

Turning Technical Language into Casual Conversation

Loris Jones-Randolph on Connecting With Guests

Emily Johnston Collins



Loris Jones-Randolph

LORIS JONES-RANDOLPH was an actress before she accepted her current position as sommelier and manager at La Boucherie in Los Angeles' InterContinental Hotel. When the pandemic suspended her acting career, she says she found herself "stalking people in the grocery store" to offer them wine advice, gleaned from the experience she gained while working in New York at such fine-dining establishments as Faro, Pearl and Ash, Salvation Burger, and Terroir. There, her role model was Master Sommelier Patrick Cappiello, who sabered Champagne in jeans and a T-shirt during his Renegade Wine Dinners at Pearl and Ash. Being a casual sommelier was fine with Jones-Randolph—but she knew she had value far beyond giving free counsel in supermarket aisles. So, she applied for a Fulton St. Fellowship to attend an intensive program at the Institute of Culinary Education. Now, armed with extensive wine knowledge

and a Certified Sommelier pin from the Court of Master Sommeliers, she aims to make wine easy and relatable for her guests.

La Boucherie's wine collection encompasses 1,200 different labels from around the world. Jones-Randolph says that the bulk of her sales can be divided into three main categories: "French, California, and 'Other.'" The latter is the most exciting to her because it invites meaningful interactions.

"Knowing your product and reading your clientele will help you sell [it]," she explained.

While working for Terroir's Paul Grieco—a champion of underdog grapes that might fall under the "Other" heading—she fell in love with the native Piedmontese grape Timorasso. As a result, she traveled to the region to forge her own relationship with a producer that she loves to talk about. For her, it is important to make a personal connection with winemakers, as she believes a sommelier should serve "the wineries we choose to support as well as the [guests]."

Coming from all over the world, Jones-Randolph's clientele is as diverse as her wine list, with varying levels of wine knowledge. However, most guests ultimately want her authentic opinion, so she doesn't hold back from gushing about a wine she loves, nor does she steer clear of using technical terms. Recently, she suggested an Albariño to diners familiar only with Pinot Grigio. She explained how the two grapes share "phenolic bitterness" before describing the sensation it imparts, and her guests responded favorably when they picked up on the sensation themselves. Jones-Randolph wants to start a trend of teaching wine terms to guests so they can learn to ask for what they want more effectively.

Housed in the tallest building west of Chicago, the InterContinental has wine cellars on four different floors. Since it can take time to retrieve the bottles, Jones-Randolph has applied the lesson she learned while working at downtown LA hot spot Bestia that, "the only way to do wine sales at high volume is to stay organized," especially as the only sommelier on the floor, as is the case at La Boucherie. By using an iPad wine list as a tool and presenting it to guests, she's able to make updates with minimal effort and to include information that would not fit onto a printed list, which can buy her the crucial time needed to meet the needs of all of the tables.

Jones-Randolph's approach to service is dependent not only on her guests' needs but also current trends. She is sensitive to the increasing number of non-drinkers she sees, so mocktails are among the first drinks she offers. Other trends that have persisted in recent years are low-intervention, low-sulfur, and low-alcohol wines. Guests cannot always discern which labels meet these criteria from the wine list, so her communication skills are critical to helping them find what they're looking for. Fortunately, she loves discussing wine. As she puts it, "When you're able to transform this really difficult-to-understand language . . . and be able to be a shaman into this magical world of wine, it's the best thing ever in life." **WBM**