collaboration, and cultural immersion. The participants honed their skills through a series of challenging blind tastings, workshops, and masterclasses led by renowned industry figures.

The Bootcamp not only highlighted Spain's rich wine heritage but also showcased Seville's warm hospitality, with attendees enjoying the city's culinary delights and vibrant atmosphere. The event concluded with a sense of camaraderie and mutual inspiration, reinforcing Spain's prominent role in the global wine community.

No Bootcamp is successful without amazing instructors. For this year's edition, the talented team of tutors who dedicated their time and passion to teach, share, and inspire the future generation of sommeliers included Sören Polonius, Marc Almert, Raimonds Tomsons, Heidi Mäkinen MW, Almudena Alberca MW, Isa Bal MS, Pauline Vicard, Mariano Braga, and Peter Sisseck.

ASI also expresses its gratitude to our ASI Bootcamp partners, who believe in this project as much as we do and support us in the endeavour each year. Thank you to Perlage Water, Stoelzle Lausitz, Österreichische Traditionsweingüter, Graham's Port, AdVini, Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association, Klein Constantia, Vinho Verde, Wines of Moldova, and Wines of Portugal.



France Announces Best Sommelier Finalists

On 9th September, **Bastien Debono**, **Clément Sommier**, and **Quentin Vauléon** emerged victorious in the semi-finals of France's 2024 Best Sommelier competition. Organised by the French sommelier organisation UDSF, the event took place at the historic Château Beychevelle, a Saint-Julien Grand Cru Classé. These three sommeliers edged out four other competitors to secure their spots in the finals, set to take place on 3rd November at the South of France Regional Sommelier Institute at Caves Byrrh in Thuir, near Perpignan.

Bastien Debono, head sommelier at Maison Bleue hotel-restaurant in Veyrier-du-Lac, Haute-Savoie, Clément Sommier, consultant sommelier at Berthaudin SA in Carouge, Switzerland, and Quentin Vauléon, sommelier at Le Frevo in New York, demonstrated exceptional skills across a diverse range of challenges. Their performance included a theory questionnaire, a media interview, mixology, and food and wine pairings, among others.



ASI Magazine Regional Correspondent Now a Master Sommelier

ASI Magazine's Regional Correspondent in California, **Myles Trapp**, has recently earned the prestigious title of Master Sommelier. Twenty-five candidates took this year's examination, held in September in Houston, Texas, but Trapp was the only one to pass all elements, highlighting his dedication and extensive preparation. It's also a reflection of Trapp's commitment to yoga and meditation, which he uses to keep his mind and body in balance.

ASI Magazine featured Myles in its June 2024 issue in an article dedicated to understanding the lives of sommeliers 'behind the corkscrew.' Currently based in Napa Valley, Trapp's background includes positions at esteemed establishments like Auberge du Soleil and Charlie Palmer Steakhouse. He plans to use his new title to continue contributing to the wine community through education and innovation, supporting the next generation of sommeliers. Trapp currently works with Preferabli, a leading-edge technology company that offers a wine, beer, and spirit discovery and recommendation platform.

George Young is South Africa's Best Young Sommelier

George Young, resident sommelier at Vergenoegd Löw in Stellenbosch, has been named Best Young Sommelier of South Africa 2024 by the South African Sommeliers Association (SASA). Originally from Hoedspruit in Limpopo, George holds WSET Level 3 and a diploma from the Cape Wine Academy and aspires to become a Cape Wine Master. He credits mentors Spencer Fondaumiere and Le Roi van de Vyver for his success.

Passionate about creating memorable experiences for guests, George values the camaraderie in the Cape wine industry and is a key contributor to Vergenoegd Löw's revitalised luxury wine tourism destination.

Tran Thi Dung: First Best Sommelier of Vietnam

The SSA proudly hosted the inaugural Vietnam Best Sommelier Competition 2024 from 12th to 14th August. The competition commenced with 40 aspiring sommeliers in the Quarter Finals, who were put to the test in a challenging theory and blind tasting examination. From this group, 13 candidates advanced to the semi-finals, where they faced an intense day of assessments, with theory in the morning followed by practical examinations in the afternoon on 13th August. Ultimately, the top three scorers moved on to the Finale on 14th August.

ASI is pleased to announce **Tran Thi Dung Tram** as the first-ever Best Sommelier of Vietnam.





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