



SOMMELIER?

**Enrico Olivieri:
Seoul's Only Italian Sommelier**

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Enrico Olivieri is the General Manager of Villa Sortino, one of the premium Italian restaurants in Korea. Yet by trade Enrico is a Sommelier, an occupation that revolves around every facet of understanding, classifying, storing and enjoying wine. So what exactly does a sommelier do and why does Korea need a wine expert?

Broadly speaking a Sommelier is a person who possesses a body of knowledge about wine and spirits and can recognize both the good and bad qualities in them. This includes knowing how to properly store a wine either to maintain its quality or to let the wine age well, treating it in a manner so that it can be enjoyed at the height of its expression. Also a Sommelier will often be in direct contact with those who are consuming wine, being responsible for the wine selection of a restaurant or shop, rather than sitting in a panel of wine experts and giving assessments on products just released from a winery.

For Olivieri the motivation following this particular career path went beyond merely enjoying wine, explaining, “To me wine is not just a beverage but as a pure expression of man's noble work. Nature is generous to men who are respectful while expressing their art.” Yet the road to becoming a Sommelier is no walk in the park; candidates have to study with an accredited organization and under go strict examinations before they can have the title of Sommelier bestowed on them. Olivieri explained that this involves learning not just about grapes but also the soil they grew from, including viticulture techniques as well as winemaking processes; how to recognize, store, age and serve wine; the geography of wine producing regions, called “oenography” and how to cor-

rectly match wine and food. Yet he stressed that the studies never end, “A sommelier must be constantly studying wine and be aware of new products, while possessing a truly global knowledge of wine, for better select and give suggestions.”

So why does Korea need a sommelier? “Korea needs to know about wine and how to enjoy it. As Korea isn't a wine producing country, people need to learn the philosophy of wine and how to enjoy it slowly. Drinking a glass of wine is an enjoyable moment when you know what you are drinking”, Olivieri replied. He went on to explain that while modern life is driven by working and studying, leaving very little time for relaxation, wine is the perfect antidote, “Wine brings you back to reality; it's not artificial, it's as old as human history and it's a worldwide heritage. It is something that can be with us every moment of our lives” he said.

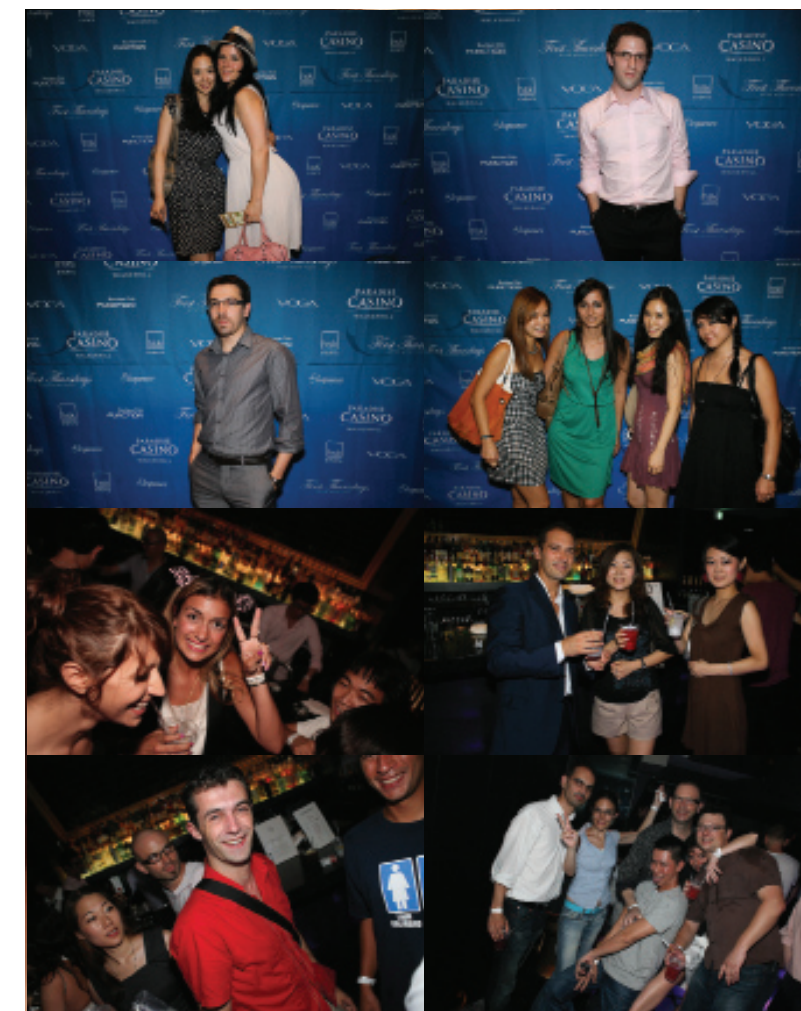
Yet how can somebody who is not a sommelier find a good wine? Olivieri stresses that so long as you have taste buds you can enjoy and appreciate wine and primarily a good wine should give both joy and pleasure, becoming a friend in every instance. Most importantly a good or exceptional wine comes from the vineyard, not the cellar as in the case of industrially produced wine. As far as the biggest mistakes people make when choosing wines Olivieri cautioned, “Simply following labels gives you a false confidence and more often than not, you pay more than the value you receive. Another mistake is judging a wine by its price, either believing that only an expensive wine is worth drinking or that all wine is the same and that a cheap industrial wine is as good as a wine from a vineyard.”

Check out Enrico's recommendations on the right side.

MORE EXPATS ARE JOINING THE SCENE

More and more expats are finding their way into the lime light away from the dingy bars filled with newbies

Indeed it is not just foreign investors, business men and bankers who want to frequent more classy establishments but English teachers too. Gone are the days of back packs, anoraks and hang ups about seeking the ‘real’ Korea, shunning the ‘dilution’ of contemporary Korean culture in favor of soju and hiking.



In recent years the foreign community has come a long way, in terms of its size, diversity and the aspirations of those in it. Yet more and more the expat community had seen a shift; regardless of the stereotype of English teachers being content to scratch around dive bars and basement clubs increasingly the foreign community is showing an interest in entering the more bourgeois corners of the Seoul party scene, perfect proof being the fact that Gangnam, traditionally the refuge of Seoul's rich and famous, as become the #1 party spot for the expatriate crowd.

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A case in point of this transformation is Between, the recently opened boutique lounge/bar in Itaewon, the heart of Seoul's international scene. While the tra-

ditional visage of Itaewon doesn't need to be discussed in print beyond making reference to a certain hill, Between is a sign of a change towards more bourgeois leanings in the district's establishments. Between is not typified by cheap beer, pool or hip hop. Instead it is defined by a menu packed with fine food and drink, exquisite décor and a certain air of sophistication. Most importantly the clientele is equally foreigner and Korean, sitting side by side, seeking the same leisure, opulence and comfort.

Why this change has taken place one explanation (albeit quite self serving in nature) is the growth of English language media in Korea. Previously expatriates in Korea were directed by friends and colleagues to the usual haunts and all the soju, Cass and associated tomfoolery, leading to the mindset of, “Well, this is it. This is my life in Korea.” The scope never extended beyond the limited means because the other side of Korean life was never revealed.

To offer an analogy, picture a fish swimming around inside a bowl — it will never know the scope of the ocean until somebody introduces it to that limitless expanse. The English media, blogs, podcasts and yes, magazines, have opened the eyes of the expatriates to what is truly out there.

ENRICO'S TOP THREE RECOMMENDATIONS



Country/Region: France, Alsace
Company: Joms Meyer
Wine: “Fleur de Lotus” 2007
Appellation: Alsace AOC
Grape: Auxerrois, Gewurztraminer, Riesling



Country/Region: New Zealand, Central Otago
Company: Wooing Tree
Wine: Pinot Noir 2007
Appellation: Central Otago
Grape: Pinot Noir



Country/Region: Italy/Sicily
Company: COS
Wine: suolo di Vittoria DOCG 2007
Appellation: Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG
Grape: Nero d'Avola, Frappato