

Money & Careers

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When it comes to the right wine, education, customer relations key

On the job with,
Orla Murphy-LaScola,
sommelier

If Orla Murphy-LaScola had to buy a bottle of wine today, she would choose Erna Schein Cemetery 2006 or a bottle of Martinelli Vineyards Zinfandel Vellutini Ranch 2007, both food-friendly wines with a big, round flavor.

As sommelier of American Seasons restaurant on Nantucket, Murphy-LaScola follows the precepts of chef James Beard, an early champion of local products and markets. From her frequent vineyard travels, she creates a one-of-a-kind wine list of over 500 American-produced wines.

The wine cellar, located in the former mill building, houses at least 5,000 bottles.

"A wine label is like a pedigree," Murphy-LaScola said. "You have to understand a wine maker's style, the vintage, geography of the land, and the weather where the vine grew."

Originally from Dublin, Murphy-LaScola's interest in the world of spirits began when, as an undergraduate student studying fine art, she spent a summer working as a tour guide for Pernod Ricard in its Cognac facility in France.

"I had to learn everything there was to know about Cognac," said Murphy-LaScola, who subsequently became fascinated



ROB BENCHLEY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Orla Murphy-LaScola searches the cellar for the right vintage.

with viticulture — the science, production, and study of grapes. One wine course led to another until she began working on her master's degree in wine, typically a three-year term of study that leads to an internationally recognized certification.

The role of a sommelier is mainly wine, but as with most wine stewards, Murphy-LaScola follows the general drinking trends. "Right now there's a big interest in cocktails, and some years, the clientele want more beer than wine," she said.

Murphy-LaScola remembers after the 2004 movie "Sideways," when the wine snob character Miles tells his friend, "If anyone orders Merlot, I'm leaving" —

suddenly Merlot was uncool, and Pinot was in. "After that film, I couldn't give away a Merlot for three or four years," Murphy-LaScola said.

What does it take to become a certified sommelier?

Anyone can be a wine steward, but a certified sommelier requires classes and an exam, which are offered by a variety of educators. The highly rigorous Master Sommelier Diploma is available through several examining bodies that are usually supervised by a group of trade associations.

Give me an example of a recent wine request that you've re-

ceived.

One night, a gentleman visited our restaurant. He was a regular beer drinker but had never had a glass of wine in his entire life. I knew as long as it was cold and white, he'd be happy. I recommended Bee Block Santa Cruz Mountain Chardonnay, because it had a level of flintiness, was super dry with a nice roundness on the front. After tasting it, he promised me he would try many more white wines.

What's the best way to become a sommelier?

Start by working for a restaurant with a good wine list, as well as taking some classes. Try to work under a sommelier as an apprentice so you can learn as much as possible about wine.

Do you always need to use terms like "jammy" and "herbaceous"?

I personally think you need to be able to describe a wine but in terms that someone will understand. "Wet dog," for example, is an actual smell that a wine can give off, but I don't want to say that to a customer.



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