

## Breaking Wine's Glass Ceiling More women are in charge of the wine list

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Whoever said the life of a sommelier is glamorous probably had a corkscrew loose. Just ask Haley Guild Moore.

The svelte sommelier for San Francisco's upscale Spruce restaurant looks like a polished Drew Barrymore as she works the floor with a warm smile. But, like all the restaurant jobs Guild Moore has had, this one, long associated with stuffy men in tuxedos, is surprisingly physical. You need only look at the 27-year-old's orthopedic-like black clogs to know stilettos wouldn't work in wine service.

"I like being active, and proving that I have the ability to work as hard as the men in my field do," says Guild Moore.

Guild Moore, whose resume reads like a Bay Area foodie's paradise -- A Cote, Va De Vi and Bacar -- is one of eight sommeliers in the Bacchus Management Group, whose restaurants also include Pizza Antica in San Jose and Lafayette and The Village Pub in Woodside.

Six of those eight are female.

Women have smashed every glass ceiling in the wine world, from managing vineyards to crafting cult wines. But perhaps the most visible of their strides is as the venerable wine steward, the face of a restaurant's wine list. While no formal training is required for employment, many stewards seek certification through a variety of groups, including the highly competitive, London-based Court of Master Sommeliers, which offers four levels of certification.

Just 5 percent pass the final exam, which confers the title of Master Sommelier. Many candidates stop at the third level, Advanced Sommelier, which gives them more than enough of the knowledge -- from grapes and regions to viticultural techniques, food pairings and wine service -- needed to do their jobs.

Rachael Lowe, a 30-year-old sommelier at Yountville's Bouchon, earned the highest score among the 11 sommeliers who passed the Advanced Sommelier exam in Las Vegas last week. Forty-nine people took the test.

"I didn't get into wine thinking, 'I'm a woman. I want to show them,'" Lowe says. "It's nice to be a woman and receive this honor, but that's not what it's about for me. Wine is where my heart is."

Still, women are in the minority when it comes to Master Sommeliers. Only 14 out of the 103 Master Sommeliers in North America are female, although that's changing. The number of female applicants who've sat for the Advanced exam has quadrupled in the past five years.

And we shouldn't be surprised. Many in the wine world say the rise in female sommeliers is a testament to the growing impact women are having across the wine world as industry insiders and consumers. According to the Wine Institute, women purchase 57 percent of the wine consumed in the U.S.

"It's a proven fact that women have better palates than men," says Andrew Green, wine director for the Bacchus group. "They can be more sensitive to aromas and flavors."

Green's motto is to hire good people, regardless of gender. But he believes that because the wine business has been a male-dominated industry for so long, women have had to work harder to succeed. Now, those efforts are paying off.

"They're driven, they're focused," he says. "They know what they want and they go after it. It's not like they just fell into wine."

It has been quite a journey for Guild Moore. The Oakland resident fell in love with food and wine on a family trip to Paris when she was 15. Six months later, Guild Moore was bussing tables at Shelby's in Orinda. From there, she studied hotel and restaurant management at San Diego State University and attended culinary school in England. These days, she manages Spruce's wine program -- by January, that wine cellar will include 2,300 bottles -- along with fellow female sommeliers Charity West and Skye LaTorre.

When approaching a table, her vibe is engaging. She'll say, "What are we interested in?" Or, "What do we want to explore?" Often, she's met with a look that says, "Oh, you're the sommelier?"

"It is very surprising to some people still, especially older clients," says Guild Moore, a level two Certified Sommelier who is studying for the Advanced exam. Because navigating a wine list can be daunting, Guild Moore says she goes out of her way to ensure the experience is comfortable.

"I think women are a little more nurturing," she explains. "This business is for people who want to take care of others. It's like having a dinner party at my house every night and not having to clean up."

Working the dining room five nights a week is a major boon when it comes to the service portion of the Master exam. Then, there's studying the books, trade publications and flash cards. Once a week, Guild Moore evaluates wines blind with a tasting group.

But not everyone who takes the exam works in the restaurant business. For Christine Tran, passing the advanced exam means giving her customers at Artisan Wine Depot the same level of knowledge and service they'd receive at any five-star restaurant. Tran, 37, is the proprietor and wine buyer for the Mountain View wine shop, which specializes in small-production artisan wines. She came to wine as a second career -- she left software business development in 2002 -- and worked as beverage director for Straits restaurants before opening her shop six months ago.

"I went through the boom and bust and realized life is too short, " she says. "You've got to enjoy what you do." She passed the level two exam in 2003 and studies two hours a day for the advanced exam, which she will take in October. She loves wine, she says, because the learning never stops. And she believes women tend to be more disarming than men, which might encourage people to ask questions, she says.

"It's kind of a novelty, " says Tran, who holds quarterly wine dinners at local restaurants to keep her sommelier skills sharp. "I'm female. I'm Asian. It becomes a conversation starter."