

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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The Cellar in Fullerton is the first U.S. restaurant to become an ambassador of Barons de Rothschild wines and Champagnes

To win the honor, restaurants must meet culinary and hospitality standards and carry Rothschild wines.



The Cellar Restaurant in Fullerton has been inducted into Barons de Rothschild Ambassadors of Excellence Club the first and only restaurant in the U.S to receive the designation. (Courtesy of The Cellar)

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[The Cellar Restaurant & Spirit Room](#) in Fullerton is the first U.S. restaurant to be inducted into the Barons de Rothschild Ambassadors of Excellence Club.

The designation is bestowed on restaurants and wine merchants that meet standards of excellence in culinary and hospitality categories and that are deemed to have unique atmosphere and an outstanding wine program; designees also must carry Rothschild wines.

Other [ambassadors](#) include the Hotel Ritz Paris, Grand Hôtel Thalasso & Spa in Saint-Jean-de-Luz, France and Unique Hotel Innere Enge in Bern, Switzerland.

Based in Bordeaux, Barons de Rothschild Champagnes and wines are distributed in more than 80 countries internationally. The Cellar's sommelier Robert Barron, offers Rothschild selections on his 92-bottle list, and he said he is thrilled to be one of 17 restaurants chosen at the end of January. When he has vintage selections of Rothschild they might be listed for thousands but other offerings go for a more affordable \$50 a bottle.

"You have to give support to the brand," Barron explained. "I've been told Michelin-starred restaurants have applied and were not chosen. Just because you have a \$1,500 bottle on the list, you have to support it. They'd rather see the \$60 bottle selling than see a museum piece sitting in the window. Rothschild has a mystique about it, they are very down to earth and very particular about what they want."

It all started when the restaurant held a wine dinner that impressed the brand.

"We did a Lafite-Rothschild dinner at The Cellar and the local representative (Jean-Christophe Convert, the Rothschild portfolio director based in Chino Hills) sent back a glowing report that it was on the level with Michelin-starred restaurants," he said. "That is what got the ball rolling."

Diners were able to purchase wines at the dinner and sales were strong. The Cellar was invited to apply to be an ambassador and Barron filled out questionnaires to email to Rothschild. Then Convert and Cedric Villars, the New-York based U.S. portfolio director for Rothschild, returned for an unannounced visit to sample the cuisine.

Barron, who was born in Chino Hills and still resides there, passed his introductory level Court of Master Sommeliers exam in 2012 and began working at The Cellar in 2014. Since then he has passed the Wine Spirit Educational Trust (WSET) Level 3 Wine and Spirits examination and been promoted to the restaurant's Wine Director.

He credits owner Ryan Dudley for his taste in French wine and says the club designation is an honor for the entire team because it includes cuisine and service.

"I think for our regulars it solidifies what they think of us. We're a unique and special place and I tell people, 'When you come in I don't want you to lift anything but your silverware and your glass,'" he said. "And for those who haven't been here, I hope they will take a second look and see that we can compete with the biggest names out there."

Barron says he will continue to advance the restaurant's wine and spirits programs. "Right now we have 'Sunday school' and we might do gin cocktails or a flight of rosés or riesling or Bordeaux, and that's kind of where we're headed."

The Cellar is at 305 N. Harbor Blvd. in downtown Fullerton. Upcoming wine dinners include: Ken Brown Wines, Thursday, March 21; Peju Province Winery, Sunday, May 19; Stags' Leap Winery, Sunday, July 21; and Château Lafite-Rothschild, Sunday, Sept. 22.

