

Latvian Captures the “Best Sommelier of Europe and Africa” Title

He convinced the jury with his extensive competence and impressive charm. On Thursday, May 11th, 2017, the Latvian sommelier Raimonds Tomsons then celebrated winning the "Best Sommelier of Europe and Africa" contest.

"We were looking for a sommelier who best reflected the concepts and ideas of the host," said Gerard Basset in summarising the decision of the technical committee. But what may sound quite simple actually demanded from the finalists of the "Best Sommelier of Europe and Africa" competition an incredible amount of practical skills, theoretical knowledge and nerve strength. The finale of this three-day championship took place in the ballroom of the Parkhotel Schönbrunn. Due to the tight results, four of the original 37 top sommeliers were selected for the chance to win. David Biraud (France), Raimonds Tomsons (Latvia), Piotr Pietras (Poland) and Julia Scavo (Romania) took their turns on the stage of the Parkhotel Schönbrunn to perform the challenging tasks of the jury before a live international audience of nearly 500 guests.

Irritation Determining Fate?

In the world of *sommellerie*, the focus is on precision - but also on personality. For the finale, three restaurant tables were set up on the stage, and the first challenge was to "serve these guests with a sake as an aperitif and then justify the selection. You have two minutes and 30 seconds to do this." On the side table, various sake specialties were provided, with one of them bearing a high alcohol content. This purposely built-in trap was overlooked by a candidate in the heat of the battle. Another challenge was to recommend appropriate wine accompaniments for an anniversary celebration menu. For each course, the sommelier was required to recommend a wine from a different country, to describe each wine thoroughly and to explain why it would fit to the matching dish. Two of the candidates could not make the short time limit allowed for this round - which was complicated further by a guest who asked - as a small irritant - for a different wine than the recommended one.

Blind Tasting - Tough Testing

"You have four minutes to open this magnum bottle and pour its contents *evenly* into 18 glasses. You cannot adjust the amount in any glass once the wine is poured." Here the candidates cleverly checked the actual number of glasses - more than 18 were actually provided - as well as their cleanliness. The uniform distribution of the wine in each glass was successfully achieved by the candidates. Another exercise proved quite tricky, as the sommeliers were faced with three pairs of dark-coloured glasses. Of the fluids contained in each glass, two were identical, but only as a product. These drinks were to be identified and described as pairs according to the basic product or type of production, and then to justify their matching characteristics.

Pleasure and Excitement

The invited guests in the audience were able to dine on beautifully crafted courses served between the candidate testing rounds. The dishes were prepared by four members of the Jeunes Restaurateurs (Hubert Wallner, Thomas Göls, Richard Rauch, Josef Steffner, www.jre.eu/de/oesterreich-at). The accompanying wines were from 84 winemakers who partnered as co-hosts for the event – as did two schnapps producers, Farthofer and Reisetbauer, and the Vermouth producer, Burschik, as well.

About the Champion – Raimonds Tomsons

Raimonds Tomsons was born in 1980 and works as a head sommelier at Vincents restaurant in the Latvian capital, Riga. Since 2007, he has participated regularly in national and international competitions, most recently in 2016 at the Sommelier World Championship in Argentina. Tomsons most important experience includes his – so far - 17 years at Vincents restaurant, and his training at the Weinakademie Rust in Austria. Upon winning the championship, Tomsons said: "I am overwhelmed! Thank you to everyone. Thanks to the A.S.I., who gives us sommeliers the opportunity to present our skills. And thanks to the Austrian Sommelier Union for the fantastic organisation. And especially, I would like to thank all who have supported me, especially my partner, Martina." And finally - "Thank you Austria!"

History and Background of the Competitions

The Sommelier World Championship was founded in 1969 by The Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (A.S.I.). It has conducted the Sommelier European Championship since 1988. The aim of the competitions is to promote the exchange of specialised professionals in the restaurant and hotel industry and to motivate them to perfect their skills. Likewise, a healthy competition between the participants is to be encouraged and promoted. All candidates taking part in a competition are from either an A.S.I. member country or a country applying for membership. More than 1,000 candidates have participated in these competitions over the years. A prerequisite for competing is active work in a restaurant, a wine bar, a wine shop or in the wine tourist sector.

The Eastern Europeans are Coming

The candidates from Austria (Suvad Zlatic) and Germany (Torsten Junker) were not so fortunate, having to leave after the first round. Fabio Masi of Switzerland, on the other hand, made it into the semi-final. Particularly noteworthy was the high density of successful sommeliers from Eastern European countries. Five of the 12 semi-finalists are from the Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Russia. In the final, the candidates from Latvia, Poland and Romania joined forces with the candidate from France.

Annemarie Foidl, president of the Austrian Sommelier Union, is delighted with the success of the competition – which was conducted for the first time with the European and African sommelier organisations cooperating together.

List of beverages at the final

- Red Wine

2004 Viña Tondonia Reserva, Rioja, Spain

- Pairs of beverages

Waqar Pisco, Chile

2012 Vin de Constance, Constantia, South Africa

The Irishman, Irish Whisky

Drambuie, Scotland

Fine Calvados, France

Brännlands Iscider (Ice Cider), Sweden

- 4 sweet wines

2014 DISZNÓKŐ 1413 TOKAJI ÉDES SZAMORODNI, Tokaji, Hungary

2013 Château de Monbazillac, Bordeaux, France

2015 Peter Schandl Traminer Ruster Ausbruch, Burgenland, Austria

2006 Dr. H. Thanisch Riesling Beerenauslese, Mosel, Germany

This event was able to be organised with the help of the following partners:

- Austrian Wine Marketing Board – general sponsor (www.austrianwine.com)
- 84 Austrian winegrowers, 2 schnapps producers and a vermouth producer
- 45 honorary sommeliers from Austria, Germany, Italy, Serbia and South Africa
- Wein & Pro and Wein & Co – running the Pop up Vinothek (www.weinco.at)
- ARGE Heumilch (www.heumilch.com)
- Chef & Sommelier (www.chefsommelier.com)
- Haubis (www.haubis.com)
- Hotel St. Martins Therme (www.stmartins.at)
- Modul Universität Vienna (www.modul.ac.at)
- Moët & Chandon (www.moet.com)
- Stölzle (www.stoelzle.com)
- Ruefa Reisen (www.ruefa.at)
- Weingut Schloss Esterhazy (www.esterhazy.at)
- San Pelegrino (www.sanpellegrino.com)
- Stift Göttweig (www.stiftgoettweig.at)
- Stift Klosterneuburg (www.stift-klosterneuburg.at)
- Trinkwerk/Transgourmet (www.trinkwerk.cc)
- VieVinum (www.vievinum.at)
- Vini Portugal (www.viniportugal.pt)
- Wirtschaftskammer Österreich (www.wko.at)

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App with all infos:

<http://app.sommelierunion.at>

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