



DOUG FROST, MW & MS

In 1991, Doug passed the rigorous Master Sommelier examination before becoming America's eighth Master of Wine just two years later. He is the second person in history to complete both exams.

Should I Take It Personally?

“Masochistic hedonists” is the latest epithet to describe the ranks of the Master Sommeliers and those who aspire to join them. So says journalist Bianca Bosker in her new book, “Cork Dork”, and of course she is welcome to her opinion. But as one of those Master Sommeliers, I’ve got a right to mine too.

Bosker, like many others who have briefly visited our world, just doesn't get it.

She’s hardly to be blamed, spending time with students, each relentless in their studies. The preparation for the Master Sommelier examination is exhausting. The task is all-consuming, with daily tasting practices, reading and self-testing, with study that is seemingly endless.

Perhaps the best-known depiction of this malady is the documentary “SOMM”. Full disclosure: I have the briefest of appearances in the movie and

was a member of the Court of Master Sommeliers Board voting to finance the movie. That doesn't mean I like the movie. In fact, I hate the damned thing.

I can't blame the filmmaker, Jason Wise. He did a very nice job with what he had, based upon what he knew. For him, the intensity shared by the four candidates that center the film, each wound up like a Swiss clock, was the only opportunity to create cinematic tension. And he didn't really know what the Master Sommelier program was about.

And what is that? It's about service.

I've long been irritated by the media's portrayal of sommeliers; high-strung know-it-all's who speak with eternally upturned noses and sneer at all lesser beings (those who are not them). To some degree it's deserved, though I could argue that most film and TV writers are projecting more than

illustrating. If they had a stint in the hospitality business, they were probably between jobs. Resentment and revenge are their muses. And the snooty restaurant guy with the fashionable suit is usually the maitre'd, who insists upon opening only the expensive bottles of wine. Few restaurants even employ sommeliers.

Scratch a long-time, satisfied restaurant professional and you will find someone who believes fervently in the dignity of service. "Ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen", goes the famous Ritz Carlton mantra and it's a tidy and truthful tenet.

All that knowledge and experience we Master Sommeliers struggle to acquire is for only one purpose: to allow us to serve every guest regardless of his or her preferences, prejudices or proficiencies. It is not our task to instruct our guests, even gently. We are there to make the food taste better and to make our guests feel happier and more welcome. If Bosker fails to see the beating heart of true Master Sommeliers and the myriad professionals who work just as hard and serve as ably, regardless of whether or not they have a title, it's because Bosker was hanging out with the wrong crowd. Stop studying and start serving. It'll make you feel better; it genuinely does. Then you can go back to the books understanding who it is you're learning all this for.