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# the drinks business

UNFILTERED: MACIEJ LYKO, HEAD SOMMELIER, LAUNCESTON PLACE

Polish-born Maciej Lyko's interest in wine developed while working as a salesman at Mielzynski, one of Poland's foremost wine merchants. During this time, Maciej successfully passed the Wine and Spirits Education Trust advanced exam, which set him on the path to hospitality and sommellerie. Maciej moved to London in 2014, and landed a sommelier role at Gordon Ramsay's Michelin-starred restaurant Maze. The following year, Maciej joined the team at Launceston Place in Kensington as assistant head sommelier, working under Piotr Petras. Following Petras' departure, Maciej accepted the role of head sommelier at Launceston Place in 2018. Already holding the Advanced Court of Master Sommeliers certificate, Maciej is now preparing to take the Master Sommelier exam. Here, he shares his love of Chenin Blanc from the Loire, what it was like to serve former PM David Cameron, and reveals his perfect pairing to langoustine 'ice cream'.



## What or who inspired you to become a sommelier?

When I was 22, I started working as a wine salesman for Mielzynski, one of Poland's biggest wine merchants. The experience was great and gave me the chance to work with people who had the same passion for wine and who could share their knowledge with me. I then wanted to bring my experience to a restaurant environment, which led me to move to London where I worked at Gordon Ramsay's Maze.

## What's your favourite part of the job?

There are so many parts of my job that I love: meeting new people; working with passionate colleagues and exploring new food and wines. Every day brings something new which makes this job so interesting.

## What's the biggest misconception about the role of a sommelier?

There are probably many misconceptions, and I'm sure some people think we only travel and drink wine! In reality it's slightly different.

## What's your go-to drink at the end of a long day?

A glass of Riesling, or a Chenin Blanc from the Loire Valley. I love the acidity and minerality of those two varieties of grape.

## What's your most embarrassing front-of-house moment?

At the beginning of my career as a sommelier, I accidentally used a bottle of Picpoul to top up the glasses of a table drinking some very expensive Burgundy. As you can imagine, it was not the best day of my life.

## If you could give your younger self advice when starting out as a somm, what would it be?

Listen and learn from people who have more experience than you.

## What bottle sparked your love of wine?

It was a bottle of Georg Breuer Schlossberg Riesling. I tasted it and realised that it is my favourite grape variety: complex, aromatic and very elegant.

## What to date has been your most memorable wine experience?

I will never forget a trip to Madeira, where I tasted some of the best wines produced on the beautiful island.

**Which customer habit annoys you the most?**

I am not annoyed by guests' habits. The only thing that I really don't like is impoliteness.

**Who is your inspiration in the gastronomic world?**

My colleagues! I am very grateful to work with such passionate people who give me inspiration to develop and be better every day.

**What's your ultimate food and wine pairing?**

Jamon Iberico and a glass of Sherry. It's not very original, but I love it.

**Where would your fantasy vineyard be?**

It's too difficult to choose just one. It would either be Rheingau or Madeira.

**If you weren't a sommelier, what would you be doing and why?**

I have absolutely no idea. Maybe I would be professional coffee drinker, music listener and book reader!

**Which wine (grape/style) do you find it impossible to get along with?**

I am not a big fan of Gewürztraminer.

**Who is the most memorable customer you've ever served and why?**

David Cameron is the most memorable customer I have served. He was very humble and polite.

**What makes you most proud to be a sommelier working in London?**

London is one of the best cities when it comes to hospitality. It is a great place to develop as a sommelier, meet people from all over the world and taste some of the greatest wines.

**What's on your wine bucket list?**

The list is very long, but I would like to visit Australia as I have never been there before.

**Finally, what wine and paired plate would you pick from your list and why?**

The langoustine tartare served with beetroot and crème fraîche brunoise and langoustine ice cream. I would pair this with Tenuta di Fessina Erse 2016 from Sicily. The wine has a very delicate, mineral character which compliments the langoustine perfectly, but also has enough freshness and acidity to cut through the crème fraîche. It's a lovely combination.