

Kathrine Larsen becomes Moët UK Sommelier of the Year



From left to right: Tanguy Martin, Kathrine Larsen and Loic Avril. Picture by Jon Bradley

Kathrine Larsen MS has become the Academy of Food & Wine Service's Moët UK Sommelier of the Year 2014 following a closely fought final at London's Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

Loic Avril, of The Fat Duck, Bray, was runner-up, with Tanguy Martin of Hotel TerraVina, Hampshire, in third place.

The Young Sommelier of the Year title, sponsored by The Wine Guild of the United Kingdom, was awarded to Loic Avril.

Following the announcement Kathrine commented: 'Winning this competition is a fantastic achievement. It feels like all the hard work has paid off and that's an amazing feeling. I have been studying wine for 10 years, and preparing for this competition has been very intense.'

Kathrine was returning to the competition for the fourth time. Last year she was third, and received the Young Sommelier of the Year 2013 title.

The day of competition began yesterday morning with a series of testing challenges that whittled the 12 semi-finalists down to six. Following further tasks, three of the six were then chosen to go through to the final in the afternoon, in front of a live audience. The three finalists completed a blind tasting, spotted errors on a wine list and answered a quick-fire question round as well as a restaurant scenario testing their ability to cope with customers under pressure. The competition culminated in the notorious Moët Champagne pour, in which the three finalists had seven minutes to pour a magnum of champagne into 16 glasses without returning to any of the glasses.

'We were delighted with the high number and high quality of entries this year. The competition is very tough' Kathrine was a worthy winner, but Loic and Tanguy did incredibly well,' commented Nick Scade, chairman of the Academy of Food & Wine Service.

Formerly head sommelier at Zuma in London, Danish-born Kathrine, 32, trained at one and two-star restaurants in Copenhagen. She moved to London in 2007 to work at Pont de la Tour and Orrery and is currently taking a sabbatical before announcing her next career move.

Judge Ronan Sayburn MS commented: 'It was a very tight competition this year with just a few marks between all three of the finalists. But Kathrine was a worthy winner' her theoretical knowledge was particularly strong.'

Stanislas Roccoffort de Vinnière, Brand Ambassador for Moët & Chandon said: 'After a day of questionnaires, tasks and scenarios, Kathrine is a thoroughly deserving winner. In addition to the UK contest, Moët & Chandon has been long been involved with both the World and European Sommelier competitions, and we see the highest levels of sommellerie around the globe: the knowledge and ability of the UK entrants is of an extremely high standard, and we are thrilled to be supporting and promoting this extremely important aspect of the hospitality industry.'

Kathrine receives an all-expenses paid trip to Maison Moët & Chandon to taste the Grand Vintage collections with chef de cave Benoît Gouez, followed by a gourmet dinner at Moët's Château de Saran. After the competition she was presented with a jeroboam of Champagne Moët & Chandon, a spectacular Amadeo decanter and Vinum glasses by Riedel Glassware, and a magnum of Domaine Boutinot La Cote Sauvage Cairanne.

She also receives the Boutinot bursary, which this year includes a study visit to Piedmont in Italy accompanied by last year's winner Clement Robert and Boutinot's master sommelier Nigel Wilkinson.

Loic Avril and Tanguy Martin were presented with a magnum of Champagne Moët & Chandon. All three receive a 12-month complimentary membership of The Wine Guild of the United Kingdom, including an invitation to its annual winter banquet held at Vintners' Hall in London, the historic home of the UK's wine trade.

Now in its 36th year the Moët UK Sommelier of the Year competition seeks to find the best wine waiter or sommelier based on wine and spirits expertise, ability to deal with customers under pressure, and front of house beverage service skills.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

About the Moët UK Sommelier of the Year 2014

The Moët UK Sommelier of the Year, run by the Academy of Food & Wine Service, is now in its 36th year and has become one of the most prestigious and sought-after titles for sommeliers and wine waiters working in the UK. The competition, sponsored by prestigious Champagne house Moët & Chandon, seeks to find the sommelier who demonstrates the highest degree of wine and drink-related knowledge together with an outstanding level of technical skills related to the serving and keeping of wine, and impressive service skills that enables him or her to offer every customer first class service.

The Moët UK Sommelier of the Year competition is open to any professional sommelier or waiter in the UK. Once the entrant has registered, they are sent a first round questionnaire of wine-related questions testing their knowledge of wine production, grape varieties, wine-producing areas of the world, service knowledge and practical knowledge. The competitors are allowed to research their answers at this stage. Entrants who achieve a 75% pass mark on the questionnaire go through to the regional finals.

There were four regional finals this year, two in London, Bristol and Stafford on 6 May 2014. Here entrants completed a written paper, a blind tasting and an oral service element. From this the competitors were whittled down to 9 to attend the final, plus last year's runner-up, the winner of the 2013 Young Sommelier of the Year competition and the winner of the 2014 Chaînes des Rôtisseurs Young Sommelier of the Year.

The 2014 semi-finalists were:

Loic Avril, The Fat Duck, Bray

Romain Bourger, The Vineyard at Stockcross, Newbury

Tobias Brauweiler, The Ritz, London W1

Lukas Kolodziejczyk, Pollen Street Social, London W1

Kathrine Larsen, formerly of Zuma

Olivier Marie, Coq d'Argent, London EC2

Tanguy Martin, Hotel TerraVina, Southampton

Stefan Neumann, Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, London SW1

Adam Pawlowski, Northcote, Blackburn

Emanuel Pesqueira, Summer Lodge, Dorchester

Damien Trinquel, Lucknam Park Hotel & Spa, Chippenham

Roberto Zanca, Hotel du Vin, Cheltenham

About the Academy

The Academy of Food & Wine Service (AFWS), established in 1988, is the professional body for food and beverage 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 with other colleagues. AFWS 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

About Moët & Chandon

Moët & Chandon has been the champagne of success and glamour since 1743. Renowned for its achievements, firsts and legendary pioneering spirit, Moët & Chandon is the Maison that introduced champagne to the world. Synonymous with the most venerable of traditions and the most modern of pleasures, Moët & Chandon has celebrated life's most triumphant moments with grandeur and generosity for nearly 270 years