

FROM

Vineyards TO Tables

Text and photos by Shalom Chin

Many of us enjoy drinking some wine every now and then, especially during celebrations and social events. However, how many of us have truly devoted time and effort to understanding the roots of each bottle of wine we drink? SMA News speaks with Shalom Chin, a certified sommelier and wine distributor, who shares how his deep connection with wine developed over the years.

Could you share with us how your journey with wine began?

My vinous journey began when I was 17. I came across a bottle of Chardonnay when I was at a supermarket and wondered what “Chardonnay” meant. Little did I know then that it was the name of a grape. I paid for it at the counter without getting my age checked. Turns out, I enjoyed it so much that I decided to research more into it, and that was what opened up my life to the world of wine.

From then on, I started to keep accounts of the wines I bought and even recorded my tasting experiences. During my university days, I spent a lot of my pocket money attending tasting events and eventually developed an appreciation for the nuances that can be

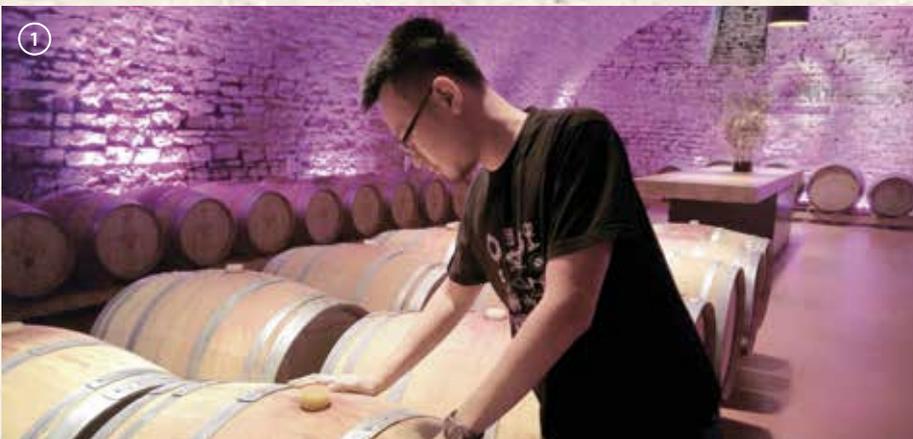
found in wines made in different regions of the world.

To formalise my knowledge, I studied to be a Certified Sommelier from the Court of Master Sommeliers in the US and further obtained a Wine and Spirits Diploma from the Wine and Spirit Education Trust programme. My interest in food also took me to do a Master in Food Culture and Communications at the University of Gastronomic Sciences in Pollenzo, Italy. My master’s thesis was about boutique wineries and how a different type of marketing and distribution strategy could benefit their sales.

I was really enamoured with the idea that the culture of a people and the identity of a region could be embodied in a bottle. I also enjoyed understanding how vines grow and react to their environment. I started sharing bottles of not-so-well-known but impressive wines that I collected during my visits to small wineries with friends and colleagues of family members, borne out of my desire to share the craft of these passionate winemakers with people outside their network and to bring some attention to what they were doing. Over the years, it evolved into a business.

What have you done since to further your interest?

In my life, I have had the rare opportunity to visit 13 wine-making



countries and most of their regions to understand more about their grapes and soil. I also did a harvest and wine-making stage in Austria, Australia and Italy. Additionally, I have worked in the industry organising wine events and also in a wine export company.

So what are you working on these days?

A few years ago, I took my company B°NU from a physical space to the digital space by transforming it into an e-commerce store. Since then, the business has stabilised and I am free to work full-time on my second passion – technology. I am now in the fintech sector.

What do you see your company's future to be?

I think more could be done to take my company digital. With today's existing technology and services empowered by technology, there is no reason why we can't transform the wine import business to become more service oriented and cost effective for consumers. If more people can band together to do combined orders, these organised efforts can significantly bring down the cost for both importers and consumers. My dream is to combine the orders of many consumers to get wines at a better price. Instead of marking up the price per bottle, I would charge on a service fee basis per bottle dependent on the time taken to process the shipping and alcohol tax. No storage cost would be included if delivery could be on the same day as arrival.



We all know to pair wine with steak and seafood, but is it okay to drink wine with steamboat?

It is more than okay to drink wine with anything, as long as you understand the basic principles of wine and food pairing. The three key things to take note of when pairing wines with food is the 1) method of cooking, 2) ingredients used and 3) sauces. For steamboat, the method of cooking is boiling. The ingredients could be an assortment of meat and seafood. If pig liver were used, then there will be a stronger, gamier taste. For sauces, it could range from a standard soy sauce with sesame oil to a chicken rice chili sauce. Putting all this information together, I would recommend a wine that is versatile for all sorts of ingredients, high in acidity to whet the appetite and yet not so heavy that it overwhelms the delicateness of the boiling method. Some suggestions would be Rieslings from Germany, Verdelho from Spain and Beaujolais Cru from France. ♦

Legend

1. Doing a barrel tasting at Weingut Sommerach
2. Me with winemaker Tal Pelter of Pelter Winery in Israel

Shalom is a certified sommelier with a Diploma in Wines and Spirits and a Masters in Food and Communications. After working for an Italian wine export company, he founded B°NU (pronounced BE-NU), a food and wine lifestyle company that sources, promotes and distributes premium limited-edition wines crafted by the finest artisan producers.

