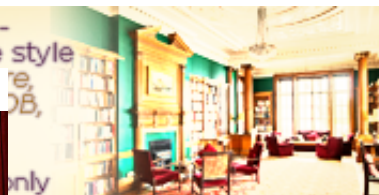


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An Interview with The Ritz London Head Sommelier

🕒 January 25, 2016 📁 Champagne, English Sparkling Wine, Other Sparkling Wines 🔖 Champagne, Sommelier, Sparkling Wine, the ritz 👤 UK Sommelier Association

The iconic London hotel, which this year celebrates its 110th anniversary, recently added 150 new wines to its distinguished list.

Unveiling this new list at a press gathering and tasting in the splendid Renaissance-style Ritz's William Kent Room, head sommelier and chief architect of the new wine list, Giovanni Ferlito took time out to answer a few questions about sparkling wines.

1). The Ritz London is an icon of British luxury, celebrating 110 years this year. What led you to update the Livre du Vin? Did you update the Champagnes too?

When I joined The Ritz 18 months ago, I was ab-

solutely fascinated and impressed by the incredible selection of iconic fine wines from Burgundy and Bordeaux with great verticals of the top fine wine producers including DRC, Rousseau, Latour, Mouton, Lafite, Margaux just to name a few! Originally from Mt Etna (the tallest active volcano in Europe) in Sicily I naturally grew up with a passion for authentic food and good wines from our tradition and culture. This is why as a sommelier I started very early to believe in diversity and I prefer single varietal wines and indigenous grapes to fully express the people and the heritage of a particular terroir. This is how I decided to create a larger offering in our wine list by covering others important wine regions such as Languedoc, Jura, South West of France, Corsica, Central and South Italy with its Islands, Portugal, Georgia, Slovakia, Greece, and new world wine regions such as Washington and Oregon in USA. Last but not least I also wanted some Orange wines from both the historic wine region of Georgia and the most recent Friuli Venezia Giulia in the north east of Italy.

Before the introduction of the 150 new wines last December the Champagne selection was already great showing the most prestigious Grandes Marques and making my job much easier.

Recently, we have introduced few grower Champagne houses such as Dumangin J. Fils at its 5th generation of producers in Chigny-les-Roses and awarded by the French wine guide "Hachette" a *Coup de Cœur*.

2). Are there Champagnes in your Livre du Vin that are unique and on a visit to The Ritz, a guest should try without fail and why?

As I always say to my guests, Champagne is the only way to start!

In particular there is a special Champagne that can be enjoyed only in very few places in the world because of its small production, and one of these places of course is The Ritz London hotel. This Champagne is exclusively selected by The Ritz and made by Champagne Barons de Rothschild, *maison* in Reims. We are very proud to list Brut, Extra Brut, Vintage, Rosé and Blanc de

Blancs.

3). Do you often get the chance to visit the Champagne Houses that you have in your Livre du Vin?

Yes, I have been in Champagne three times and every time is a new discovery!

It is such a unique wine region with its tremendous underground chalk cellars that runs for kilometres under the ground which previously were “*crayeres*” or chalk mines used to build the city of Reims; some of them are from the Gallo-Roman period and today have been recognized as the world heritage site of Unesco.

The most exciting experience I had, was the *Vin Clair* tasting. This is when you have the opportunity to taste the different monovarietal still wines coming from different villages before they are blended together to make the NV *Cuvées*.

The experience was just incredible. While these *Vin Clair* are undrinkable because of their high level of acidity, it is actually the best way to really understand how difficult and precise the cellar master job is. The art of blending needs decades of experience to finally enable the winemaker to craft such a unique and elegant product. This is liquid art!

4). With the popularity of English Sparkling wine growing year on year, with some award winning products available, what are your views of The Ritz possibly starting to serve English Sparkling wine?

The 2016 is a very important year for the hotel being the 110th anniversary of The Ritz but until now, only Champagne (as sparkling wine) has been served to guests who have visited the hotel since its opening in 1906.

I personally think that today English sparkling wine houses are coming up with some very good wines especially because more and more producers have now in their cellar some great *Vin de Reserve* ready to be used and give more complexity to the NV *Cuvées*. Recently the growing importance of English wines, also confirmed by the

numerous international wine awards, has affected the UK market and more often, we see English sparkling wines served by the glass in prestigious locations or as a house pouring wine. Is it maybe the right time to introduce an English sparkling wine to The Ritz guests, who knows...?

5). During your time at The Ritz, what was the most extravagant Champagne you have served?

I think that our Champagne selection reflects The Ritz classic style and having mainly Grandes Marques Champagne houses is difficult for me to use the word extravagant...

But if I have to choose a Champagne, which I have introduced last year, I would say Eric Rodez, Blanc de Noirs. Made with 100% Pinot Noir grapes only from Grand Cru vineyards in the famous village of Ambonnay. This Champagne is a really powerful expression of its terroir with a rich elegant and citrusy nose with hints of cherries, followed by a beautiful balance between complexity, ripeness and freshness. Just the perfect "food" Champagne!

6). As of Italian origin, can we one day expect to see a Franciacorta in the Livre du Vin? It is virtually unknown here in the UK, would this be a sparkling wine that you would like to introduce to The Ritz London guests?

As mentioned before if The Ritz London will open its doors to the English sparkling wines, I think that probably there will be opportunities to introduce some great sparkling wines from others awarded regions. I would immediately think about Franciacorta or Trento from northern Italy and Cava from Catalonia in Spain. But for the moment it's just an idea.

7). Which sparkling wines or regions do you think are the most underrated?

I was in South Africa last September for the WOSA exhibition and I literally fell in love the

Western Cape wines. I had the chance to taste some interesting expressions of “Méthode Cap Classique” (Classic Method from Cape region) sparkling wine and my favourite was La Motte Vintage Brut 2012 made with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from a beautiful slope 200 metres above the sea level in Franschhoek. This is a region to keep an eye on!

8). What is your favourite sparkling wine and what would you pair it with and why?

Being half-French, my mother is originally from Paris, I have a strong French side although I was born and grew up in Sicily, this is why I have to be honest and say I prefer Champagne...

My favourite Champagne is Perrier-Jouët and I think the Belle Epoque 2006 is the most delicate and elegant Cuvée. I would pair it with one of my favourite signature dishes of Executive Chef, John Williams, MBE, the “Braised Turbot with Celery, Lovage and Perigord Truffle”. Just delicious!

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