

Christopher Delalonde becomes Champagne Piper-Heidsieck UK Sommelier of the Year 2010



]Christopher Delalonde: the 2010 Champagne Piper-Heidsieck UK Sommelier of the Year

Christopher Delalonde MS, sommelier with Sarment Wines, London, was announced last night [28 April] as the winner of the Champagne Piper-Heidsieck UK Sommelier of the Year 2010 following a thrilling final held at the new Westbury Gallery at the Westbury Mayfair hotel, London.

Christopher, 36, was last year's runner-up but yesterday returned to the competition determined to win the title. An emotional

Christopher, formerly head sommelier at The Square in London and who now works with the personal sommelier service Sarment Wines, said he was 'extremely happy to have won'.

'Last year I came as a newcomer and finished second, this year I came here to win,' he said following the announcement. 'Because of that I put myself under more pressure. It has been six months of hard work but I'm delighted to have won, particularly given the high standard of this year's competition.'

Runner-up in the competition, organised by the Academy of Food & Wine, was Yohann Jousselin, head sommelier at the Vineyard at Stockcross, Newbury, with Clement Robert, head sommelier at Summer Lodge Country House Hotel, Evershot, taking third place.

Christopher Delalonde was presented with the winner's trophy at the Sommeliers' Dinner at the Westbury Mayfair hotel by Victor Lanson, marketing controller, First Drinks, the UK agent for Champagnes Piper-Heidsieck & Charles Heidsieck. He also wins a trip to the House of Champagne Piper-Heidsieck in the heart of the Champagne region including a personal tasting with chief winemaker Régis Camus.

'While all three finalists were extremely impressive, Christopher was a worthy winner of the title,' commented Victor Lanson, who was on the judging panel. 'His ability to stay calm under pressure, think on his feet and the depth of wine and service knowledge he displayed shone through.'

Christopher, who passed his Master Sommelier exam last year with the highest score overall, trained in his native France. In the UK he has worked at The Square and Gordon Ramsay at Claridge's and now works as a sommelier at the personal sommelier service Sarment Wines.

The Champagne Piper-Heidsieck UK Sommelier of the Year competition seeks to find the best sommelier or wine waiter in the UK based on wine knowledge, customer service skills and tasting ability. The competition, now in its 31st year, is widely recognised as being one of the industry's toughest and most prestigious. Previous winners include Laura Rhys from Hotel TerraVina in Hampshire, Gearoid Devaney, then of Tom Aikens, London, and Nicolas Clerc of the Milestone Hotel, London.

Christopher, Yohann and Clement won their places in the final having triumphed in the 15-strong semi-final yesterday morning. In the final, held in the afternoon on stage in front of an invited audience of industry guests, the finalists completed a timed blind tasting, corrected a series of mistakes on a wine list and took part in a restaurant role-playing scenario with difficult orders and demanding customers. The dramatic finale was a Champagne pour, where a magnum of Champagne Piper-Heidsieck Cuvée Brut had to be emptied and evenly poured into 16 flutes without the sommelier returning to any of the glasses.

The winner of the first-ever Amateur Sommelier of the Year was announced at the Sommeliers' Dinner. The competition, run in conjunction with Champagne Piper-Heidsieck, the Wine Guild of the United Kingdom, and Decanter.com was won by Daniel Brown from London.

Daniel, 32, was presented with the Wine Guild of the United Kingdom's new silver Amateur Trophy and an engraved decanter by Wine Guild councillor Richard Agutter and Adam Lechmere, editor of Decanter.com. Daniel wins dinner for two at the one-Michelin starred Texture restaurant in London.

The winner of the Young Sommelier of the Year award, given to the youngest placed sommelier in the semi-final or final of the main competition, was announced as Clement Robert from Summer Lodge. Clement was presented with a certificate, a trophy and a magnum of Champagne Piper-Heidsieck.

Academy of Food & Wine

Linda Pettit

T. 01737 823721 M. 07973 789853, linda@tilburstowmedia.co.uk

Piper-Heidsieck UK

Elaine Begley

T. 0207 491 9903 M. 07801 515585. elaine@sidhuandsimon.com

EDITOR'S NOTES

ABOUT THE SOMMELIER OF THE YEAR COMPETITION

Entry to the Sommelier of the Year competition is open to professional sommeliers and waiting staff working in the UK. All competitors must be supported by their employer. Once the entrant has been registered, they are sent a first round questionnaire. Those entrants who achieve a 75% pass mark on the questionnaire are selected to go through to the regional finals ? usually 75 to 100 entries.

The regional finals are held in four locations across the UK and entrants undertake a written paper, a blind tasting and an oral service element. The three highest scoring entries then complete two practical service elements and an oral food and wine matching sessions.

The four regional winners and the highest scoring entrants make up the 15 candidates who compete in the national semi final in London on 28 April 2010, along with the previous year's runners-up and the Jersey winner.

The three best semi-finalists go forward to the final the same day in front of a live audience of industry professionals. Candidates undertake a wine list correction test, a serving exercise, a blind tasting and a Champagne pour.

Last year's UK Sommelier of the Year Laura Rhys, head sommelier at Hotel TerraVina in Hampshire. In 2008 Gearoid Devaney, then head sommelier of Tom Aikens in London, scooped the top prize.

THE JUDGES

? Richard Agutter, councillor, Wine Guild of the United Kingdom

? Gerard Basset MS, MW, winner of the 2010 World Sommelier Championship held in Chile. Gerard is also technical director, Academy of Food & Wine, and owner of Hotel TerraVina, Southampton (chair of the judging panels)

? Paul Boutinot, founder, Boutinot

? Victor Lanson, marketing controller, First Drinks, the UK agent for Champagnes Piper-Heidsieck & Charles Heidsieck

? Matt Wilkin MS, director, Academy of Food & Wine, UK Sommelier of the Year 2005 (chair of judges for the final)

? David Wrigley AIWS, MW, Wine & Spirit Education Trust

ABOUT THE ACADEMY

The Academy is a not-for-profit social enterprise organisation, founded in 1988. It is the professional body for front-of-house service personnel focussing on improving the quality of personnel and the image of front-of-house service as a meaningful career choice.

The Academy's purpose is to identify, promote and maintain the highest professional standards for the education and training of food

and wine waiting staff and bar assistants in the UK hotel, restaurant, catering and bar industry.

Its objectives are: for every practicing waiter/waitress, wine waiter and

bar assistant in the industry to be a member of the Academy ? their

professional body; to gain greater recognition for these operatives throughout the industry by accreditation, badging and recognition; to help members develop, maintain and advance their knowledge, skills and ability; to provide an interface between educators, service staff and their employers; and to enhance member's career prospects. Currently the Academy has over 1,000 members.

ABOUT PIPER-HEIDSIECK

The House of Champagne Piper-Heidsieck was founded in 1785 by Florens-Louis Heidsieck. Champagne Piper-Heidsieck has been part of the Rémy Cointreau group since 1988 and benefits from the expertise of celebrated Chef de Caves Régis Camus. London's prestigious International Wine Challenge has awarded Régis Camus the Sparkling Winemaker of the Year Trophy in 2004, 2007, 2008 and 2009, which underlines its efforts to be among the best made Champagnes.

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