

# Interview: How Gerard Basset was inspired from drinking water and wine as a young man to be world's No1 sommelier | Academy Of Food and Wine Service

<http://www.afws.co.uk/2011/01/interview-how-gerard-basset-was-inspired-from-drinking-water-and-wine-as-a-young-man-to-be-world%e2%80%99s-no1-sommelier/>

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When the BBC had to train eight young front-of-house staff to serve wine in top restaurants like Le Gavroche for its new series *Michel Roux's Service*, it knew who to ask for help: world No1 sommelier Gerard Basset

Some of the young hopefuls vying to win a scholarship from the Academy of Food and Wine Service had never drunk wine let alone open and serve it in a restaurant. Yet Basset instilled confidence in them to be a sommelier during Michel Roux's

*Service* currently airing on BBC 2 on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

"I did a masterclass for the candidates but then they had to make recommendations for restaurant guests on their own and show their service skills by opening the bottles in front of people.

"They did a fantastic job given that it was so difficult for them. They had to remember a lot and serve about 60 people between them - they had to remember over 20 wines each," explains Basset, founder of Hotel TerraVina and co-founder of the Hotel du Vin Group.

Used to tasting and serving some of the best wines in the world, Basset says the sommelier's job is as much about how they serve wine as what they recommend to restaurant guests.

And while the master sommelier acknowledges that France has played a part in influencing the way wine is served in UK Michelin-starred restaurants, Basset is also relieved that Australians have added a relaxed flair to wine serving.

"Le Gavroche, Gordon Ramsay and Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons are all friendly top class restaurants where the wine staff aren't too precious, and Diego Masciaga at the Waterside Inn must be one of the best maître d's there is."

## Serving wine correctly

Try not to abandon customers, warns Basset, so if you're passing by their table then be professional and look at their needs.

"For me it's important to serve wine at the right temperature and at the right time. You shouldn't sit there with your starter and still be waiting for the wine," he adds. "And if a good wine needs to be decanted then sommeliers need to do it right. You also need to adapt yourself to each table because sometimes the customers might not want you around."

Despite Basset's heady rise to the top of the wine industry he still serves wine in his

own hotel's restaurant, Hotel TerraVina in the New Forest.

“When I did training for the world sommelier, for two months I was the sommelier at Hotel TerraVina every evening and my two sommeliers were my backup. I also went to work for Gordon Ramsay so I was very much the sommelier. Training like this was very important to me,” he says.

### **What makes a good sommelier?**

When Basset is recruiting for his own restaurant he knows at interview whether someone's too arrogant. “Then I don't consider them,” he says. “I'm looking for someone who's passionate and has the right attitude, who knows about wine and are flexible.”

And if you're looking to change careers and train to be a sommelier then Basset has these tips for you:

- Find a restaurant who can show you the process – if you can find an inspiring person at the place then go and work for them
- A good sommelier will be happy to show you the ropes but be prepared to put in your own time because it's a two-way thing
- You might put in the time and be learning the process but read as well. A sommelier can be a support to you by telling you the right books to read
- Apart from working hard show you're passionate by going to lectures, read wine magazines and go to tastings.
- Try and travel to wine regions – 95% of my holidays were and still are to wine regions. I've been all over the world and it's related to my job. They are very nice places to go!

### **Basset's inspiration comes from wine - and water!**

A wine profession might have seemed the natural thing for Basset who grew up in Saint-Etienne in France, between Beaujolais and the Rhône. But wine was drunk a little differently when he first encountered it.

“When I was growing up people were drinking very ordinary wine. In my teens we'd drink early but put a lot of water in wine to dilute it and make it refreshing.

“In those days French people were drinking a lot of ordinary wine – it was like Vin de Table Water. But even today I still do dilute when I'm drinking cheaper wine – it's normally one-fifth red and four-fifths water.”

Want to visit Gerard Basset's Hotel Terravina?

Location: Hotel TerraVina, 174 Woodlands Road, Woodlands, Netley Marsh, New Forest, Southampton, Hampshire SO40 7GL

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[www.hotelterravina.co.uk](http://www.hotelterravina.co.uk)

Contact the Academy of Food and Wine Service about front of house careers and training by calling 0208 661 4646 or [click here](#) to find out more about Academy training.