

1. How did you get to the realm of sommeliers? How much experience have you piled up on you?

Might sound odd, but I started in the Internet business. Way back, during the European 'Internet bubble'. It took me 10 years to realize that I prefer to work with 'living' materials, rather than computers. At the same time I found out that I tasted a lot of wines during the year. Visited a huge amount of wine producers. I made shortlists with best value wines and 'have to drink once in a lifetime' wines for friends and relatives. Published it on the internet, and collected a massive crowd of readers and enthusiastic wine lovers. At that time, I sold my IT-businesses and turned into the wine-journalism. Did a lot of wine and oenology studies from South Africa to Australia and France.

I started to write my own wine guides, and ended with the major wine guide (100.000 copies) in The Netherlands. Nowadays I'm one of the leading wine writers in the Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands, Luxemburg). I taste approximately 7.500 wines each year. Travel all over the world where there is grapes. Write my articles for several (gastronomic, wine and consumer) magazines and a weekly column in the biggest Dutch Financial Times (Het Financieele Dagblad).

Next to that I'm one of the jury members in a Dutch food TV program, jury member for The International Wine Challenge in London and Tokyo. I teach hotel school-students and sommeliers. And I do consultancy for major hotel-chains, airlines, restaurants and bars.

2. Habanos are currently major elements of after-meal enjoyment. So, as a sommelier, what Habano brands and *vitolas* do you prefer? What do you bear in mind when it comes to recommending a pairing?

The most important aspects when it comes to pairing Habanos and wine is texture. The mouth feeling of both products. On one hand white wines can have a soft, silky, creamy texture, with tasty acidity. On the other hand reds can have an astringent feeling, spicy with bitters and tannins, mouth filling. That's exactly the same feeling what Habanos and *vitolas* can cause in your mouth. Soft and silky on one hand. Bitters and spices, some acidity and tannins on the other hand. With pairing, the question is what do you want to achieve. Balance? In that case you are going to look for an agreement between the two. Soft and creamy. Or contrast. Powerful and spicy.

Two examples when it comes to balance: Light, easy-going and digestible white wines are a perfect companion with, for example, the relatively mild Montecristo Open series or a nice Hoyo de Monterrey. Heavy, mouth feeling and spicy reds work in a perfect way together with for example a full bodied Cohiba, Partagás, Bolivar or Ramon Allones.

3. Wines and Habanos have a very peculiar relationship. What do you need to take into account when recommending a paring between wines and Habanos?

The story that Habanos absolutely need much alcohol to compete, is an absolute fairytale.

4. What would you suggest to pair with a Habano brand like Trinidad, a brand with some character of its own?

Trinidad has a medium to full bodied taste. Spicy, some coffee and chocolate aroma's. A well balanced good quality Bordeaux red will do. Keep in mind, it needs roundabout 50/50 Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot grapes, and maybe a tiny bit of Petit Verdot/Cabernet Franc in it. No overdose of oak. This will give enough power for the Trinidad, some fruity aspects, spicy and a little bit of mushroom/coffee. Delicious marriage!