



Chris Kilpatrick

VIC HARRADINE, program co-ordinator for Algonquin College's sommelier program, teaches the secret language surrounding wine.

Grads find jobs on grapevine

If there is an art to selecting the perfect wine, Mark Tandan is a virtuoso.

As one of only a handful of sommeliers in the Ottawa area, Tandan's position at the Brookstreet Resort is unique but one he views as on the cusp of an industry trend. He said there is a growing demand for "value-added service."

Tandan's job is part wine expert, such as knowing what wine goes best with what food, and part mind reader, in that he anticipates what his clients might enjoy in a wine or from a variety of beverages.

"This job is as much about art as it is about science ...," said the 35-year-old. "The best wine for somebody is the best wine at the time."

As a sommelier, Tandan meets with suppliers, keeps up-to-date on the latest trends and newest wines, and serves the resort's clientele the perfect wine to suit their palate.

The award-winning sommelier is also a proud graduate of the Algonquin College Sommelier certificate program.

"To be honest, I use most of the skills I learned at Algonquin pretty much every day at work," he said.

The sommelier program often attracts individuals who are already working in the restaurant industry and want to get a job at a fine-dining establishment where wine knowledge is a necessity, said program co-ordinator Vic Harradine.

"What a sommelier's job is, what they are really trying to do is enhance your dining experience," he said.

Graduates of the program have also gone on to be wine experts, entrepreneurs, work in tasting rooms at wineries and wine consultants to name a few.

"These jobs are not out there, they build a business around the fact they have a certificate in wine knowledge," said Harradine.

In some cases, restaurant owners take the courses to expand on their knowledge of the beverages they serve.

But one thing the program is not is pretentious. It's an image surrounding wine that Harradine is working hard to shake.

"Even the wording that people use about wine it's almost like a secret handshake for the Masons," he said. "I don't know why wine gathers this aura around it."

Harradine, who is a wine writer and a graduate of the sommelier program he now teaches, said he learns something new about wine every day.

One of the courses taught in the program is wine and food pairing, something of particular interest to many wine lovers.

While there are guidelines about what food goes with what wine, it all boils down to individual tastes.

"If you like the wine and you like the food, you will probably like them together," he said.

— Laura Czeka

