



Following a period as a jazz-playing chef, Andreas Larsson has won every sommelier competition he entered, including the World's Best Sommelier in 2007.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT WINE LIST?

I like to see a wine list that is intelligently constructed. It needn't be a Bible with verticals of first growths: 50 wines from various origins, highlighting a selection of grape varieties, can be enough. Still, most sommeliers today would say that they love 'terroir' and 'natural' wines, preferring single vineyard Champagnes, small lot

Burgundy and rare Riesling. On top of that, the wines should be organic, even biodynamic. That sounds sexy, but does it really sell? As much as I love these styles, it is important to retain a sober view. Let's start with 'natural' wines. This is nonsense. Wine is not a natural product. I understand what is meant by a wine showing primary fruit, less oak influence and high acidity, but when growers use less or even no sulphur, it might be a salvation for their own souls, but not for those buying. I recently visited a colleague in a highly touted restaurant who is a great defender of natural wines and resolutely against 'modern winemaking'. I understand his love for some Burgundies of more restrained style, but not why a wine is judged good just because it is lean, acidic and pale.

As for terroir, I also think a great wine should express the character of its place of birth and enjoy the subtle comparisons between vintages, vineyards and growers, but what is terroir? I don't know where to draw the line. A few hundred cases of La Romanée? Yes, that's terroir. Or 20,000 cases of Mouton? Maybe. What about several million bottles of Dom Pérignon? I think that all of these express a 'sense of place'. And even if some hate to admit it, isn't Romanée Conti also a brand? The organic and biodynamic movements have also done positive

things for the wine world - and I agree that there are some world class wines being made by their proponents. Of course, it sounds romantic when sommeliers communicate that 'organic wines have more flavour' or 'biodynamic wines show more depth', but can we taste the difference? I am not sure if I can.

What about famous labels? Even though most of us might prefer a well-made Côtes de Blaye over a well-known Saint-Emilion Grand Cru Classé, I bet most restaurant customers wouldn't. There's just something about the 'label on the table'. In this context, we mustn't forget the customers paying our salaries. Throughout the years I've observed how different guests tick. I find that nationality, social background, but especially sex and age matter. My own observations show that younger people are always more open minded. Women are more open minded than men and often dare to say what they

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like and don't pretend they know everything! Older men are more conservative, seldom venturing outside white Burgundy, claret and Vintage Port.

While guests from non-producing countries tend to be inquisitive, those from wine regions can be chauvinistic. When I encounter such guests, it is not my object to impose my beliefs on them, but to give them what they want. If I can rid myself of underperforming Margaux from a weak vintage, instead of recommending an excellent Barbera, why not? Both the customer and I will be happier in the end. So despite my affection for some small growers, and the trend to single vineyard wines, I think the on-trade needs more well-known brands than it will admit. I work in a small restaurant and can play with allocations, but what about the buyer for a large hotel or restaurant group that turns over thousands of cases? Why, though, the polarisation? I like traditional wines, but I like modern ones as well. I like small, hand-crafted wines and big brands, too. Most important, though, I like good wines that I can sell.

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