

DESCRIPTIVE CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

18

WHAT IS A SOMMELIER?



This introduction provides the keys to understanding the role of the sommelier. Is this role found only at a restaurant? Can sommeliers be found in other work-places? What other paths are there for sommeliers

to take? This chapter presents a new theory on the etymological origin of the term “sommelier,” casting doubt on the assertion that it is derived from the figure of the *conducteur de bêtes de somme*, which translates as “someone who drives pack animals” and existed in the fourteenth century. The chapter also explains the typical confusion regarding the role of the sommelier and the official definition according to the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI), information completed by the opinions of the nine leading sommeliers who will be commenting and providing examples throughout this book, based on their experience of the different subjects raised.

The aim of this first chapter, therefore, is to define the role of sommeliers within restaurant organization and operation systems: What are their responsibilities? What departments should they lead? How should they be integrated into the team? What are their daily tasks and what happens during those 24 hours?

CHAPTER 2

42

WHAT IS A FINE-DINING RESTAURANT?

Although sommeliers have knowledge and skills that make them multifaceted professionals, their natural habitat is the fine-dining restaurant. These spaces offer entertaining experiences and aim for high quality. Nonetheless, aside from its mission and vision, a restaurant is a business, and it should therefore have a complex organizational structure in place for the purpose of achieving a well-defined goal: satisfying its customers.

Each department requires proper organization; in other words, it will be necessary to know who the leaders and coleaders are and to know which resources will enable performing their different tasks, including administering, controlling finances, purchasing, selling, reproducing, and providing meticulous management that will allow for daily operations to be run with maximum efficiency. Human resources are key to this entire process. Who is behind a restaurant? What are the duties of each team member? Undeniably, people are responsible for the success of a restaurant—they are its greatest asset.



CHAPTER 3

94

THE RESTAURANT AS A BUSINESS

It would be wonderful to be a free sommelier, to wander about a restaurant without any other responsibility than that of recommending wine, offering only the most exciting bottles. But nothing could be farther from the truth. A restaurant is a business, typically a for-profit one, which means it will close down if it is not profitable. If a sommelier is not conscious of this fact, he or she risks having a distorted view of reality and developing professional narcissism. This is, without a doubt, a reductionist and dangerous attitude to have.

A sommelier should have a clear understanding of the mission or vision of the business, consider the factors for success and risk, set out a business model and business plan, establish strategies that will enable meeting targets, create a brand, keep the statement of operations updated, and, in general, handle the day-to-day paperwork. These are all basic concepts of the business world through which to understand the work environment and the complexity of a business. Without this knowledge, a sommelier will have

trouble being effective and profitable. Moreover, going a step beyond, this chapter is essential for sommeliers who decide to undertake their own business projects, to become entrepreneurs and take on new responsibilities that are as or more important than those attributed to their role.



CHAPTER 4

142

THE SOMMELIER'S PERSONALITY AND PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

Every individual, just like every sommelier, is different and has his or her own personality. However, when it comes to working face-to-face with customers, each person must adapt to the professional culture of the business. This chapter provides an understanding and thoughts on these manners and behaviors. There are countless determining factors that mold our behavior, the most important among them being the social and economic environment in which the business operates, the way of working imposed by the restaurant, the age of the employee, our needs for self-realization, and our own limitations.

As humans, sommeliers have a body and mind to perform cognitive processes, such as feeling, perceiving, remembering, concentrating, speaking, or thinking intelligently. Through the use of physical and mental attributes, and taking into account the determining factors, sommeliers can carry out their day-to-day tasks with varying degrees of success.

This chapter studies the variables that may come into play in molding a sommelier's behavior: instincts, skills (cognitive, motor, emotional), professional mindset, emotionality, values, character and temperament, past experiences, acquired knowledge, general culture,

own philosophy, and habits, among others. These factors can lead every sommelier to act in a different way. Nevertheless, all sommeliers should be governed by a code of ethics, a set of rules and customs on which to base their conduct and stand out within the restaurant. In order to achieve this, a sommelier's code of ethics has been created (and included in this chapter), which comes with an amusing personality test.



MISE EN PLACE

This chapter focuses on the hours prior to service and explores one of the key tasks for its success: mise en place, the preservice setup. This preparation should be performed with stringent adherence to standards and with an arrangement that guarantees a successful outcome. Check sheets, a manual for tasks, inspection of spaces, cleanliness, machine maintenance, and preparation for service are some of the concepts that allow for a more focused service. Internal team communication will enable improving daily tasks and come in the form of meetings, which are the culmination of the mise en place.



THE RESTAURANT WINE SERVICE

“Service” is a generic term that encompasses a large number of concepts that can be summarized in a sole idea: serving is caring. This task is as intangible as it is essential. It is performed in the form of a repertoire and greatly impacts the customer experience. This is not surprising; not only does a well-served wine taste better, but it goes down better.

To be excellent, sommeliers need to master decantation and making recommendations. Likewise, they

should be a good host, have communication skills that enable offering wines in the best possible way, impress and inspire customers with their recommendations, be precise when taking orders, gracefully pour wine into a glass or decant a bottle, closely oversee each table to guarantee continuous attention, have flexibility and expeditiousness for resolving complaints, understand that the service does not end until the last customer pays their check and is seen off, and, finally, perform all the post-service tasks.

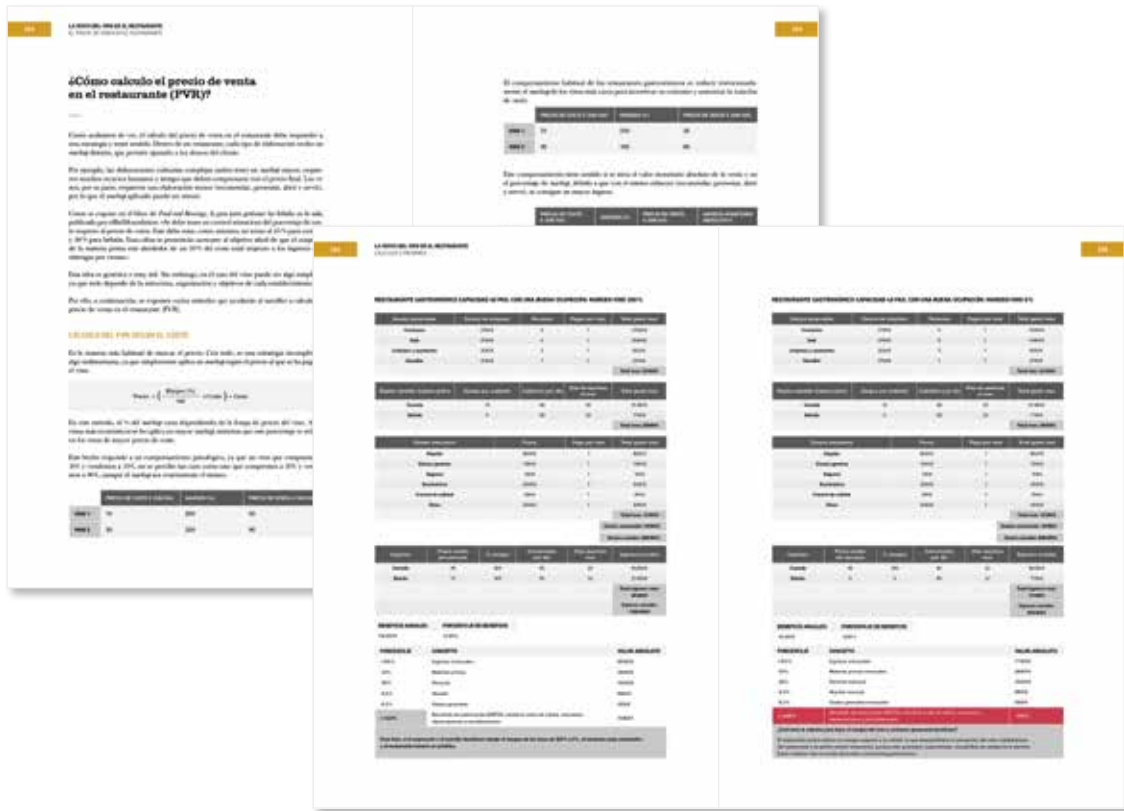


SELLING WINE IN A RESTAURANT

Selling is what keeps the fine-dining restaurant business afloat. In this respect, sommeliers play an important part, given that a large part of the restaurant’s revenue comes from the beverages they manage. However, it would be wrong to think that sommeliers sell on their own. Without a team, structure, and organizational resources, sommeliers would not even sell a drop of wine. Selling is supported by the science of marketing, which serves to understand customer needs and create an offering that is capable of satisfying them.

Most sales are made directly, by conversing with customers and understanding what they want, although a sale does not necessarily mean success, not in the least. You can make a good sale, a bad sale, or even a terrible sale. It all depends on the approach, empathy, and character of the seller.

This chapter provides many examples and ideas for the efficient control and analysis of sales. Calculating and obtaining a sale price in a restaurant that is appropriate to the business is another key point in this section. Finally, wine list engineering is considered as a method for sommeliers to increase the value of bottles sold and to offer further insight into the sale of wines by the glass.



CHAPTER 8

414

FOOD AND WINE PAIRING IN A RESTAURANT



Wine is the preferred accompaniment in the fine-dining restaurant. This complementarity between the solid element (food) and the liquid element (beverage) may be a casual one that does not seek a connection, or inversely, it may resemble an intimate, well thought-out relationship that offers a unique experience. This chapter discusses the discipline of food and wine pairing, considered from a wide variety of perspectives: Is it art, science, a sales tool? By eschewing a pseudoscientific view, it aims to gain accuracy through the knowledge of sensory science (combinations of taste, feel, and smell).

There are countless trends in the field of food and wine pairing. To be able to understand them in their full magnitude, different pairing classifications are presented to enable navigating between the leading trends: Giuseppe Vaccarini; the Robert Harrington method; François Chartier and his molecular theory; Josep Roca and the sixth sense applied to food and wine pairing; Jeannie Cho Lee and versatility; and Tim Hanni, MW, among others.

CHAPTER 9

468

SOMMELIER SERVICE TECHNOLOGY

We consider how sommeliers should apply the techniques that enable the elaboration of wine. The main ones are chilling, opening, glassing, decanting, and changing glasses. These techniques take on a higher dimension when given with scientific knowledge and systematization: they become technology. Sommeliers should embrace this knowledge to gain precision and professionalism. Is it true that wine breathes? Why is wine oxygenated when decanted? Why does an ice bucket containing ice and cold water chill faster than one not containing water? How does the shape of a glass influence perception of the wine?

This chapter provides a historical overview of the styles of table service (Russian, American, French, English) and ends by presenting a novel proposal for the service types applied to wine. Can wine be served in the French style?

In addition, it explores the laws of physics governing the handling of the service tray. Applying this knowledge can enable the mastery of this skill.



CHAPTER 10

560

THE SOMMELIER'S TOOLS

Tools are utensils or instruments that enable performing a technique. Sommeliers have a large number of specialized tools at their disposal, ranging from those used to chill wine to Coravin technology—which has changed the way wine is served by the glass all over the world—and including the simple but functional wine cloth napkin, ergonomic corkscrew, and tray.

Glassware in the form of tasting glasses and decanters are also essential items in the sommelier's routine. We should not overlook the cradle, funnel, and candle, which are an integral part of the decanting process. Of the individuals who work front of house, the role of the sommelier easily stands out, thanks to the uniform, another element in constant evolution within the restaurant. This chapter compiles and analyzes all of them.



CHAPTER 11

598

WINE INNOVATION IN A RESTAURANT

Progress in life is marked by innovations, which largely serve to improve our daily life. Having an innovative and creative mind enables us to better resolve problems, better adapt, and, as a consequence, become better professionals. However, before innovating, it is first necessary to understand the actual concept. What do we mean by innovating? What do we mean by creating? What are the levels of innovation? Am I creating if I adapt something that already exists? What paths can help me to innovate more effectively? All these questions are necessary if we are to understand that innovating is much more than creating a new wine or product. In fact, sommeliers can create at any stage of the chain in which they are involved: in the way they procure supplies, in the way they sell, in their vision for the business, in the type of service, etc.

Both this chapter and the book end with a review of some of the most amazing innovations that are being seen now in the twenty-first century, focusing on the field of wine in the restaurant. Particular mention is made of such magnificent and inspirational figures as Venta Moncalvillo, Juli Soler, Coque, François Chartier, Il Vino, Ambivium, and El Celler de Can Roca.

