

Eric Zwiebel to represent UK in world sommelier competition



Eric Zwiebel: heading for Tokyo

Eric Zwiebel MS, 39, Cellar Master at Summer Lodge in Dorset, has been chosen to represent the UK in 14th Best Sommelier of the World competition, being held in Tokyo next month.

Eric was born in Alsace, France, but is eligible to represent the UK having lived and worked here for over three years and having held the Moët UK Sommelier of the Year title (2004).

He was selected by the Academy of Food & Wine Service (AFWS) in a tough contest between Matthieu Longuere MS of La Trompette (UK Sommelier of the Year 2000), Nicolas Clerc MS of Pont de la Tour (2007) and Jan Konetzki of Restaurant Gordon Ramsay (2012).

‘This is a great honour,’ said Eric. ‘In the past I have competed as the French candidate, but it’s fantastic to be picked as the English candidate. The support I get from this country is very important to me.’

Eric was placed equal second in the Best Sommelier of the World in Rhodes in 2007 and confesses that he never stops preparing for the next competition. He is currently spending four hours a day studying in the run-up to Tokyo, focussing on viticulture, wine making and his knowledge of a range of beverages. He has also spent time in other restaurants to experience different set-ups.

The Best Sommelier of the World competition, organised by the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI), takes place every three years. The last competition was held in Chile in 2010 with UK sommelier and hotelier Gerard Basset OBE, MW, MS, taking the ultimate title. This year Gerard, who as technical director of AFWS headed the UK’s selection panel, will be going to Tokyo as part of the judging panel for the world competition.

‘Eric won what was a tough selection process in a clear cut way, so he deserves to go to Tokyo,’ said Gerard. ‘He is a very thorough and also a very determined sommelier, a great competitor and someone who works hard to prepare. He has a great chance to do well and, perhaps win, too.’

‘Competing in the Best Sommelier of the World is very thrilling and exciting. The competitors are high on adrenaline and being in the final – one of only three people from over 50 – is an amazing experience,’ he added.

The competition will begin with the quarter final (27 March), a semi-final (28 March) and the final on 29 March between the top three candidates. Over 50 entrants are expected to compete for the title in front of an audience of 5,000 people. The candidates will be tested on their wine and drink knowledge, service skills and ability to deal with various restaurant scenarios.

Among Eric’s opposition in Tokyo will be AFWS member Isa Bal MS of The Fat Duck in Bray, who is representing his native Turkey. Isa was a runner-up in the Moët UK Sommelier of the Year in 2008 and in the same year won the Best Sommelier of Europe title.

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Editor's notes

The Academy of Food & Wine Service (AFWS) established in 1988, is the professional body for front-of-house service. It is dedicated to improving the status and awareness of food and beverage service as a viable career choice, raising standards across the industry, and encouraging teamwork to foster good relations with other industry sectors.

The Academy can offer advice and training to anyone following, or considering, a career as a sommelier, wine waiter, waiter, bar manager or restaurant manager.

www.afws.co.uk.