

## After Hours with a Sommelier

AT NEW YORK CITY'S PEARL & ASH, WINE DIRECTOR AND MANAGING PARTNER PATRICK CAPPIELLO CAN OFTEN BE SEEN WHACKING THE TOPS OFF CHAMPAGNE BOTTLES WITH A SABER. HE ALSO OVERSEES A CELLAR FULL OF EXTRAORDINARY VALUES. HERE, HE TELLS HOW ANYONE CAN FIND BARGAINS ON A WINE LIST.

INTERVIEW BY RAY ISLE PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN RAYNER

**Q. Let me get this straight. You quit your job at an ultra-high-end, two-Michelin-star restaurant to help open a wine bar on the Bowery?**

**A.** Pearl & Ash is the kind of place where I've always wanted to work. I'm a downtown guy; I have a lot of tattoos. Although I did start off as a middle-class kid from the suburbs, who grew up on a skateboard, went to college and majored in philosophy...but even back then, if I could have designed the perfect job scenario, Pearl & Ash would have been it.

**Q. What inspired the wine list? It's both eclectic and very well priced.**

**A.** If you go to Paris right now, the wine scene is very much focused on places like ours. Le Chateaubriand, Spring, Le Verre Volé: They're casual, they're mostly in the outer areas, your server will be wearing jeans. When I was in Paris two summers ago, I went to all these places, and it was incredibly inspiring.

**Q. Wine prices in restaurants often seem very high. How can people know if they're getting a good deal versus getting ripped off?**

**A.** Boy, I could make a lot of enemies here! But generally speaking, industry standard is about twice the retail price. At Pearl & Ash, our markup is lower, more like 50 percent above retail. We're making just enough money to keep the lights on and the water running.

**Q. What's the best way to find values on any wine list?**

**A.** Do your research ahead of time. A lot of restaurants post

HOW MANY BOTTLES OF CHAMPAGNE DO YOU SABER EACH NIGHT?

5 to 10 

"I use a giant sword I bought on eBay."

their wine lists online these days. If you're looking at a particular wine on a list, you can use a site like wine-searcher.com to see what the wine sells for at retail, then calculate the restaurant markup.

**Q. That sounds like a lot of work. Is there an easier way?**

**A.** You can look for regions that are exciting for values. Right now I think the northern Rhône can be great. For instance, this young Japanese guy named Hirotake Ooka bought a property in the Ardèche a little while back called La Grande Colline. He's got a Syrah that's \$40 on my list, and it's *amazing*.

**Q. What other regions are you excited about?**

**A.** The Loire Valley is one of those places that hits that sweet spot where nothing comes in over \$40 [in stores], white or red. Plus, there are a lot of cool producers in the Loire like Puzelat-Bonhomme and Bellivière working with Pinot Noir and Gamay, not just Cabernet Franc. And Sicily—a decade ago everyone was focusing on imported varieties like Cabernet and Chardonnay. But now Sicily has all these small producers, like Valle dell'Acate and Arianna Occhipinti, concentrating on local varieties like Albanello and Frappato. Some of these wines can be incredible values.

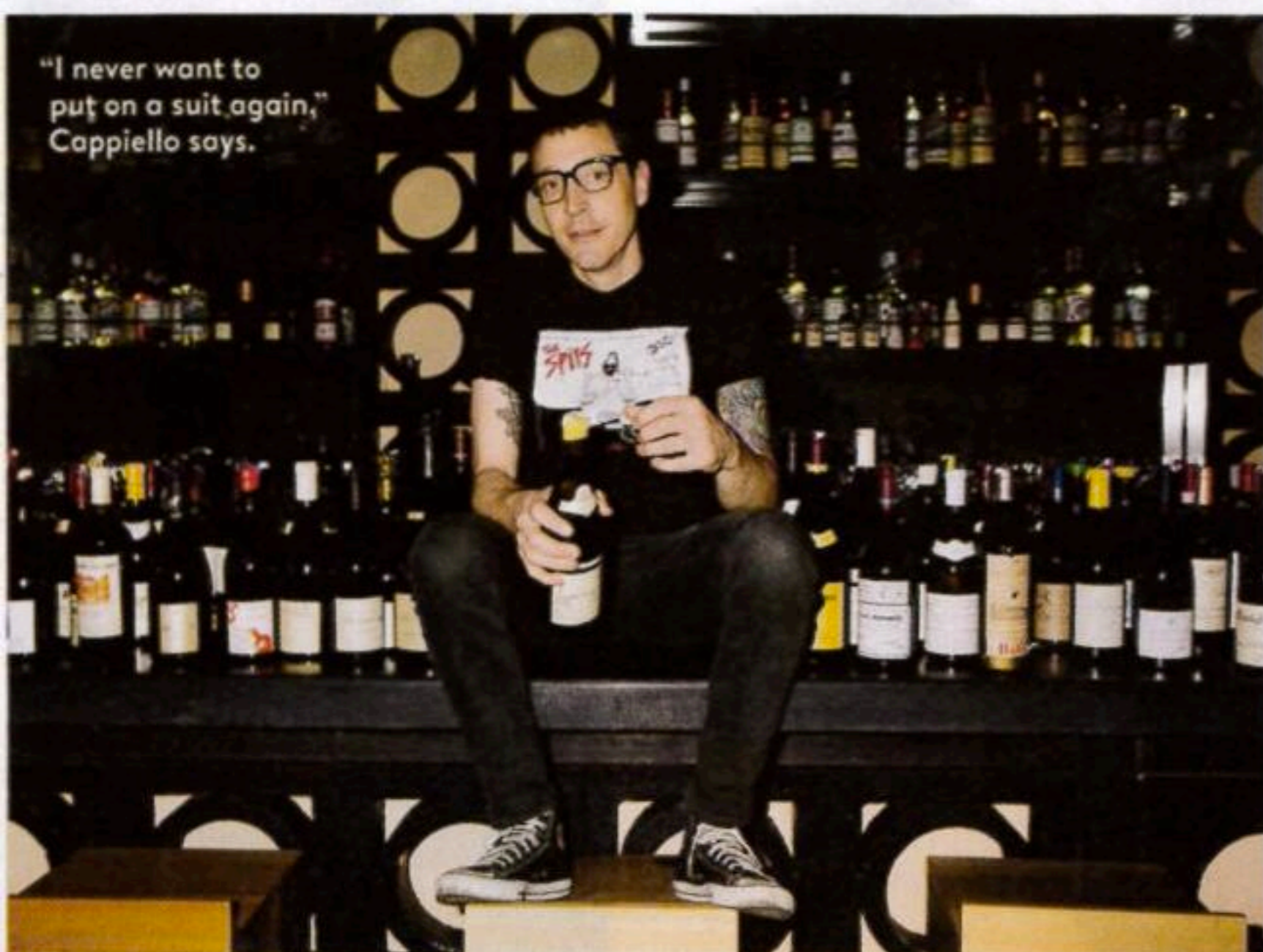
Patrick Capiello heads to work.



THE MOST SHAMELESS MARKUP YOU EVER SAW?

7x RETAIL  \$200  
2010 Marcel Lapierre Morgon

"You could get this for \$55 at my restaurant!"



"I never want to put on a suit again," Cappiello says.

**Q. Isn't there a fashion right now, though, for putting obscure wines on restaurant lists just because they're obscure? How many Frappatos can you offer before the customer gets annoyed?**

**A.** If you're a sommelier, I don't think it's either smart or nice to make a wine list that's entirely about wines you like personally. What's the point if someone has to have a decoder ring to figure out what's on your list? I definitely have obscure wines on my list, but I also have a great Pinot Grigio from Tramin by the glass. I want people to walk in and feel comfortable; I don't want to challenge them for no reason.

**Q. One thing you feature is a lot of older vintages at surprisingly low prices. What has the response been like?**

**A.** The funny thing is, when people think they've found something priced wrong on the wine list—too low—they get really excited. They feel like they put something over on me. They're really

thrilled because they feel like they're getting away with something, like a '96 Nuits-St-Georges from Freddie Mugnier that we sold for \$125. I offer stuff like that at an incredibly low markup.

**Q. If you were going to pour a wine for anyone in the world, who would it be, and why?**

**A.** David Lynch, the director. First, because I've always admired his films and art, and second, because it'd be awesome! I think I'd saber a bottle of Champagne for him. Or, I don't know—he seems like a Bordeaux guy, so maybe an exquisitely old Bordeaux instead. One of my all-time favorites is the '89 Château Haut-Brion.

**Q. So tell me—do you still have a skateboard?**

**A.** I do! The last board I actually ever rode regularly is mounted on the wall of my apartment. But I turned 41 a few months back, and it's a little harder now. I definitely wouldn't want to be videotaped doing it.

## PATRICK'S FAVORITE VALUE REGIONS

Right now I'm looking to the Loire Valley, the northern Rhône and Sicily.

# 7 values to seek out

### NV CA' DEI ZAGO COL FONDO PROSECCO (\$22)

"I love this wine because it's atypical for Prosecco—it's super-dry, saline, fresh and vibrant. Prosecco often has a little residual sugar, and this is exactly the opposite of that style."

### 2010 LA GRANGE TIPHAINE CLEF DE SOL MONTLOUIS-SUR-LOIRE (\$28)

"Organic wines from this area of the Loire can be too funky for some people, but this white wine is really refined: bright, light and crisp."

### 2012 FRANCINE ET OLIVIER SAVARY VIEILLES VIGNES CHABLIS (\$27)

"Olivier Savary is a young guy in Chablis. His family was selling off their vineyards, and he was like, 'Stop! I'll make the wine!' Raveneau is just down the street. The story is that Raveneau told [importer] Kermit Lynch about Savary—a pretty good endorsement, to say the least."

### 2012 VALLE DELL'ACATE VITTORIA FRAPPATO (\$20)

"A great example of what's happening in Sicily. The stars are getting expensive, but lesser-known producers are making great wines from old-school varieties."

### 2012 BERNARD BAUDRY CHINON LES GRANGES (\$20)

"Baudry's wines usually need time to relax, but this one he wants you to consume young. It's got all that classic tobacco and spice you get from Loire Cabernet Franc."

### 2012 EDMUNDS ST. JOHN BONE-JOLLY GAMAY NOIR (\$22)

"Steve Edmunds has inspired a lot of other California winemakers, especially some of the younger guys. They're often the ones getting the attention, but the truth is he's been doing this style of low-alcohol, balanced wine forever. This one's like a *cru* Beaujolais—it's made from the same grape variety, Gamay."

### 2011 GEORGES DESCOMBES MORGON (\$24)

"This *cru* Beaujolais has everything that's great about wines from Morgon—power, but with elegance and structure. Since Descombes hasn't gotten the recognition of Lapierre, Thévenet or Foillard, his prices have stayed low."