

Ep 37 Advice & Stories from a Master Sommelier with Stefan N...

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SPEAKERS

Stefan Neumann MS, Janina Doyle



Janina Doyle 00:07

Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier, so stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you.



Janina Doyle 00:30

Hello, lovely wine lovers. Welcome back. So today's episode is all about advice from Master Sommelier. So I'm talking with Stefan Neumann, who is the Director of wines at Dinner at Heston Blumenthal's and The Mandarin Oriental, an incredible five star hotel in London. He's going to tell us all about his journey of Master Sommelier. Have you ever wondered how you take your Master Sommelier wine exams where you're going to find out a little bit more about that here. He'll be telling us some fun stories, some little mistakes and some of his favourite experiences whilst being a sommelier. He'll give us a little bit of advice on how to understand a wine list. And then he's going to let us know his four wine regions that he believes are up and coming and offer some of the best value wines, so stick with us.



Janina Doyle 01:28

So like I always do, I will start with my winery of the week. As my guest is Austrian. and he's going to tell us some of his favourite up and coming and bargain wine regions. I thought I would start with a incredibly good value wine from Austria. So I've picked a wine from one of the star winemakers of Austria and this is Markus Huber. So he started making wines when he was only 23 years old and was even named "wunderkind" by the Decanter magazine. That translates to "prodigy" because he has basically brought his whole winery to international acclaim. So the Huber family has been around making wine for over 220 years. So Markus Huber is the 10th generation. But he has done such sensational things. So he focuses on Grüner Veltliner and on Riesling and is in the Traisental region. Now when we talk about Grüner Veltliner, the kind of star regions that a lot of people have heard about is Wachau, Kremstal and Kamptal. Well Traisental is just east of these three wine regions. It's one of the smallest, with just over 800 hectares of vines and really this is also one of the youngest wine growing regions in Austria. Now Marcus organically farms

and he has vines growing on these unique limestone soils. He has everything from the more standard Grüner Veltliners and Rieslings up to the "Erste Lage" which is the "first sites" so these are the best vineyard sites that he has. The Terrassen is actually only £12. I found that you can get this from Noble Green Wines if you're in the UK. And then the Erste Lages you can get for £25, £29 depending on which one you want. Now I decided to actually get the cheapest wine from Marcus Huber that I could find and that's with the Waitrose supermarket. So for people in the UK, the Master of Wine Xenia Ruscombe-King, she has made a special wine with Marcus Huber and it's just over £10. So I decided, well let's give it a go and see if it is classic Grüner Veltliner flavours.



Janina Doyle 03:33

Okay, so on the nose, it's really quite fragrant, aromatic, it's got this lovely nice lemon citrus fragrance and kind of like a fruit salad nose. It's actually very celery like. Now celery can be a note that you will pick up with Grüner Veltliner. There are always these kind of green salad kind of flavours, notes, maybe even green beans or lettuce, lots of kind of mineral, floral, herby notes expect that with a Grüner Veltliner and I'm actually getting a touch of white pepper. That white pepper is quite a signature for Grüner Veltliner but it's lovely and fresh. It's light, is quite zippy, it's green, it's slightly steely in fact. It's got a very limey palate with a grapefruit kind of acid finish. And it's not super complex, but this kind of price point you wouldn't expect that but very, very fresh, dry and crisp, a really good food wine. If you kind of like Sauvignon Blanc, the steelier types, this is a spicy version of that. If you like Picpoul de Pinet from the South of France, that kind of green note or even Vermentino with that lovely citrus acidity, even Muscadet, these kind of grape varieties, then you will like Grüner Veltliner. The ripest types will be quite apricot in fruit whereas the leaner types will be that lime flavours. Grüner Veltliner is divine, really good with Asian food. Obviously lovely with fish. It's great with goat's cheese, cheese with spices and herbs, and of course, lovely green vegetables and asparagus. But enough about food pairings, I'm keen to get across to Stefan. So let's go there now.



Janina Doyle 05:16

Thank you so much Stefan for joining me. I'm super excited to get really wine geeky with you. So thank you for joining me.



Stefan Neumann MS 05:22

It's an absolute pleasure.

J Janina Doyle 05:22
I'm hoping you're going to entertain me to be fair, because...

S Stefan Neumann MS 05:25
I hope so too. I'm a little bit nervous.

J Janina Doyle 05:29
Well, you should be because there's some very, very high expectations. As people will already know, you are a fantastic Master Sommelier. And so I really wanted to touch on kind of your experiences, what got you into wine and to let people who are listening know a little bit more about the Master Sommelier exams. So I'm going to ask you a very standard question here. Okay, so hopefully you have a good answer. What was the inspirational moment for you? Was it a wine, a place, a person? What took you down the wine path?

S Stefan Neumann MS 06:00
Well, I think there's never a straightforward answer to this. It's that there's always more things than just 1 to the story. So I'm trying to make it interesting for you. In the beginning, it was it was certainly a wine. I mean, there's no doubt about it. First of all, I'm Austrian, I grew up in a wine growing area, which is called Wachau. The first thing which really took me by surprise, and it was sort of that moment where I was like, oh, wow, stunning stuff. It was actually in 2003 when my dad turned 50. So we drank a Riesling from his birth year, so from 1953. And I was a tender 19 years old. You are just past the legal drinking age. So I mean, we open this 1953 Riesling, and I had absolutely zero expectation, because first of all, I have never tried something so old.

J Janina Doyle 06:48
50 years old? That's insane.

S Stefan Neumann MS 06:49
50 years old! The bottle had no label, the cork looked old.

J Janina Doyle 06:53

Like, it wasn't even a cork anymore.



Stefan Neumann MS 06:55

It was it was still good in fact. It was proper mouldy on top. And I was like, this looks very strange, but actually was kept in the same place for more than 50 years, from a winery, from the neighbouring sort of wine region where I grew up, which is called Kamptal. Kamptal is very, very well known for Riesling and Grüner Veltliner, slightly different in terms of the style from Wachau, but a very, very good reputation. And we opened this and the mould actually, now I know this is actually very good sign. You know because the mould essentially acts as a sort of barrier, the mould was growing around the cork. And it was kept in a perfect wine cellar for many, many years, for 50 years, or let's say, 49 years. So when we open this, I was like, wow, this is pretty much magic stuff. And, you know, there's not many tasting notes that I remember, but what I do recall is like, it fascinated me that actually something of that age. so gracefully aged, is still very, very enjoyable. So there's so many layers, there's so much to discover. So it's like, and I was just saying to myself at that time, you know, well Stefan if you could make a living with wine, or in the world of wine, I'd be like, yeah, money wouldn't really matter. So it was that sort of very idealistic approach of saying, you found something that you like, and if you can make a living with this, yeah, why not? So that was sort of the, my, I could say, maybe eureka moment where it was like, huh, this is pretty delicious. And, of course, then, growing up in the wine growing area, very lucky, very very lucky.



Janina Doyle 08:20

And one of the best, I don't want to say best regions of Austria...



Stefan Neumann MS 08:24

Certainly extremely well known area. I think even on an international scale, people will know a little bit, maybe heard about Riesling or Grüner Veltliner, people would know about Wachau. Actually Wachau, last year became a DAC. So it's one of the...



Janina Doyle 08:38

Yes, that was in the news, I read about that. And everybody who's listening, there is a transcript here. So all these regions like Wachau is spelt with a W everybody. So I'm gonna be able to see that when I type up the transcript. So that might be useful if we're going to mention a few Austrian names. So heads up on that, but yeah, carry on.



Stefan Neumann MS 08:55

But, you know, the, I mean, first of all, German is not an easy language either. So it's like it's very good to have this transcript, it certainly will help.



Janina Doyle 09:02

So be as complicated as you want now, right? Now, you know, they'll all be typed out. But yeah, so you're very lucky. And you not only came from this amazing wine region, but you've worked in some fantastic restaurants, it seems that you only like the Michelin star restaurants.



Stefan Neumann MS 09:17

Well, actually, this is this was not something by choice really. Initially, it was not something really so big when I was young. And when I came to the UK, certainly I was aiming for one specific restaurant at that time, I only had this one in mind. So I applied for this one and nothing else. It was called Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, which is in Oxford, Raymond Blanc is the chef. And it's possibly the most classic French cuisine you can imagine, in British homelands. But it was a wonderful experience, because at the time actually, I was not applying for a Sommelier role or in the wine team. I wanted to but there was no availability. So I actually took a job as a commie waiter or breakfast waiter, which essentially meant, you know, for me, I just wanted to get my foot in the door, start at this place and then hopefully, you know, again a bit different idealistic, you could maybe even see naive thinking like, maybe I'd be lucky enough to get transferred one day.



Janina Doyle 10:09

Maybe, maybe! I think you did. I think it worked out for you, didn't it?



Stefan Neumann MS 10:14

I think it's worked out well, indeed. I think having, said that, and there was great timing, because I had to get up at something like four o'clock in the morning to serve breakfast. And you know, what happened there, actually sort of had a few chats with the sommeliers and head sommeliers and it really again sparked my interest and my love for wine. And I didn't stay long in the breakfast team, I got my transfer within a couple of months, which was brilliant. That was just before Christmas. So just in December, which is obviously the best time to start a new job.



Janina Doyle 10:20

When you're literally thrown in the deep end, and as I was already talking, before, I press the record button, there's no time for the toilet, you work from noon till close, you don't breathe.



Stefan Neumann MS 10:57

It's a funny time Christmas, you know, it really gets, as we said before, it gets the worst and the best out in people. But anyhow, so I found my way there and spent like two years in Le Manoir, made some fabulous friends there. But anyhow, I mean, after that, it took a really extreme step of going for what is called the Fat Duck. So restaurant, which is in Bray. Heston Blumenthal is the chef, obviously the very opposite of French Cuisine. Heston at that time, and I think still not as a bit the reputation of challenging the rulebook, you know, doing things in his way. And I mean, the first time I looked through the menu, actually, the Fat Duck, I saw there's a mock turtle soup on there, and I was like, What is a turtle soup?



Janina Doyle 11:38

Some of his creations are bizarre.



Stefan Neumann MS 11:41

Indeed, but at the same time, what a feel like with Heston, no matter what he puts in front of you, there's always this one element. This one thing which he focuses on, it needs to be tasty, it needs to taste good. And I think this still carries on in the way I very rudimentary cook as well at home. Whatever you do, you need to make it taste good. And I think Heston was the master of that. Obviously, he choose some I would say pioneering ways of achieving that. But actually, that's really inspirational for you as well when you work in a team where your job is to work with wine. So it actually challenged you as well. And it puts you a little bit out of a comfort zone, but you have to come up with actually quite an innovative and creative pairing. So I mean, these were the two extremes. And I mean three years there and had some really fabulous moments.



Janina Doyle 12:29

So then after the Fat Duck you have finished and you are still in where?

- S** Stefan Neumann MS 12:35
It's called Dinner by Heston Blumenthal. So it's an historic inspired restaurant in Knightsbridge, London within the really wonderful Mandarin Oriental, Hyde Park. So fabulous property overlooking Hyde Park. And yes, it's now a two star restaurant. The intention in the beginning was to have a really relaxed, easy dining environment when we opened, no tablecloths, no tasting menu as such on the a la carte with the exception, there's one tasting menu on the Chef's Table, which is a table as the name suggests very close to them within the kitchen.
- J** Janina Doyle 13:07
Oh, okay. This is not the... I've been in the private room, do you remember you showed me the private room, and that was rather grand.
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 13:12
The private dining room is, I mean, a lot of our dishes essentially are inspired by British history. And when you go into the private dining room, it has sort of a medieval feel to it.
- J** Janina Doyle 13:22
Yes, it does.
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 13:23
I always call it a bit the Game of Thrones room when you go in there.
- J** Janina Doyle 13:25
It totally is, isn't it? Yes!
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 13:28
It looks fabulous. I mean, the chairs and the table they all bespoke and the table itself was inspired by Arthur's round table but the rectangular room we couldn't really fit the round table in there. So we sort of squished it a bit. Yes. But you know, there's nothing wrong with some good improvisation. But 12 chairs, I mean gorgeous looking as it's really, I mean whoever came up with that design and partly it's been inspired by Alice in Wonderland as well. So some of the chairs there is an engravement with the Alice in Wonderland

characters. So I mean it's really something quite to look at. And the Chef's Table which is just on the opposite side, closer to the kitchen, this is the only table where we serve essentially a tasting menu. But the main restaurant was always like, a la carte, and then we were lucky enough to have, particularly Heston, he had a few brilliant ideas with some dishes which since day one are on the menu, and still are on there. Like the Meat fruit, which is a chicken liver parfait encased in a mandarin gel. So it looks like a real Mandarin. I've seen people peeling it. It looks so real.

J Janina Doyle 14:29
Oh no really? Silly them. But its that realistic? Wow!

S Stefan Neumann MS 14:33
The tipsy cake, I think is a really famous dessert and I love it and basically it's a fresh baked brioche which is infused with vanilla, sauternes, so of course the wine link there, and some brandy, so it's cooked in the oven 190 degrees, 20 minutes, infused with this sort of really luscious sauce. You get this really super fluffy cake but served with a spit roast pineapple on the side and this spit roast pineapples like 3, 3 and half, 4 hours on the spit roast. We brush it with apple caramel. Just to get that crispy, sort of...

J Janina Doyle 15:00
Stop it. Stop it. Enough because we can't even go right now.

S Stefan Neumann MS 15:05
Well, very soon.

J Janina Doyle 15:06
Very soon. Exactly. There we go, and everyone knows what desert to get. That's amazing.

S Stefan Neumann MS 15:10
But yeah, I mean, this, this, this essentially my journey in the UK. And I mean, what a journey it has been. I've made some really good friends along the way. And as you've asked in the beginning, you know, then of course, another journey was for me, not only to, in the world of wine, but aswell to achieve something which is called a Master Sommelier.



Janina Doyle 15:30

Which I heard is a, it's a little bit difficult. Takes a few hours of studying, doesn't it?



Stefan Neumann MS 15:35

It takes a few hours ha ha. And certainly, I mean, there's a reputation about this exam of being notoriously difficult. And I mean, to break this down a little bit, you know, there's a few, there's a few elements to this. You see an organisation which is called Court of Master Sommelier, it was started in Europe. And now you've got different chapters around the world. But the heart was always in Europe. Started around early 70s. And since then, give or take, I don't know the precise number, but around 270 people have passed.



Janina Doyle 16:06

Is that it? 270?



Stefan Neumann MS 16:07

270, Yeah. So it notoriously makes it look like it's a difficult exam. And yes, it is. But now, I always say, victory loves preparation. For this exam, you better be well prepared.



Janina Doyle 16:20

So how long did it take you to do this from the start of preparing for those exams to take in them and passing?



Stefan Neumann MS 16:27

The easiest way of saying this is actually, maybe it took me my entire life really, but... You know, there's four different levels. You've got your introductory, your certified and your advanced level, okay. And I started with the first one in 2010. And I've completed my advanced in 2011. So that was relatively quickly, you could say, but then the last one, which is called the master sommelier exam, took me a little bit longer. So I, first of all, it's quite difficult to get a spot in that exam. So very often you go on a waiting list. And basically, you're basically invited. So I finished my Advanced in 11, then I was one year on a break, so I didn't get a spot. So this was basically 2012 gone. Then in 13, 14, 15, 16, 17. So it took me five attempts in total. So 13, I didn't pass anything. In 14, I didn't pass anything. When I say I didn't pass anything, because this example breaks down into three different parts.

J Janina Doyle 17:22
Okay, so what are the...Yeah, theory. Okay,

S Stefan Neumann MS 17:24
Theory. So it's like anything between 60 to 100 questions in give or take less than an hour. And it's all oral, so there's no, there's no written. So you need to answer that question when they ask you the question. And you can't come back to a question, which makes it really, really difficult. Because I don't know about you. But sometimes you always have the best answers ready, like 10 minutes down the line. So it's like, that's, I think that's one of the most challenging things. Your memory recall needs to be really good. That's simply purely computer trained that, you know, you need to have a few goes at it, in order to get that right. So and of course, it's generally not the easiest questions about the wine as well. So it's not something where you're like, oh, let's talk. So it's like things you either know them or you don't know them. And there's not much room really to make that stuff up, you know? And, you know, if you're not quick enough, then they'll be like, yeah, let's just move on. And then, you know, theory was, for me personally, the hardest thing because for theory you need time and you need, you know, patience. And you need, you need to be, certainly need to train that muscle of memory recall really, really in a good way. So theory was the last thing I've passed, for example, which was brilliant, because that meant I could study five years of my life only about wine.

J Janina Doyle 18:37
Fab. So now you are exceptionally exceptional.

S Stefan Neumann MS 18:41
No, not at all. I think. I mean, I would say I know a thing or two about wine. But God Almighty, this this journey never stops, you always learn something new. Like if you have stopped learning, then that's that's not the right thing. You know, you always learn something, regardless. I think in every job and every everything you do, you improve. You never reached that pinnacle, where you say, Okay, that's it. I'm done.

J Janina Doyle 19:04
Well, that's true. And then in the wine world, we keep on just getting new wine regions keep cropping up all the time.

S Stefan Neumann MS 19:10
Absolutely. I mean, 10 years ago, I mean, I will say this 10 years ago, Chile and Argentina barely existed in the world of wine. In other words, there was a few wine regions, a few producers. I mean, now it's a huge player, and a very important player,

J Janina Doyle 19:22
And you're forgetting about Brazil and Uruguay. I mean, it's, it's insane.

S Stefan Neumann MS 19:27
Oh yes, Uruguay in the last year has really come around.

J Janina Doyle 19:30
I'm loving Uruguay at the moment for their wines. But anyway, that's a whole other story, isn't it? So sorry, we've gone off track, so carry on...

S Stefan Neumann MS 19:36
So coming back. So then, of course, you've got your tasting exams. So the tasting exam essentially means 6 wines, 25 minutes, and you need to correctly identify as many as you possibly can.

J Janina Doyle 19:47
Now, are you just supposed to say right, I think this is a Cabernet Sauvignon. I think this is a 2003. And I think it's from this region, or actually they want you to go further and name, like if we were talking about a Bordeaux, would they want you to say, right, I think this is a Mouton Rothschild. I mean, you know what are they expecting?

S Stefan Neumann MS 20:04
I would hope one day they will do that.

J Janina Doyle 20:06
That'd be nice, wouldn't it.

S Stefan Neumann MS 20:08
To have the budget to call Mouton blind. And I think you need to be quite confident in order to call it Mouton, but...

J Janina Doyle 20:18
Apparently some can do it, apparently.

S Stefan Neumann MS 20:21
What you should get is, absolute grape variety, country, sub region or the region, vintage, and of course you can break it down to a producer level. I think this becomes so hard. It's just yeah, I'm not saying it's impossible, but it's very difficult, especially for six wines.

J Janina Doyle 20:37
Okay, so we have theory, we have tasting...

S Stefan Neumann MS 20:40
Then, of course, practical, which is a fun part. So basically, you've got four or five different tables with different scenarios, You've got your, for example, blind tasting spirit, your decanting table, open a bottle of sparkling wine or champagne, and essentially, it's simulating a restaurant environment. And, of course, the few challenges along the way. So it's not like just like open a bottle. And here we go.

J Janina Doyle 21:03
Don't they deliberately try and make it hard for you.

S Stefan Neumann MS 21:05
I think no. I think what I've seen so far which always fascinates me, people always think it's so notoriously difficult, but noone of the examiners is trying to make you fail. But what you, what they want to see is how do you work. This is something difficult in this exam, and they have a point system, it's about reaching a minimum level of points in order to pass this. Now for the MS exam that 75%. So you need to reach 75% of the marks in order to pass for all three parts. And what makes it quite difficult, you need to pass those free parts within three years, so that makes it quite difficult. So in my situation, I didn't, for

example, pass anything, certainly not 14 at all, because in 13, the first time when I went there at two weeks preparation, because there was a slot becoming available, I took it. And I was like I just rather be on board and go there. And I felt a bit like a tourist the first year, but not not on a joyful holiday. You know, then, of course, when you don't pass anything, you always look gutted, and you take it very hard on yourself. But as soon as you pass one thing, the clock starts ticking. So for example, I passed my practical in 15. So I had then two more attempts. So two more years, because you only get one attempt in a year to pass the other two parts. So that makes it it's a certain time pressure. And if you think of it that you learn an entire year for a tasting, which lasts 25 minutes, or for a theory exam, which lasts less than 60 minutes, it can put a certain pressure on you. Lets leave it there. But in all honesty, there are so many fun and interesting moments as well. I mean, funny is like I always share this one story when I passed in 2017. I was so happy that I sang in my sort of study room, which of course I was tidying up at that time until 3am in the morning. And I sang so loud that at that time she was my fiancée. She wasn't my wife yet, but I woke her up at 3am. And she's like, this is it, you are coming to bed and I was so happy and so full of adrenaline I couldn't sleep. So I woke up four hours later at 7am. And she, at that time was working for London and partners, which is the official London marketing agency. And we had a speedboat experience the next day at 7am. So like, blasting down on the River Thames in a speedboat. And I was like, you know what, I was like: Life can't get much better than that. I haven't slept much in the last day or so. But I was still so so happy and so stoked. And I mean, in the end of the day, not the journeys, as hard as it may seem, you know, thinking sometimes it's a bit of a longer conversation as we have now. But the journey itself, of course, it's hard, but it is very, very enjoyable. And I did tastings at 130 in the morning for 230 and started for a few hours and went to bed and had my five hours of sleep and then did the whole thing again for five days. So I think you know, my team at that time was so supportive as well. It's incredible. I mean, for example, they're pulling some extra hours so I could be off the week before the exam. I mean it's the journey itself, is something which you need to enjoy as much as you can.



Janina Doyle 24:10

Absolutely otherwise it becomes overwhelming right. Now we know how difficult it was to take the Master Sommelier exams. Let's go back to those funny moments that happened as a Sommelier whilst in, was it actually in the Fat Duck, you said that there were some interesting moments?



Stefan Neumann MS 24:24

There were definitely interesting moments. I mean, I think we can fill an entire podcast with just funny things which have happened.



Janina Doyle 24:30

Or disasters perhaps?



Stefan Neumann MS 24:31

Yeah, definitely. Well, I mean I've sprayed a lot of champagne over people so...



Janina Doyle 24:35

To be honest, that's not really, I'd quite like being sprayed in champagne. It almost seems quite luxurious.



Stefan Neumann MS 24:39

It's very good for your skin apparently. Never tried it myself. But...



Janina Doyle 24:44

Tell us, tell us the story. Give us one or two very good Sommelier stories.



Stefan Neumann MS 24:49

Okay, I'll give you one which I thought I will never share but I will. So, it's exclusive release here. So you know we never really talk too much about our celebrity guests. And this is like, this is something which we normally, it's just that sort of this unwritten rule. But okay, you know, it's now more than 10 years ago so I think I can, I can share a little insight there. So at that time, we had 14 tables in the Duck. And that was it. So suddenly this one day we came back from, from our dinner break, which is around five o'clock. And suddenly, we had 15 tables in the restaurant. And we went, Oh my God. I didn't even know this could fit in. I mean, I could walk 50% of the time, not with with a straight back in the restaurant because it's a, it's a very old building rated, I think it's a rated 2 building so essentially, the ceiling is so low I'm having to duck all the time. So, okay, we've got this 15 table, so I was like, okay, must be someone really important. And the booking name, I can't recall the booking name but it was something which seemed quite generic, something like Smith, you know, you would be like okay, whatever. Anyhow, so it turns out, he was Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. And I was like, okay, it's like I really, really, really want to go there with the champagne trolley. Because I just, I just want to see them in flesh you know.

- J** Janina Doyle 26:12
I want to smell her hair.
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 26:15
Maybe not that creepy.
- J** Janina Doyle 26:18
Sorry, I'm not creating a good vibe, you know, of course. You just wanted to see them.
Okay. Yes.
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 26:22
So I was like, I was like, I, we had this wonderful trolley which was just big enough to go around the restaurant and I remember we had in their Cuvée William Deutz Rosé 2000. So I was like, okay, I went there, and I think we had Salon, I think 1997. My god - really crazy champagnes, by the glass if you think of it.
- J** Janina Doyle 26:40
By the glass, okay. Nice.
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 26:41
By the glass, yeah. And the Salon 1997 I think was £39. Now imagine that. £39 for a glass of Salon. Anyhow, so I rolled over the trolley there and I was like, I'm generally not the person who is stuttering. But I saw Angelina Jolie and I mean, I literally couldn't stop, you know? It was...
- J** Janina Doyle 26:59
She is Tomb Raider!
- S** Stefan Neumann MS 27:00
Yeah, I was thinking, Okay, this is embarrassing. You know, i was like, this is just not me. And I have this, this one moment with Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt and I'm stuttering like... Anyhow, so then I decided to look at him instead of her because it was like this, like, I

looked at her and I was like, god, you are a beautiful woman. So I was like, if I keep on stuttering like this, it's gonna be the longest aperitif order I've ever taken. So I looked at him and I was like, God Almighty, your suit looks very, very good.

J Janina Doyle 27:27
Did you say that to him?

S Stefan Neumann MS 27:28
No I didn't. Just what was in my head. I was like, Oh, God, he looks very handsome. This guy. So he was wearing a charcoal suit. And I made it the mission at that time. I didn't know that the colour charcoal, which you believe itself. So I asked someone who was working in the restaurant. So this is a very nice, it looks like greyish but it's not grey. Yeah, this is charcoal. Ah, I made it the mission to buy a charcoal suit years later. So anyhow, my Brad Pitt suit. So that's going to be an interesting one. And whenever I will go out to restaurants this year, then people will call me Brad Pitt in a suit.

J Janina Doyle 28:03
Of course, of course.

S Stefan Neumann MS 28:04
Of course, anyhow so I was like, I had to have a little chat with him. And he was so nice. And so down to earth. Very easy to talk to. You always say never meet your heroes. And at that time, you know, she was super big in movies, so was he. And it's like when I met them, I was like, God Almighty they are the nicest people ever.

J Janina Doyle 28:19
Oh, that's amazing. Everyone go by their Rosé then, they were nice.

S Stefan Neumann MS 28:22
Yep. All right. I'll give you one more disasterous story. This is, this is a while further back. And it's something which is partly wine related because I was at that time working in the front of house. It was in the wonderful restaurant in Austria, which was called Steirereck am Pogusch. So it's a restaurant which is in the countryside, it's located on 1000 metres. At that time, actually it had Michelin stars as well, but then Michelin withdrew from this area,

so they only rating other bigger cities. So not anymore the countryside. And it was, I think, a really super super busy Saturday evening. And I was for this one moment, this one weak moment I had, I was like, Okay, I need to help everyone I can. So of course I was this headless chicken running around trying to help everyone I can. So I grabbed this one plate, and it was a salmon in some sort of fish sauce.

J Janina Doyle 29:09
Please don't tell me you threw the salmon in someone's face.

S Stefan Neumann MS 29:12
No, actually. worse. So I was serving the lady. And while I was serving the lady, I was lifting the other plate which I had, which was the salmon plate over the gentleman's head. And the sauce went all over him.

J Janina Doyle 29:27
That sounds nice. Was it tasty sauce?

S Stefan Neumann MS 29:29
I mean, I still recall his scream. I recall his scream. I mean, now I can laugh about it, but that time it was like I basically dipped a gentleman or I completely spilled that sauce, you could say over him, you know. It was all over his shirt, his suit, his, you know, I mean, I left literally no part of his body untouched with fish sauce.

J Janina Doyle 29:51
Oh my god. So basically, well, you're handy with a bottle of champagne because if we get spilt with champagne, we're fine but you should not be trusted to walk to anyone with any food, right.

S Stefan Neumann MS 30:00
No, I mean, I think I've improved in the last years, ever so slightly. I hope so at least. But yeah, there was, there was a kind of a funny moment aswell. So the owner of the restaurant at that time. She said, don't worry too much, it's fine. So she went upstairs and she brought the gentlemen a freshly ironed shirt from her husband. He had on a freshly ironed shirt. He was okay. And I made it sort of my mission of personally looking after

them. I believe they left happy. Well, I think you know, I mean, I've never seen him again, which is possibly a good thing.



Janina Doyle 30:33

Well, you live and learn, don't you. Now talking about learning, you have had all this amazing experience as a sommelier. So as you know, and I know, for the average consumer, one of the most intimidating things about going to a restaurant is understanding that big book of wines, that wine list. What is your top tips that you could give to a consumer that doesn't feel very confident with a wine list, so they can enjoy it, understand it just that little bit more?



Stefan Neumann MS 31:00

Well, it's, you know, there's a few tips I can give. So wine list, the trouble with wine is very often that you're getting intimidated by the size, or there's so little information written on there that you will be like, oh, what I'm gonna do? Or there's something which you just don't understand? You never heard about it. And believe it or not, you know, this is, no matter which title you have, no matter how many exams you've taken, there will be always something in the world of wine you have not heard about. And we are all in the same position. So it's like there's a few different ways to approach it. So in general, my first advice is always when you look at the wine list, and you're not choosing wine too often because maybe your partner's doing it or you feel like oh, yeah, let someone else, my friends or let my mate choose. I would just say, Okay, look at the structure of the list first. Is it organised by country? Is it organised by variety, or is it organised by a specific style. Take Hakkasan here as an example which got a few restaurants, and they organise the wine list like, sort of in different categories. So you've got fresh and vibrant, rich and full bodied, and then they list the different wines. So you basically have, not really anything related to a country, but it's organised by style. Now, for me, this is sort of the first thing I would look at. If it's organised by country or by variety, it may be a little bit easier to browse through because you will have an idea sort of which wines you normally like and which wines you normally would enjoy. And any good wine list will have sort of a content as well somewhere. So for me, this is always a good reference point, look for the contents and then sort of narrow it down what you want to drink. I would always say forget about vintages because if you new to wine, don't bother. Don't bother too much about vintages. If it's such a bad vintage, then either it's not produced or people would not put it on the list either because the wine is not good. So general these days, I think wine is, I'm just speaking general about the UK market. I think wine is quite smartly crafted in that sense, that when the wine is on the list, it's pretty much ready to drink or it is ready to drink and you shouldn't worry much about the vintage. And then the other thing is, think about what

you want to drink. So if you say Okay, you know what I like? I like French wine, I think Okay. So then say, Okay, if you'd like for a light French wine, then think in a logical way of thinking about geography will help you. If you like a light French wine, so if you go to the southern part of France, where you've got 250 to 300 days of sunshine, it could prove quite challenging to produce a delicate fragrant easy style of red wine. Purely for that reason the more sun you have got, the higher the natural sugar content in the grape will be, the higher the natural sugar content, the more alcohol you will get during the fermentation. So the wines tend to be a bit richer, more full bodied in terms of the style. I'm trying to generalise here things, I hope it helps. It's like, okay, you think about the lighter red one and then you say, Okay, let me stick to a cooler area like maybe it could be something from the Loire Valley, could be maybe something from the Northern part of Burgundy. Think about maybe you've been on holiday somewhere. You've been on holiday in Burgundy, you've been on holiday in the Loire, it's like, okay, and cooler regions will provide general like, a cooler expression of wine and aswell a lighter, more approachable, fresher style of wine with a higher level of acidity than higher level of alcohol. Of course, you you work in the world of wine. And I work in the world of wine, we all know that we can sort of trick it a little bit, maybe with certain winemaking techniques, but that's sort of my general rule of thumb. So when I look at the wine list, I always look first, how's it organised? Is it per country, is it per variety, is it per style? And then I think, what I want to drink and then if you have a bit of a geographical knowledge, this will certainly help. And of course, if you've been somewhere on holiday and if you can recall, or was it a particular hot year, was it particularly warm at that time or was it raining a lot? So I mean, like, all these little memory things will help you. And the other thing I would say is, if you can and not all wine lists do that but okay, you say okay, I want a dry German one. And you see that the Riesling which you see there is 9% in terms of alcohol, then the chances this wine is dry is quite slim, because with 9% alcohol, there will be some sugar remaining from the fermentation. So it's not completely fermented fruit, meaning there's a little bit of RS: residual sugar there. So alcohol can be an indicator and give you certain indication as well. And now the most important thing in the end, you know, we all we all quite tech savvy these days, we will take pictures of things which we like. And if you look for a wine list, and you're like, Oh, God, I have no idea. There's always a moment, where you can sort, I say, Don't poke the bear, but give the bear a little, how should I say, you know, a little moment. What I want to say with this you know, speak to your Sommelier. If there's anyone who's, well there might not be a Sommelier, some restaurants don't have a Sommelier but someone who's looking after the wine, and just be, say - okay, you know what I recently had this, this and this and you can show them a few pictures. Or you can say I recently had this Malbec from Argentina, it was really good, is there something similar on the list? And I never get offended if people would give me a budget and say, you know what, this is a really special occasion for us today. Our budget is £60. I'd be like, fantastic. I see this as a motivation for myself. And I think I can speak for a lot of

Sommeliers here. And a lot of people who love wine. If you tell me, okay, I want this, this and this, I will try my up most best to get you something which is so good in that price range. I think the times are really over where people will try to rip you off. And I've had this in the past. But I generally strongly believe that these are not the times anymore. And especially in, not let alone fine dining. But if you give people an indication, saying I like this, and this, very often, they are thrilled that you're honest. And very often they will try their utmost best to fulfill your request. So that little bit of open mindedness of stating what you like and what you don't like, Man that can change the whole sort of dynamic with the service stuff, but it can change the whole dynamic. I always say you will never regret it. Because in the end of the day, what you get is actually someone who was putting effort into making it for you. I think that that helps you. Nothing beats a good conversation.



Janina Doyle 37:09

Absolutely. And you know what I will always remember as a Sommelier, for me, the price point was the most important thing because if, you know, I had wines on my list from £30 all the way up to £3000 plus. If somebody says I want a full bodied wine, I want it to be quite fruity. Well, okay, do you want to add the £2000 mark, or do you want to add the £200 mark? You know, if they say to me, yeah, I just want to spend £40, people should never be embarrassed if they only want to spend a certain amount of money. It makes our time much quicker and then like you said, you will then see what is the best thing from any other indication that they've given, what is the best thing within that price point and they will get something that they really like? Yeah.



Stefan Neumann MS 37:49

And I think you know we, if you work in the world of wine, if you work in restaurants, you know, you know, your list. You know, you know, when you give me an indication I like something for x y z amount of money, full bodied and rich, suddenly, from the 7/800 positions you have on that wine list, it becomes 10/15. The world becomes much much smaller, your recommendation is actually much more solid. Call me old fashioned, you know, but I always loved that conversation with someone and if someone is honest and says, oh it's our wedding anniversary, we really want to lash out today but we're not quite sure. Of course, you know, if you, if you spend for example, I want something for £300. You want to make sure that you get something very good for £300.



Janina Doyle 38:30

Yes, absolutely. So talking of wines on a wine list. People maybe don't want to spend the

£300, they want the best value. So what's your best value wine regions? Or what's an upcoming region? What's something that maybe people might want to look out for on a wine list or in a wine shop?

S Stefan Neumann MS 38:45
I would say I put four things out there.

S Stefan Neumann MS 38:48
Four, yeah. One which is proper off the beaten track. So that's Georgia. I've tried so many wines recently from Georgia. There was an MW, Madeleine Waters, she organised an online masterclass about Georgian wine and god there was so much delicious stuff. They have got not always varieties which are easy to pronounce, like Saperavi is the Georgian variety. It's a red variety.

J Janina Doyle 38:48
Oh four, okay.

J Janina Doyle 39:13
Big and thick and purple in the glass and be prepared to stain your teeth, right?

S Stefan Neumann MS 39:17
Oh, yes, it's, the thing is, you know, it's still so fresh, and it's one of the few, it's one of the few varieties in the world, one of the few grape varieties which they call teinturier. So it's red flesh and red skin. So if you just squeeze the juice, it's really super coloured juice. Then Mtsvane, Kisi, Rkatsiteli. And I said they're not easy to pronounce, but Georgian wine, there's a lot going on. And not all of them are made in low intervention natural or amber, orange style way. So you find an incredible amount of wines which are absolutely delicious, very juicy, very easy drinking. And I think there's some really good value from that as well because Georgian wine, I mean, let alone buying it in Georgia. It's really, I'm not sure if I should say cheap as chips you know, but what makes Georgian wine a little bit more expensive on the export market is purely the shipping, and when I say more expensive you find great Georgia wine for £10.

J Janina Doyle 40:09
Well I can say Pheasants Tears who are definitely one of the biggest and certainly a high quality producer from Georgia, you can get a lot of their wines in England for around £15, £16 a bottle I've seen. So they would certainly be one that I would always point people to.

S Stefan Neumann MS 40:23
Yeah, I mean for me the one the one really good example here is like Orgo, it has a white and the red. It's a, I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing his name now correctly is Gogi Dikishvili. It's like, lets just call him Gogi. It's like G-O-G-I so it's very, very easy. Gogi, great name. But yeah I think Georgias for me out there. Then, I have of course I have to put something which is very close to my heart, which is Greece. I love Greek wine. Xinomavro which is the red wine variety, very widely planted. Agiorgitiko, which is the most planted red variety. Again doesn't really roll off the tongue but they realised this a few years ago so they called it now Saint George but yeah, Agiorgitiko, really great stuff. Assyrtiko, of course for the whites.

J Janina Doyle 41:08
I adore Assyrtiko, the saltiness and that high acidity and I feel like there's not really many other varieties or other styles that quite compete. It's its own, its own unique style.

S Stefan Neumann MS 41:21
Absolutely. I mean, for me Assyrtiko is delicious. I mean, I have to have to plug in one thing here. I've been recently to Greece and I've tried in four days around 400 wines and this was hard work, I mean.

J Janina Doyle 41:34
I know, I actually imagine it was.

S Stefan Neumann MS 41:36
When we say try, we really mean you try and you spit, you try and you spit.

J Janina Doyle 41:40
And your mouth has just gone by the end of it.

S Stefan Neumann MS 41:42
So people, can they Google that, so they can see?

S Stefan Neumann MS 41:42
And if you know Xinomavro, Xinomavro has something's quite present tannins so it's like sort of a Nebbiolo style of varieties. They are quite full on. And the amount of great Xinomavro which we tried was fabulous and really great Assyrtiko's. And this was all done for a competition, which was called 50 Great Greek Wines. What was really good to see that some of the wines, which, because we tasted all of them blinds, we didn't know what they were. All we knew for example was, okay, this is a white wine from this variety. Like from Assyrtiko but there were a mix of mainland Assyrtiko's, so from all over the Greece to Assyrtiko's from the islands. So it was really very well curated. And we had like 50 wines in the end, which got that sort of title, 50 Greek Greek wines.

S Stefan Neumann MS 42:27
Yes, absolutely. There's a Greek MW who initiated that. He is called Yiannis Karakasis. And if you just Google 50 Great Greek Wines, and I think, just the first 10 of them, the top 10, none of them is more expensive than £20. So it's like there's some, there's some really cracking value to be found there. If you like Assyrtiko I have put one bottle here, which I received today for an upcoming tasting. It's called Daphne. Daphne is actually from Crete.

J Janina Doyle 42:57
Yes, Daphne the grape variety, no?

S Stefan Neumann MS 42:58
Daphne the variety from Crete and it's Lyrarakis

J Janina Doyle 43:01
The main planted variety on that island?

S Stefan Neumann MS 43:05
I'm not sure if it's the most planted but yeah, it's definitely from there. And Lyrarakis is the producer. It is so delicious.



Janina Doyle 43:13

I tasted that in 67 Pall Mall and one of the, one of the Greek Sommeliers was like, you've got to try it. It's delicious. Carry on...



Stefan Neumann MS 43:18

Yeah. I mean, as I said, just we can fill the podcast just with great value wines.



Janina Doyle 43:24

We are gonna have to do another one aren't we.



Stefan Neumann MS 43:27

Sounds like it. Okay, the next one, Portugal. Portugal, I think, there's some good stuff as well. If you like dry red wines, Douro where Port is produced. They do delicious dry red wines out of Porto varieties and again it never breaks the bank and it's amazing for me to see that because, if we go to the Douro, not only is it a beautiful part of the world, but it's really labour intensive so the majority of the grapes you need to pick by hand. So somehow very often this reflects in the price but not there. I mean, Douro Red, you find great stuff for maybe £7.50, £8 onwards, and of course you can go higher if you want to price wise, but really, really good stuff and as well Dão which is just a region close by.



Janina Doyle 44:09

I love Dão. I always, the funny thing is, I always think Dão is like Burgundy style so its got that little bit more food friendly and some elegance. Douro of course has that concentration, they do these incredible beautiful blends. And then you have Alentejo down, and I always say to people if you want like kind of the more new world style that big and bold and juicy. Portugal has so much to offer.



Stefan Neumann MS 44:27

Yeah, and it's still so good value. I mean, it not only in wine lists, but as well in shops. So I mean, and of course my last country must be Austria because.... region is difficult. Of course, my heart will always lye with Grüner and Riesling, so kind of like Wachau, Kamptal, Kremstal, they do really good stuff there but if you like reds, you know, I point people, that discover this as always, I point them into the direction of the more eastern part of Austria: Burgenland is a wine growing area and there's one, there's a few winegrowing regions

there, like for example, Leithaberg which does very good Blaufränkisch. Leithaberg DAC which does good Blaufränkisch and Neusiedlersee DAC. Neusiedlersee is basically the lake which is shared between Austria and Hungary. And around that lake is many vineyards. It is a surprisingly hot area for Austria so we get 2400 hours of sunshine there. So its hot, its warm. And Zweigelt is the main variety. Bauer Zweigelt is the most planted Austrian variety. And it's style wise, maybe sits in between, if you like, Beaujolais, or Gamay as a style, but you like Syrah with a certain peppery element there.



Janina Doyle 45:43

Well, it's like, it's got these lovely soft tannins. But yeah, it's still quite full bodied and all that big cherry fruit.



Stefan Neumann MS 45:48

It's super velvety, always in terms of the style. It's like, I mean, I can share this, I chose actually as my wedding wine Zweigelt because I always wanted to have something which is easy drinking but not, not an easy wine if that makes sense. It should be complex enough to keep you, to keep you interested and for me Zweigelt is this quite often because, as you said so correctly now, it's this cherry loaded fruit spectrum but not like sweet cherry you know. It's like, it's more like ripe cherry but it's so soft, it's smooth. It's a very elegant style.



Janina Doyle 46:17

Look at you getting passionate.



Stefan Neumann MS 46:19

Super velvety tannins. It's a really good variety. So I mean, here we are people, I mean this is just the four countries on top of my head that does really really great stuff.



Janina Doyle 46:26

Yeah, funny you say about the Zweigelt, Blaufränkisch for me, I actually prefer. Obviously bigger tannins for people, it is more, a deeper darker fruits than the Zweigelt but there's some great fantastic versions of Blaufränkisch and so many of them in England. Am I pronouncing the region Carnuntum, is that how it is pronounced?

S Stefan Neumann MS 46:43
Carnuntum, yeah.

J Janina Doyle 46:44
Because I always remember one of the first Blaufränkisch that I had. I think it was Johannes Trapl, anyway and £15 a bottle or something like that and it was absolutely delicious. So yeah, go buy Austria.

S Stefan Neumann MS 46:57
Buy Austrian wine yes indeed. I mean for me Blaufränkisch always has this wonderful, savoury element which is great and again and over the last years what it, what they manage so well is less oak, less new oak and just managing these tannins nicely. So these are, and Carnuntum itself is a really wonderful part of the world as well. It's actually, I think it was the first Roman settlements and North of the Danube.

J Janina Doyle 47:19
Ah there you go. So history facts.

S Stefan Neumann MS 47:21
Lots of history there and he still finds some Roman building. They're not of course anymore intact, but you've still got some archaeological sites there. And as one of the first Roman settlements north of the river, and beautiful part of the world. Again, it's for Austria, it's quite warm. It's relatively flat there, some hills. And again, really good value, really good value. And it's like an hour, it's less than an hour away from Vienna. So if you fly to Vienna, like you'd be there in 45 minutes, in the vineyards.

J Janina Doyle 47:48
No excuses, they go people know exactly where to go now. And for anybody who has thoroughly enjoyed listening to Stephen and I know that you will have done I get really amused listening to your Instagram videos. They are fantastic. I'm incredibly jealous because I like to think that I'm an, shall we say, quote, "amusing person", but I swear to God when I do wine videos, I just can't make them that funny. And you are hilarious. Oh, no, you really are you do make them very unique. And Stefan certainly has a way, so guys go and check out and see if you agree with me. So you need to go to Stefan's Instagram,

which is @stefanthesommelier_ms. I will, of course, that will be on the transcript. I'll also have that on the show notes. There's everything from your cheese special. That's awesome, to preparing for your master sommelier, which I think is great. And you've got your beautiful wife helping in that and everyone needs to be friends with Stefan because he has a champagne and sparkling wine episode where he gets out, like I actually counted the bottles, you've got out 13 bottles, and two magnums. Seriously, I counted you were like, Oh, this is just a selection of some of my sparklings in my house and I'd like to talk about it. I'm like, we need to be best friends with you. And we need to come around for dinner because my God, the amount of wine you have in your house is spectacular.



Stefan Neumann MS 48:30

Lets not share my address because I would like to keep them for longer.



Janina Doyle 49:04

Fair enough fair.



Stefan Neumann MS 49:05

No no, in all seriousness, the most important thing and I think, thank you so much for your positive feedback. And this is one thing I always say good wine is to be shared. Noone's got anything from it if you keep it for yourself. Don't be selfish with wine. You need to share it. So the next time when you see me we need to have a bottle of sparkling wine. That's as simple as that.



Janina Doyle 49:23

That is a deal. Stefan, I cannot wait. I'll come see you in December. Okay.



Stefan Neumann MS 49:27

It sounds like, it sounds like a deal. Absolutely.



Janina Doyle 49:29

That is such a plan. Stefan You're amazing.



Stefan Neumann MS 49:32

Thank you so much. And I need to say a big big thank you to you as well because I mean, you know, the reason why we do this Instagram videos is if it can put a laugh on someone's face, and that's really great. And if little comments like these, they keep me going because I learned from this as well and it's a fun thing to do. Try to be of course a little bit educational as well but..



Janina Doyle 49:52

You are very educational at the same time, which is the perfect balance. Well, certainly for me.



Stefan Neumann MS 49:57

Well, thank you ever so much and I can't wait for a bottle of champagne and sparkling wine which we're going to have, because we have more than one knowing the two of us.



Janina Doyle 50:05

You are my best friend. Can not wait to see you. So thank you so much and have a lovely evening.



Stefan Neumann MS 50:09

Same to you. Thank you very much indeed. Bye.



Janina Doyle 50:16

So I started with talking about Grüner Veltliner, the main grape variety of Austria, but Stefan already mentioned two of the main red grape varieties. So just quickly to touch on them that a little bit more. Zweigelt is actually a crossing of two grape varieties, Blaufränkisch, which we already mentioned, that was crossed with Saint Laurent which is a another grape variety that you should know about from Austria. This is in fact quite a young crossing back in 1922 by Dr. Frederick Zweigelt ,surprise, surprise. Now with those much softer tannins and that lovely vibrant red fruit, remember, this is a great wine that can be chilled down, have it with some fish, great with poultry. And it's an absolutely awesome pairing with barbecue. Now Blaufränkisch, that's probably my favourite red grape variety of Austria. If you're looking at Hungarian wines, and you see Kékfrankos, this is the same great variety. They call it different names. So, obviously, we're talking Austrian,

so Blaufränkisch. This is much more peppery, a little bit bigger and bolder. So one have anything with pepper sauce, that's going to be very good. It's quite nice with more elegant meats. So slow cooked meats in kind of a red wine sauce would be delicious or kind of your pheasant. It's very good with deer, if you can get your hands on some deer and a lovely mushroom risotto would be perfect too so do go and get yourself some great value Austrian wine and now you have some perfect food pairings to try it with.



Janina Doyle 51:50

So I want to finish with a wine quote from Rudolf Steiner, who was Austrian, he was also the founder of the biodynamic approach to agriculture. So anyone who wants to know more about biodynamics, go back to Episode 25 if you haven't already listened. Now, he had a very spiritual scientific approach to vine growing or farming in general. And he has this beautiful little quote, and it says; "The totality of truth is present in every soul as a seed and can be brought to blossom, if the soul devotes itself to the development of that seed." I think that one's quite a nice one. He has some lovely little quotes that are not completely directed to winegrowing, as his whole ethos was very much the energy of the universe. So do go and have a little look and read up of Rudolf Steiner. So thank you, as always for listening in. If you're enjoying this podcast, you have the option to go across to patreon.com/EatSleepWineRepeat for just a few pounds every month you can listen to exclusive content just for you. That support is so gratefully appreciated, but if not, just liking this podcast, sharing it with anyone that you know who loves wine and of course subscribing massively helps as I always say to make this podcast more discoverable. So until the next episode, cheers to you!