

THE SOMMELIER WITH A TASTE FOR SUCCESS (AND WINE)

Ruben Desport is a renowned sommelier who was first cast into the wonderful world of wine during his teens. His first experience of being a sommelier came when he was just 19 years old when he worked as an intern for Alain Ducasse in Monaco.

Ruben's passion for wine and drive for success has only matured with time and remaining loyal to the Ducasse establishments, he has recently been promoted into the role of Head Sommelier at Alain Ducasse's restaurant within London's Dorchester Hotel.

A three Michelin star restaurant, the Dorchester's Alain Ducasse is just one of 25 other restaurants Mr Ducasse owns throughout the world.

Inspirational London were lucky enough to catch Ruben away from the restaurant floor to find out more about where his passion for wine began, what he brings to the Head Sommelier role, and a few recommendations of some good bottles.

You have been working as a sommelier since the age of 19, but what was it that led you down this particular career path?

"My passion for wine. That's probably what everyone says isn't it? But just because you have a love for wine doesn't mean a sommelier is the only route. I chose it because as a sommelier I am not only able to showcase my vast knowledge of wine, but I also get the opportunity to meet a variety of different people. I'm very sociable by nature and so I take a lot of pleasure in interacting daily with guests, and I enjoy watching them experience new wines for the first time. Knowing I have played a part in introducing them to something really special, is a great feeling."

Do you remember the first time you discovered your passion for wine?

"Yes, it was while I was studying at a catering school in Bruges. The school predominantly focussed on cuisine and the service industry, but for one hour per week we studied wine. It was in these lessons that I found myself paying the most attention.

There was one exercise where the teacher had 20 small samples of herbs and liquors, and we all had to guess what it was using only our sense of smell. I went home and told my mother about it right away. So, that's the moment I always credit to being the point where my interest in wine really stemmed from."

Being promoted to Head Sommelier after just two years is an impressive feat, what skills and experience do you bring to the role?

"I have had quite a bit of experience working within the Ducasse establishments, so, what I bring to the role is an elite level of understanding of what is expected from the wine list. I am responsible for composing the wine list so it is imperative that I know all the different variations and appellations we have, because guests really can ask anything at any time. And, as Alain Ducasse is a three-star establishment, it is justifiably expected that we always have the right answers.

"I also help to provide the ultimate experience for restaurant guests and that often goes beyond understanding the wine list. I bring my conversational skills to the role which is an intrinsic part of the job and works to ensure guests remember their experience for a lifetime."

(Dorchester Collection
ICONIC HOTELS IN ICONIC PLACES



As you said, you have experience working within the Ducasse establishments can you explain what it is about them that make them so special for you?

"My first experience of Mr Ducasse's work was back in Monaco when I was just 19 years old. I was interning at the restaurant and I was struck by the success he had created for himself. He's very ambitious, very passionate and very rigorous in all that he does – and as I believe we share much of the same traits, working in Alain Ducasse is just the perfect fit for me.

"What I find most special is that it's a company with endless opportunities. Not only are the Ducasse establishments committed to creating a truly bespoke experience for each of their guests but they are equally committed to the development of their employees. Even after working for Mr Ducasse on and off for many years, I still learn new things daily."

Is there anyone in the industry that you particularly aspire to/ draw inspiration from?

"There aren't any other sommeliers in particular, but I often find myself inspired by wine producers. As I am not a wine producer it is very impressive to me as an outsider looking in, how a producer can create a wine with such harmony. A bottle of wine is made up of many different elements, and I find it truly remarkable how a producer can introduce all these elements and not lose a single one when it comes to the finished bottle."

Do you have any interest or ambitions in one day owning your own vineyard?

"It's actually very funny you should ask this question, because that is an absolute dream of mine. If I am ever able to make my own wine, then that would be a dream come true – but that's a dream for later.

If/when it happens though, I fancy Tuscany both for their stunning food and their beautiful wine."

What is the wine that you find you always go back to?

"Brunello di Montalcino. It's a wine with great variety, with a lot of diversity and an eclectic mix of red fruits including red plums and wild strawberries. It's firm on the palate and is a wine which accompanies red meats extremely well."

In that case then, is this the red you would typically pair with a steak dish? Or do you have any other recommendations?

"It is my personal favourite yes, but the likes of Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo or Merlot are also fantastic when paired with red meats such as steak or rich venison. But of course, Malbec is one of the most popular in the UK."

What white would you recommend to pair with fish?

"Something very classic, and very good, is Extra Brut Champagne paired with oysters, or any other types of shellfish. I also like a nice, flowery Riesling paired with a dish such as tuna tartare.

But, what I must say is that when my guests ask me what wine to pair with certain cuisine, I always ask them first which wine they prefer. If you know what you like, and you enjoy drinking it, then that's what you should have, and if that so happens to be a red wine but you are having a fish dish then just enjoy it!"

Alain Ducasse is located inside Mayfair's Dorchester Hotel, for more information about the restaurant, visit: www.alainducasse-dorchester.com