

Q&A With Restaurant Mosaic's New Sommelier

Shawn Greyling



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One of Mzansi's most exciting female sommeliers, 28-year-old Taryn Nortje (of Marble fame), recently joined the award-winning Restaurant Mosaic in Pretoria. Taryn joining Chef Chantel Dartnall's team at Mosaic has had the culinary crowd riled up in excitement. The rave comes at the hand of Mosaic cleaning the plate at 2017 Eat Out Awards. Taryn will work with renowned wine expert Moses Magwaza (who won the coveted Wine Service Award last year).



As part of the Mosaic Boutique Hotel, Restaurant Mosaic specialises in gourmet de jure headed by one of the most talented chefs (in our humble opinion), Chantel Dartnall. Having travelled the world, Chantel found her second home in Paris where she fell in love with the Belle Epoque Restaurants. Renowned South African Impressionist artists and interior decorators were commissioned to step back in time to the romantic early 1900s to create a restaurant that was both romantic and unique. restaurant Mosaic owns an intimate feel with booth-type seats and two private dining rooms.

Who is Taryn Nortje?

I was born in Carletonville and grew up in the North West Province. My family now lives in Hermanus. Growing up I loved going to the theatre, writing, directing and acting in school plays. My favourite subjects were Speech and Drama and Geography and I initially studied a Bachelor of Arts at Rhodes University.

How did your love affair with wine and your journey to becoming a sommelier begin?

I was waitressing in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley and loved the idea of being able to explain the wines a little better to the guests. I completely immersed myself into the world of wine. After I'd completed my first wine course I knew my life would be dedicated to wine.

What does the training involve and what are the attributes needed to become a sommelier?

I've worked in restaurants a lot which built the foundation of my career as a sommelier. Sommeliers need to taste as much wine as possible, have an enquiring mind and must be prepared to learn all the time. It's a profession we spend our lives attempting to master. I hope to inspire more woman to enter the field and urge more establishments to support the growth of female sommeliers.

What have you studied (wine wise)?

I completed the Advanced Garagist winemaking course through the Faculty of Oenology and Viticulture at the Stellenbosch of University; the Front of House Course at the Cape Wine Academy; Certificate Course, Cape Wine Academy; Wine and Spirits Education Trust Level 3 with merit and Cape Wine Academy Diploma. I am also preparing to join the Court of Master Sommeliers.

What is your favourite varietal of wine grape?

Chardonnay by far.

Do you have any hard and fast tips you can give wine fanatics?

Invest in some really great stem wear. Don't leave your wine in the car in extremely hot conditions, this will result in irreversible heat damage. Don't be afraid of the sommelier, we want to share our knowledge with you and we love talking about our favourite topic which is wine and food.

What do you look for in the wines you drink?

A well-made, balanced wine.

What's the down-low in the wine trend world?

Firstly, I'm so excited that more and more people are drinking Chardonnay. Cab Franc is so in right now. There's also the controversial natural wine "movement" which has no official guidelines. Trends will come and go, but a well-made wine will never go out of fashion.

In your opinion, what blatant mistakes do people make when it comes to wine?

A common misconception many people have is that in order to enjoy wine you have to know a lot about it. My goal is make wine less intimidating and more accessible to people.

What's the importance of food and wine pairing?

If it grows together it generally goes together, these are the classic pairings we have all grown to know and love but something really interesting happens when we start using our senses. Taking the texture or temperature of the food/and various wine styles into consideration when building a harmonious pairing. I love vertical pairings, almost contrasting the elements between the food and wine will at the same time illuminate the nuances in each. That's where you'll stumble upon the most rewarding taste sensations.

You've been in the game for a while, are more and more people getting into wine?

Most definitely! Wine shows are now major events on social calendars and more and more wine clubs are starting up. Even boutique wine stores have started arranging pop-up wine tastings outside their stores on weekends.

Any wise words to budding sommeliers and aficionados?

A sommelier's main role is to provide a professional service; to advise/guide the guests through the wine list. Ultimately enhancing the guest's experience at the restaurant. I like to ask my guests what they enjoy drinking and then I work around that, cultivars, styles of wines and price points. As a sommelier you have to be really good at reading people, you have to be personable. It takes a lot of studying, emotional stamina and patience in order to be a great sommelier and great sommeliers teach their colleagues about wine. Education is paramount to a sommelier's growth. The more I study wine the more I realise how much I don't know. Humility is key!

By Shawn Greyling