



BLUMENTHAL

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My cellar...

Best known for his boundary-pushing, multi-sensory cuisine, The Fat Duck's Heston Blumenthal reveals a long-standing love affair with wine.

INTERVIEW // SARAH LEWIS

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WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN WINE?

My dad had a vineyard – about half a hectare of late-ripening grapes. I spent a year working there and did a viticultural course in Plumpton, near Brighton. In my early 20s I had a wine cellar with around 600 bottles, but when I opened The Fat Duck in 1995 I had to sell it all. I actually sold most of it to the Duck, apart from my 1989 Chateau Le Pin, which I'd bought for around £30 a bottle. I ended up selling them for £2000 each and used that money to fund a trip to France. I guess you could say I enjoyed those wines in a different way.

HAS YOUR TASTE IN WINE CHANGED SINCE THEN?

I've gone through phases of liking certain wines. I had a Condrieu phase and I played around with Georges Vernay aged viognier. The only wine I won't drink is really grassy sauvignon blanc. I just can't do it.

HOW DID YOU CRAFT THE WINE LIST FOR THE FAT DUCK IN MELBOURNE?

When I first opened the Duck, I did the wine list myself. We had 50 whites and 50 reds from around 20 different suppliers – if I can do something the easy way or the hard way, I'll do it the really hard way. These days, I'm very lucky to have a brilliant team, lead by head sommelier Isa Bal. Isa was voted best sommelier in Europe and he is like an encyclopaedia. Isa and the chefs, Jonny and Ashley, now do all food and wine matches.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE ROLE OF WINE IN THE FAT DUCK EXPERIENCE?

Flavour perception is the most complex thing the human body does – there are more chromosomes involved in that process than anything else. There was a period of time when some people thought we should just serve Champagne with the tasting menu, or no wine at all. But wine and food are from the same pool of molecules and when you get a great wine pairing, the dish then becomes something else. I love that interaction where you think, 'do I eat and then drink, or do I drink first and then eat?'



FLAVOUR PERCEPTION IS THE MOST COMPLEX THING THE HUMAN BODY DOES – THERE ARE MORE CHROMOSOMES INVOLVED IN THAT PROCESS THAN ANYTHING ELSE.



ARE THERE ANY HARD AND FAST RULES WHEN IT COMES TO PAIRING?

Ultimately, it comes down to personal taste, so if you fancy a steak and you want to drink Sauternes with it, then go for it.

WE HEAR JAMES HALLIDAY HAD A LOOK AT THE MELBOURNE WINE LIST BEFORE OPENING...

I spoke to James at the Restaurant Australia event in Hobart last year and said, 'Do you know what I'd love to do, what'd be really left-field, would be if I opened with an Australian-only wine list'. The restaurants here have some really great French and Italian wines on their lists, but, coming from the UK where you can fly to Barolo in a couple of hours, it seems weird to me to come to the other side of the world and order an Italian wine. But then Isa talked me out of it. He said we can have a really prominent, fantastic Australian wine list, however, with the wine and food pairing there are certain styles that you don't get in Australia, so that would cut their range down. Before opening, Isa showed James the wine list and his input was fantastic.

IS THERE AN AUSTRALIAN INFLUENCE ON THE MELBOURNE MENU?

Almost all of the fresh ingredients are Australian. We've also changed one of the lollies [ice-creams] to a Gaytime, and we're using Lark Whisky from Tasmania for the whisky gums.

WHICH AUSTRALIAN WINE HAS LEFT THE BIGGEST IMPRESSION ON YOU?

A Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz that I tried 10 years ago. It was one of the most concentrated wines I've ever had. The vines were very old and they only made one barrel. At 16–17%, it was absolutely huge, and it was memorable because of its strength.

WHAT'S YOUR TYPICAL GO-TO WINE?

I like to start the meal with a glass of white, then move on to red. Red signals the end of the night for me.

COCKTAIL OF CHOICE?

A negroni. If you're a bit tired, the bitterness wakes up your mouth. I created a mandarin and thyme negroni recently and it was a cracker. Thymol, the molecule in thyme that gives it its fragrance, is also found in mandarins and certain oranges, so it was a fabulous combination.

WHAT'S YOUR NEVER-FAIL FOOD AND WINE MATCH?

Roast chicken with a velvety Burgundy, something like a Rousseau, or a burger and a glass of oak-ish red that's not too inky. 🍷

**Heston Blumenthal* is heading up The Fat Duck at Crown in Melbourne until August. Once the Fat Duck team returns home to Bray, the restaurant will transform into Dinner by Heston Blumenthal. Visit: thefatduckmelbourne.com