

2011 Sonoma Wine Country Weekend Sommelier Stars

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Amy Currens ~ Prospect Restaurant, San Francisco, CA



Growing up in Kansas and not coming from a family of drinkers, Amy Currens found wine, on her own, through supporting herself in the restaurant business. Sips of old Bordeaux before she even knew what she was looking for were all it took to solidify her interest. Wine remained an integral part of her life, as she explored other careers, outside of restaurants and with a couple of college degrees under her belt. However, it was the inevitable pull of being a part of the globe, connecting with other people and really learning all there is to know about making and drinking wine, bringing Amy back to wine as a career. Working in a couple of wineries, studying under several Master Sommeliers, studying and tasting with peers, a very grateful Amy studied to become a certified sommelier, while selling wine to the masses. In 2008, Amy became the wine director and bar manager for the InterContinental Hotel and Luce Restaurant, in San Francisco, as well as the InterContinental Hotel Group's national sommelier. When the iconic Nancy Oakes' Boulevard restaurant, in San Francisco, headed toward opening a new concept restaurant, Prospect, in 2010, Amy left the InterContinental with great experience and impending excitement to continue calling San Francisco home while becoming the wine director at this modern concept restaurant. Prospect has been open for a little over a year and continues to thrive with dynamic food, wine and cocktail menus

Brahm Callahan ~ Grill 23 & Bar, Boston, MA



Raised in Western Massachusetts, Brahm Callahan's upbringing was very old-world in style. From an early age, Brahm learned just how important a part wine plays to a meal, and growing up he even stomped grapes and made wine with his father. His family bottled several special vintages the year he was born to share with

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him on his 18th birthday. “They weren’t necessarily the best wines, but it was very special to see how the wines had matured”. At 17, Brahm started at The Shelburne Falls Wine Merchant, learning many aspects of the business from his mentor Paul-Thierry de la Blotier. By the age of 18, Brahm was running wine tastings, managing the cellar and working on dinners with winemakers and local restaurants. While attending the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Brahm continued to work at the Wine Merchant and worked part time as a Wine Steward in many of the top restaurants of Western Massachusetts.

After moving to Boston to attend graduate school at Boston College, Brahm embraced Boston’s wine community and began working as a sommelier while finishing his graduate work. Through his time at top Boston restaurants, including Excelsior and Rialto, Brahm has developed an interest in small producers who make terroir driven wines. “For me there is nothing better than finding a wine that speaks of its origins and reflects its own unique terroir.” Brahm expanded Excelsior’s list to over 900 selections, staying current with developing appellations and fostering relationships with up-and-coming winemakers. In 2009, Himmel Hospitality was thrilled to have Brahm as part of the opening team of Post 390, Boston’s first Urban Tavern. There, Brahm created a beverage program that included not only an expansive list of excellent, affordably priced wines; he added a 40+ selection craft beer list and competitive cocktail program. While at Post 390, Brahm passed the grueling Advanced Sommelier exam with the Court of Master Sommeliers on his first attempt, and is currently studying for the Master Sommelier exam. Now as Wine Director at Grill 23 & Bar, Brahm will look to develop the award-winning list of over 1,500 selections; focusing specifically on finding new cult producers as well as maintaining a balanced list that offers amazing selections for wine connoisseurs and novices alike.

Cosmin Marinescu ~ Hilton San Francisco Financial District, San Francisco, CA



Cosmin is a Certified Sommelier and has 10+years of experience in the hospitality industry. He was most recently Sommelier at Flyte Wine Bar for the Hilton Hotel, Financial District in San Francisco. Cosmin also has worked for Celebrity Cruise Lines and fine restaurant establishments in Bucharest, Romania. Cosmin’s long-term goal is to be a Master Sommelier.

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Dana Manison ~ Southern Wine & Spirits, San Francisco, CA



Dana Manison, she encompasses what a Sonoma County wine showcases... charming, relaxed, bold in a subtle way, full of the spirit of her surroundings, she makes all around her comfortable and wanting another glass of whatever wine she is enjoying... bubbles is surely what you will find adorning her hand while you partake in her bubbly personality!

Dana's career first began in 1999... while under the Florida sun, she fell in love and passionately pursued the love of everything wine. Southern Wine & Spirits discovered her and so began her journey to spreading the passion of wine to the national hotel and restaurant arena in Florida. It was inevitable that California would woo her to wine country in 2002 where she now preaches "for the love of wine" in every top regional and national account in San Francisco and beyond.

She is well versed first hand through traveling the world exploring the uniqueness of various wine regions, studying to achieve her Wine & Spirits Education Trust (WSET) Advanced in 2009, Certified Sommelier of Wine (CSW) in 2005, and current involvement with the Court of Master Sommeliers.

Danielle Kuzinich ~ Hidden Vine Wine Bar, San Francisco, CA



For Danielle Kuzinich hospitality springs naturally. Even at age five, she was at the helm of her own personal fantasy restaurant -- writing menus, taking orders, and cooking food for her cousins and family. Now at 25 years old, her devotion to hospitality is as strong as ever. Kuzinich has earned the distinguished position of General Manager at the Hidden Vine. Her ambition is matched by her passion for hospitality and breadth of wine knowledge.

Kuzinich began her restaurant career at the Discovery Bay Yacht Club in 2004 where she worked as Sous Chef. After garnering the experience and palate development that the kitchen had to offer, she moved on to her desired realm - the front of the house. She assumed a position as the manager of Town Hall for the next year.

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By April 2006, Kuzinich had graduated from the California Culinary Academy with a Le Cordon Blue Hospitality and Restaurant Management degree. In February of 2007, she joined the Fifth Floor as Director of Guest Relations and Assistant to Master Sommelier Emily Wines, working with a wine list that had won the prestigious Grand Award from Wine Spectator magazine and was also nominated for best wine service by the James Beard Foundation.

Under Wines' tutelage, Kuzinich's sommelier knowledge expanded exponentially. She was exposed to wines from all over the world, but specialized in French and California wines, which is her focus of expertise. She took and passed the Level 1 Introductory Sommelier CMS test shortly after turning 21. Only a few months later, she passed the Level 2 Certified Sommelier CMS test.

In October of 2007, Kuzinich stepped out from Wines' wings and joined the Grand Cafe as Head Sommelier and subsequently Beverage Director. She restructured the wine program to match the Grand Cafe's new restaurant concept with over 400 wines on the list.

After spending some time in Napa, in February of 2011 Kuzinich took over as the General Manager for the Hidden Vine Wine bar. Today Kuzinich has expanded her knowledge to develop an international wine and beer list for The Hidden Vine and is also utilizing her culinary expertise by creating the food program. She is looking forward to the reopening of The Hidden Vine in October 2011 in the heart of the Financial District.

Deanna Dwyer ~ Gary Danko, San Francisco, CA



Deanna Dwyer started in the restaurant business at a young age as a hostess working for Matt Prentice Restaurant Group in Detroit, Michigan. She was inspired by the company's Wine Director, Madeline Triffon who was the first female Master Sommelier, to pursue a career in the wine industry. She went on to become the Wine Director for The Capital Grille assisting with earning the Best of Award of Excellence from Wine Spectator. Having moved to Northern California in August 2009 she has since worked for Thomas Keller Bouchon Bistro and has now fulfilled her dream to be a part of the wine team at Restaurant Gary Danko, a Grand Award winning wine list in the heart of San Francisco.

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Hai Tran ~ ãn New World Cuisine, Cary, NC



The product of Vietnamese immigrants, who came to the country after the end of the Vietnam War, Hai Tran was raised in a household where wine had no place. It wasn't until he was an undergraduate at Duke University that he was exposed to the world of wine and the first seedlings were planted to a career in wine. While working at the Fairview Dining Room at the Washington Duke Inn & Golf Club, it was during a staff tasting that he reached an epiphany with wine and developed a desire to learn as much as he could about the different varietals of wine and the history behind each wine. Through his self-education and attendance of many of the local wine tastings in his area, he was introduced to a position at a statewide wine distribution company. It was through this company that he was introduced to the executive chef and co-owner of an New World Cuisine, where he was eventually offered the position of sommelier at the restaurant, a position that did not exist. While working at an, Hai has cultivated the wine program to work with the rich and bold flavors of Southeast Asian cuisine, while guiding his staff and patrons into understanding how the two can go hand in hand. Hai enrolled in the Court of Master Sommeliers in 2008 and is currently a Certified Sommelier working towards his Advanced.

Josiah Baldivino ~ Michael Mina. San Francisco, CA



Josiah Baldivino brings with him a wealth of experience from time spent at some of the country's top wine destinations to MICHAEL MINA San Francisco. A Southern California native, Josiah found his way into wine by way of a college summer job at Silverlake Wine, a small wine store located near California State Northridge. Attending college as a business major, Josiah was unsure of his career path, but after interning for a class assignment, he knew that he had stumbled upon his life's work.

Josiah was offered a job at Silverlake Wine after his internship was complete, and through his time spent there, he grew more fascinated with the entire industry. Next came a move across the country to New York City, where Josiah was anxious to gain experience in the industry. There he worked at noted restaurants including Lupa, Recette, and then at The Oak Room, before landing a sommelier position at Bar Boulud, Daniel Boulud's casual bistro located across from Manhattan's Lincoln Center. It was at Bar Boulud where he met wine

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director Daniel Johnnes and head sommelier Michael Madrigale, who taught him that successful wine programs should make quality wine accessible. In New York, he also met one of his mentors, Laura Maniec, one of only 18 female master sommeliers in the world. Laura, along with Master Sommelier Reggie Naritto of Southern Wine & Spirits and Master Sommelier Dustin Wilson, have been influential in shaping Josiah's outlook and philosophy on wine.

Following Bar Boulud, Josiah returned to California where he joined MICHAEL MINA in February of 2011. Josiah passed the advanced sommelier exam in August of 2011, and was promoted to head sommelier at the much-acclaimed restaurant thereafter. At MICHAEL MINA, he hopes to carry on the practices that he learned from Bar Boulud by making wine accessible to all guests. More than anything, Josiah believes wine should be enjoyed and shared, and he takes pride in finding diners the right bottle to fit their mood, and exposing guests to exciting up-and-coming regions.

Marita Esteva ~ Parc 55, San Francisco, CA



"A Life Inspired By "A Moveable Feast" Marita Esteva grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan where she attended the University of Michigan concentrating in film and art, although her other passion was of food and wine. She came San Francisco in 2004, working for Roland Passot, at the Left Bank in San Mateo, under the mentorship of Laurie Theis. Within two month, Marita was promoted to Wine Director in 2005 and a year later helped design a corporate wine list for all 5 Left Banks with Michael Ouelette. After opening Passot's Tanglewood in San Jose, Marita joined the Kimpton Group taking the reigns at Scala's Bistro and the Sir Francis Drake hotel as the property's Wine Director. She worked closely with Master Sommelier and Kimpton wine director Emily Wines to bring city wide wine programs. Her insight as how to wine is art and a collective memory was quoted in the Tasting Panel magazine where she was featured along side the rising new San Francisco sommeliers. She now holds the position of Director of Outlets at the Parc 55 where she continues to contribute to the wine culture through creating a new and exiting wine partnerships to enhance the guest experience.

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Michael Garcia ~ Southern Wine & Spirits, San Francisco, CA



Michael graduated from Saint Mary's College in Moraga, California with a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy and Economics and from Fordham University in New York with a Master's Degree in Philosophy. He knew his career path would change when he often found himself reading more about wine and food than Hegel and Nietzsche. After graduating from Fordham, Michael worked at Campton Place Hotel and Restaurant before joining the W Hotel and XYZ Restaurant in 2002. In 2009, Michael joined Southern Wine and Spirits as a Key Account Specialist.

By fostering this life long passion Michael has become a highly acclaimed sommelier and has earned several awards and certifications from The Wine Spectator, Star Chefs, The Court of Master Sommeliers, and The Wine and Spirit Educational Trust.

Michael currently resides with his wife and daughter Ana Sofía in San Francisco where he enjoys cooking for friends and family, and traveling.

Michael Pechloff ~ Four Seasons Hotel, San Francisco, CA



Four Seasons History: 2003-2004 Commis Sommelier FS London 2006-2008 Sommelier Four Seasons Maldives 2008-2009 Ass. Sommelier Four Seasons Santa Barbara 2009-2011 Sommelier Four Seasons San Francisco

Practical Experience: 2001 Internship at the German winery 'Geheimer Rat Dr. von Bassermann-Jordan'

Certifications: 2002 Wine Institute Mainz / Germany - Wine Seminar 'German Wine Skills' 2004 Academy of Food & Wine Service London - Wine Seminar 'Wine Skill Build' 2009 International Sommelier Guild ISG / Los Angeles - Wine Fundamentals 1&2 2010 International Sommelier Guild ISG / San Francisco - Sommelier Diploma Program

Education: 2004-2006 Hotel Management School Heidelberg / Germany

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Nico Sciackitano ~ A16, San Francisco, CA



Nico Sciackitano is the Wine Manager of San Francisco's A16 Restaurant, working as the protege under owner and James Beard nominee Shelley Lindgren. He was raised in the farming region of NW Indiana, where the precepts of hospitality, family and sharing with one's community helped to nurture his keen abilities within the service industry. After an initial six-year stint in Seattle -- getting his professional feet wet as a server at Le Pichet and Via Triunali -- he set his sights for wine knowledge development by moving to San Francisco in 2007 and landing a position at the renowned A16. By Spring of 2009, Nico was broadening his scope of experience through an internship with Wine and Spirits Magazine, gaining insights into fine wines enjoyed both in and outside of the restaurant world. After a further year of apprenticeship, and honing his skills via the Court of Master Sommelier's Introductory Course, Nico made the natural transition to sommelier in 2010 before becoming the Wine Manager earlier this year. In the fall he will be traveling to Sicily to work harvest alongside Arianna Occhipinti, for a truly "hands-on" appreciation for Italian wine production. His journeys and adventures are only just beginning for this blossoming talent

Noah Dranow ~ Bourbon Steak, San Francisco, CA



Noah Dranow, currently the Lead Sommelier BOURBON STEAK San Francisco, comes from an esteemed background in wines and restaurants.

His passion for wine and the hospitality industry is clearly evident with his quick rise through some of the best restaurants in the country.

Dranow spent most of his wine and restaurant career at MICHAEL MINA and Farallon in San Francisco. Starting as a server at Farallon, he dedicated himself to learning and working hard, earning the titles of Sommelier Manager.

In 2007 he joined the wine team at MICHAEL MINA where he helped manage their Grand Award winning wine program.

Before moving to San Francisco Dranow worked in Cambridge, Massachusetts at Rialto, a Four-Star Mediterranean restaurant and in Boston at Fine Arts Restaurant as a server, studying and understanding the art of a memorable dining experience.

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Priscilla Young ~ Mandarin Oriental, San Francisco, CA



She discovered her passion for wine when pursuing her degree in Cultural Anthropology at San Francisco State University in 2004. She recognized the beauty in the origin of wine and its many influences in multiple societies' history and customs. After 11 years in the food and beverage industry, Priscilla Young is currently Mandarin Oriental, San Francisco's Sommelier and Bar Manager. Her latest hobbies are learning to distill spirits, painting, target practice, cooking, and traveling. Her ultimate go-tos are pinot noir, Champagne, and gin.

Sean Gaenter ~ Rothmann's Steak House, East Norwich, NY



Sean is the wine director and sommelier at Rothmann's Steak House. "I am responsible for maintaining the accuracy of the list, which actually needs to be updated several times a week between what we sell out of, the new wines brought in and vintage changes," he said. And the work doesn't just stop in the cellar; Sean is responsible for meeting with reps from numerous distributors and scheduling on-premise tastings or visiting Manhattan for larger portfolio tastings. Staff education is a never-ending part of his job as well. "It's not enough to buy the wines and put them on the lists if the waiters and bartenders don't know anything about it... not that I expect them to be able to fill in a map of the great producers of the Wachau, but a little knowledge goes a long way in enhancing the guest experience and it seems the more they learn the easier it becomes to teach them. It's all about building points of reference."

At the restaurant, Sean's favorite role is that of host. Stopping by to visit each table, Sean becomes a member of the family and guests welcome him warmly. He is the official rock star behind every sip of grape at the restaurant. Given the choice, Sean drinks a lot of Gruner (a white wine) and enjoys turning diners on to Austrian wines. "Something about all the umlauts," he noted. Behind the bar, there's nothing he can't live without. "It takes more than one monkey to the circus, and any ingredient or wine can be replaced, it's a just a matter of being aware of what's onhand," he said. "The point is that the key is to be aware of the flavor profiles the guest is looking for and the flavor profiles of the wines on hand. Most people will have a second glass, and if the guest is adamant about having a Malbec and all the other options have failed, you can be sure I've still got another trick up my sleeve."

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"I have enjoyed the freedom and creatively seek out interesting and off the beaten path wines and bring them to the restaurant and to the public with the understanding that if I buy the wines, I will sell the wines, which fortunately has never been a problem," Sean said. "I'm also very lucky to have an adventurous and trusting base of regular guests who more often than not take me up on my suggestions to try every off the beaten path varietal that I've brought in, from Altesse to Zweigelt. Our "unique whites" and "unique reds" pages are among the most visited on the list, and the bonds I've forged with our customers over these acquisitions inspires me to continue the search for more.

Tonya Pitts ~ One Market Restaurant, San Francisco, CA



I have been in the food and beverage industry for over 20 years. My career started in St. Louis, Missouri as a host during college. I was very fortunate to be surrounded by nurturing food and wine professionals who realized that I had a palate. My fine art studies relocated me to the bay area and a new chapter was born. My first job in San Francisco was with Chef Judy Rodgers at Zuni Cafe and Chef Jeremiah Tower at Stars Restaurant as a server. Needless to say, I only paint for fun now. After three years, I was running the wine program for Loretta Keller at Bizou Restaurant. It was with Loretta Keller that I realized I have a true passion for wine. Since, I have worked in many notable houses in the bay area. I am currently pursuing my wine studies with the Court of Master Sommeliers and continuing to educate myself on the world of wine.