

Uncorked: Jules Bensacq



The Bordeaux-born group head sommelier at 28-50 Wine Workshop & Kitchen studied viticulture at Château La Tour Blanche in Sauternes and has worked alongside some of France's best known winemakers.

When did you first become interested in wine?

Rather than it being a revelation, my love for wine grew gradually. From the age of 15, I studied the subject at the college of Château La Tour Blanche, which is one of the best wine schools in France but also one of the great Grand Cru Classé of Sauternes. I understood at that time that wine is much more than alcohol but a complex drink that creates emotion.

Tell us about your wine list at 28-50

Our wine list is slightly different in each of our restaurants as each head sommelier has their own freedom to diversify the list. However, the structure remains the same - more than 40 wines by the glass and more than 300 by the bottle. The list is composed of mature, rare and fine wines but also rising star producers and under-the-radar regions.

Over the course of your career, have you had any wine-related disasters?

Back in Bordeaux, when I was working for a wine broker, I closed a great deal on 1,200 bottles for a very competitive price. But when it arrived to our client, we realised that it was smaller 37.5 cl bottles. The boss wasn't very happy with me.

Name your top three restaurant wine lists (excluding your own!)

110 Taillevent, Noizé, and Cabotte all boast amazing lists, which really inspires me.

Who do you most respect in the wine world?

Jean Luc Dantou, my blind tasting teacher really impressed me. When it comes to his knowledge and tasting ability, he is simply the best. He's a real character - wild looking and amazingly talented, this very direct gentleman has won 'Best Blind Taster' in France twice.

What's the most interesting wine you've ever come across?

For me, the wine I was the most emotionally connected to was a bottle of Château Rayas 1998. It really surprised me - the flavour profiles are completely out of the box and exceptional in terms of its complexity, elegance and length.

What are the three most overused tasting notes?

I think that there is a big misunderstanding with the word 'sweet'. People generally confuse sweetness with fruitiness. Balance and freshness are probably overused too, but nevertheless totally indispensable to the composition of any good wine.

What's the best value wine on your list at the moment?

I'm a big fan of the New Zealand Pinot Noir called Akitu in Central Otago, the vineyard has been planted with Burgundy Pinot Noir clones. The wine offers all of the appeal/seduction of a New Zealand pinot noir with the depth and complexity of a Burgundy but at a far more palatable price. It's extremely delicate and floral and the wine reminds me of a Chambolle or Volnay profile after aeration.

What is your ultimate food and drink match?

I hope everybody on earth gets to try this pairing: chicken tajine with apricot and confit lemon, paired with a bottle of Yquem. Simply divine.

Old World or New World?

Old World - it's a no-brainer for me. What can I say? I'm French!

What is your pet hate when it comes to wine service in other restaurants?

Even though it can be tricky to control, I pay a lot of attention to the temperature of the wines, especially the red. I truly think that the right temperature for the right profile of wine is a game-changer.

Who is your favourite producer at the moment and why?

That's quite a hard choice - I particularly love Philippe Gavignet in Nuits Saints Georges, a rising star of the appellation from my point of view. All of his wines are elegant, sophisticated, and full of character - especially the Nuits Saint Georges 1er Cru 'Les Chaboeufs'.

As group head sommelier, what question do you most get asked by customers?

One of the most common questions is where do we source our wines from.

Which wine-producing region/country is currently underrated at the moment and why?

I think that New Zealand deserves more credit as there is so much more to offer than overripe Sauvignon Blanc over there - and it's great value for money.

It's your last meal and you can have a bottle of any wine in the world. What is it and why?

Probably a bottle of Château Marjosse, my best friend's estate in Bordeaux. It is not the most famous wine in the world but is always associated with good times. So if it must be the last, what better way than to share a wine with a strong meaning with the people you love?