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EVER WONDERED HOW
A LOVE OF WINE CAN
BECOME A THRIVING
ENTERPRISE? THREE
INDUSTRY PIONEERS
SHARE THEIR STORIES
OF PASSION TURNED
PROFESSION. BY
**CHARLOTTE
MCMANUS**



While many of us prize good wine as one of life's essential luxuries, turning one's epicurean enthusiasm into a prosperous career is no mean feat, given that the wine industry is both notoriously complex and highly competitive. Much like the winemaking process itself, the endeavour requires deep reserves of knowledge, passion, patience and skill – not to mention bloody-minded determination.

Whether you are bottling your own product, showcasing expertise or creating a sought-after hospitality experience, each venture comes with its own challenges. However, for those who succeed, the rewards are infinitely fruitful.

Here, we meet three remarkable individuals who have blazed a trail in the business of wine.



Maria Boumpa

UK SOMMELIER OF THE YEAR 2025, IWSC
WINE DIRECTOR & RESTAURANT MANAGER, DA TERRA

When it comes to choosing an inspired apéritif, identifying the most delicious varietals from niche terroirs, or hand-picking the perfect vintages to pair with a fine-dining experience, few are better placed to guide you than rising star sommelier Maria Boumpa.

"To be a good sommelier, you need to study – a lot – to know the many elements, factors and stories about wine, as well as the different styles and producers out there," she explains. "It's also key to be empathetic and listen to your guests, to understand what they want."

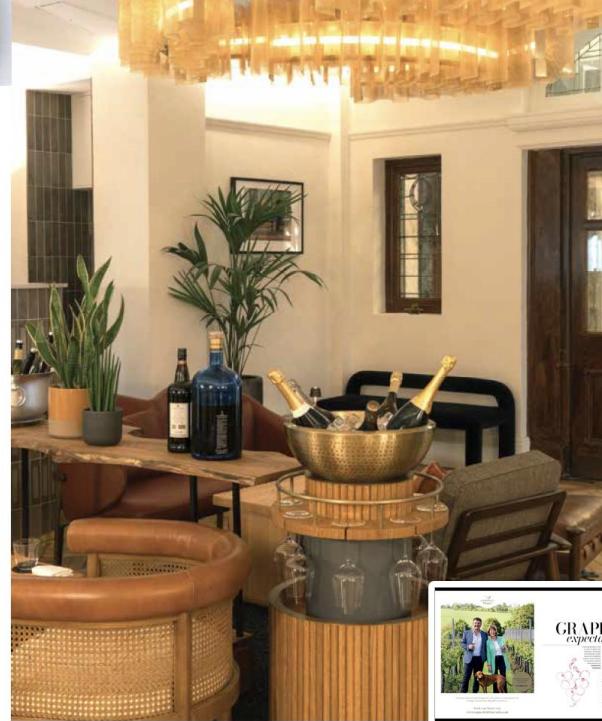
Hailing from Metsovo in Greece, the London-based wine expert combines an encyclopaedic knowledge with a cabinet full of industry accolades, not least the coveted IWSC UK Sommelier of the Year 2025 award bestowed just this summer. Though Boumpa has worked in the hospitality industry for some 12 years, it wasn't until 2017, during a stint at Michelin-starred Kokkeriet in Copenhagen, that she discovered the true power of a well-chosen wine programme. She soon became an avid wine disciple, achieving prestigious qualifications such as the Court of Master Sommeliers Advanced Exam with distinction.

Now, as wine director of the two-Michelin-starred restaurant Da Terra in London, it is Boumpa's enviable responsibility to source and select the drinks served alongside the culinary creations of chef and owner Rafael Cagali. The restaurant boasts an extensive wine list of around 500 bins, including orange, fortified, sake and English sparkling wines alongside the usual varieties.

"The list doesn't have a particular focus; we try to list wines from many different regions so that we can offer interesting pairings," she explains. "Because we are a tasting menu-only restaurant, we try to keep it creative on the beverage side as well."

In Boumpa's expert opinion, Champagne – of which she's a keen supporter – forms an integral part of a luxury lifestyle. "Burgundy and Bordeaux are other elevated regions, as well as places like Napa Valley," she adds.

PHOTO: LARISA TEPALAK / TEPALAK



Her personal preferences lean towards Italian reds, such as Nebbiolo and Brunello di Montalcino, though she has a particular fondness for volcanic varieties, like Sicilian Nerello Mascalese. Yet the wines of her homeland are never far from her mind. "Lately I have been enjoying Iatiko, the red variety from Crete. As we move from autumn to winter, I'll be recommending more full-bodied reds, such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and more fortified wine, like Madeira, sherry and port. Not only are these very underrated categories but they are also food-friendly, and we need to bring them back into the spotlight."

Boumpa is not one to rest on her laurels. Alongside studying for the WSET Diploma in Wines, she keeps abreast of the latest trends through trade tastings, competitions and wine editorials.

"Right now, people are looking for cleaner wines with crisper, more refreshing styles; both white and red," she illustrates. "However, the big industry trend is for non-alcoholic wines – but I think it is better to go for non-alcoholic beverages instead. Non-alcoholic wines often require more processing, so they feel quite manipulated."

Has Boumpa ever been tempted to turn her hand to wine production? "Not yet, although my father owns a small plot of vines in Metsovo, where I am from," she replies. "It is mostly formed of indigenous varieties, so although he just makes wine for his own enjoyment right now, maybe I could get involved one day."

daterra.co.uk





Grant Ashton

FOUNDER & CEO, 67 PALL MALL



Wine is a marker of a life well lived. Just as luxury lovers are drawn to beautiful watches, cars and yachts, they like fine wine. Is fine wine a luxury product? Absolutely – a consumable product that costs that much is, by definition, a luxury."

So says Grant Ashton, founder of 67 Pall Mall, the world's first private members' club for wine aficionados. Celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, the flagship club is based in London, housed within a grand Grade II-listed former bank in St James's. Members can explore one of the largest wine lists on the planet – featuring 5,000 wines from 42 countries – and store their own collection in the vast bank-vault cellar. Over the years, additional clubs have followed in locations such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Bordeaux and Melbourne, amassing some 10,000 members worldwide.

Despite 67 Pall Mall's runaway success, it was never Ashton's goal to achieve such international acclaim. "It was not meant to be this big or dramatic," he insists. "I originally worked in finance but had been trading and collecting wine with some friends. In 2010, I pitched the idea of starting a wine-centric restaurant where we could store and drink our wines without excessive mark-ups. However, Westminster City Council said that we couldn't do a restaurant, as Pall Mall is a 'club street'. So, we opened a private members' club instead. Now, 67 Pall Mall has a life of its own. Be careful what you wish for!"

Further clubs are currently being explored in Tokyo, Seoul, Bangkok and Jakarta, with potential for more in Europe, the US and Australia in the future.

"We've grown from a single site where wine lovers and industry hang out to being regarded as a genuine authority," says Ashton. "As a training ground for incredible master sommeliers, we also publish fine wine reports and host the 67 Pall Mall Global Wine Communicator Awards."

So, what is the secret of the brand's success? "Along with the biggest wine list, we've got very low

PRICES



pricing. If you join a standard members' club, you'll be charged 70% gross profit on wine, but we only charge a small cash markup.

"People are also far more mobile now with work. You can have a much more social conversation sitting in a nice wingback chair with a nice glass of wine, rather than on a stained sofa in a coffee shop, like people used to do. A lot of people use our clubs like that."

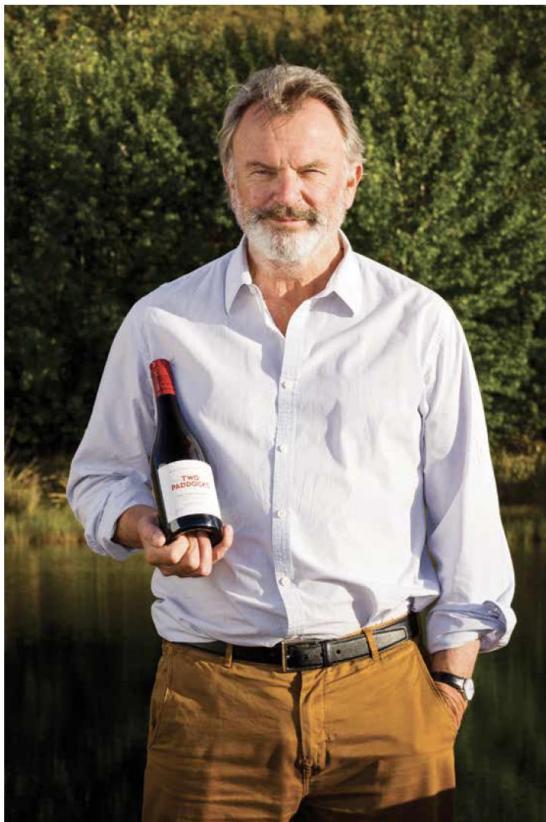
Conversely, Ashton does not regard himself as a wine expert: "I've never taken a wine exam in my life – but I understand the business of wine. I have very smart, well-educated people to be authorities for me. We have 15-18 sommeliers per site – they know more about wine than I ever will."

"In fact," he continues, "I don't think I drank a 'serious' bottle until I was in my late 20s, when I was running trading desks for various banks. My 'Damascene' moment, where I was truly converted to wine, was drinking an amazing Chateau Figeac '82 in The Arches, the Swiss Cottage wine bar owned by the much-missed Harry Gill. That bottle knocked my socks off."

Reflecting on the changes he has observed in the industry over the past decade, Ashton says, "People are more adventurous with what they drink now. Great wines are being made all over the world, and people know it, whether that's Greek, Swiss or Chinese. Personally, my tastes are quite classical: Bordeaux is my first love. I tend to drink wine as an apéritif, usually a glass of Champagne, such as Olivier Horiot, although my go-to NV is Taittinger Prelude Grand Cru, especially with a bit of age on it."

67pallmall.com





Sam Neill

FOUNDER & PROPRIETOR, TWO PADDOCKS

Sir Nigel John Dermot Neill, KNZM OBE – better known as Sam Neill, silver screen icon – has a surprising side hustle. While his fans know him for performances in Jurassic Park, Peaky Blinders and The Piano, Neill is also the visionary behind Two Paddocks, an organic wine estate nestled in the stunning peaks and valleys of Central Otago, New Zealand.

"I've had a deep and abiding love for wine for as long as I can remember," he explains. "Wine was always on the table when I was growing up."

While celebrity wines are nothing new, with many regarded with a degree of dubiousness by industry aficionados, Two Paddocks is the real deal. Established in 1993 – the same year Neill soared to global fame with Jurassic Park – Two Paddocks labels itself as a 'fine wine and cheering-up business'. Specialising in Pinot Noir, Central Otago's most celebrated variety, the winery has won numerous awards, including an IWSC Gold Outstanding and all-but perfect scores from the likes of Decanter and Wine Spectator.

The contents of every bottle are organically grown within Two Paddocks' four vineyards, which have themselves won gongs for sustainable practices.

"When you drink our wine, there are things that will be apparent, from complexity to a great attention to site and season," says Neill. "Our wines are made with much love and dedication."

But how did Neill nurture a passion project into an internationally respected wine business? "I founded Two Paddocks by degrees," he explains. "It started very modestly – I just wanted to produce some nice wine for myself and my friends, so I planted five acres of grapes. As the years went by, I got more ambitious when I realised that we could make some of the greatest Pinot Noirs in the world."

IMAGE: TWO PADDOCKS



Nowadays, alongside the flagship Pinot Noir, Two Paddocks has expanded its offering with pinot rosé and riesling, though years past have seen forays into sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and merlot. There are 'picnic' blends for everyday drinking and single vineyard wines, as well as barrel selection offerings. At the top of the range are Proprietor's Reserve vintages, some solely available to the brand's Private Paddock wine club members.

Though Neill is a man of global stature, he has no interest in expanding his wine operation beyond its natural dimensions.

"We are quite big enough. We are a boutique winery, producing about 8,000 cases of wine a year, including rare wines like The Last Chance Pinot Noir, which we make perhaps 120 cases of per annum. However, we do have a presence, as an important component of the wine-making community here in Central Otago, with a worldwide

affectionately on site as 'The Prop' (or 'El Presidente', depending on who you ask). Neill is a familiar face at the vineyards, whether he is overseeing the harvest, waxing lyrical about the latest vintage with visitors, or popping up at one of the Private Paddock's impromptu dances in the orchard.

"I love everything about making wine," he says. "Occasionally we'll have a brutal season, but then next year, our beautiful ship comes sailing in, and we forget all about how tough it was the year before."

Talking to Neill, it is soon apparent that Two Paddocks is as far removed from a vanity project

as it is possible to get. He cites the "absolutely vital" importance of his dedicated team, including winemaker Dean Shaw (who joined the project in 1998) and viticulturist Mike Wing, who just celebrated his 20th work anniversary: "I am proud that what started off as a hobby has become a significant part of my life – and that of everyone who works with me."

Neill's enthusiasm for wine is also undeniably infectious. "I drink wine every day; dinner isn't really dinner without wine," he says. "I am completely, insanely obsessive about Pinot Noir; I live and breathe it. Sometimes I want something completely different, like a massive Australian shiraz or a Spanish Duro, but that is what is so magical about wine – the variety. There's a whole world to explore."

Refreshingly, in today's hyper-health-conscious age, Neill is a stout believer in the notion that wine is good for the soul. "There is an awful lot of talk about how bad alcohol is, but for most of us, wine has health benefits which are significant but hard to measure," he effuses. "Conviviality, conversation, sociability and good times are so important for your wellbeing."

Balancing a Hollywood career with world-class wine production can't be easy, but Neill has no intention of giving up either pursuit. "I have two lives, as an actor and a winemaker," he says, taking a breath. "I am often asked what actors and wine producers have in common – the answer is, we both love good reviews!"

twopaddocks.com

