

Verve Wine

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Saturday Somm Sessions

FRIENDS OF VERVE - RITA JAMMET

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Welcome to Saturday Sommelier Sessions, Verve's weekend wine education in five minutes or less. This week, we're featuring our once a month interview session, 'Friends of Verve,' where we give you a little (personal!) insight into one of our fellow industry comrades.

Introducing Rita Jammet of La Caravelle Wines/Bouquet Ventures Hospitality, one of our nearest and dearest friends here at Verve. Rita received her degree in Economics and Marketing from the University of Geneva, taking a job at her father's international trade company shortly after.

Jammet met her husband, André, whose speciality lies in hospitality (his family owned Le Bristol Hotel in Paris.) The duo opened their New York based restaurant, La Caravelle, which received a prestigious James Beard nomination. Upon closing the restaurant in 2004, the couple carried the restaurant's name on through their Champagne company, La Caravelle.

"To succeed in the wine industry, you definitely need to have an affinity for people," she says. "It's a highly relationship-based industry. It's also important to be detail-oriented, to possess digital skills, know how to navigate softwares and social media and lastly, be a kind person."

Get to know Rita through our Q&A with her below!

Name/Company/Position

Rita Jammet, La Caravelle Wines/Bouquet Ventures Hospitality, Chief Bubble Officer, Hospitality Consultant

Where are you from?

My family is originally from Iraq (although I never lived there), I was born in Saudi Arabia, grew up in Lebanon and Switzerland.

Where do you currently live?

Harlem, NYC

Your background was originally in restaurants; can you tell us a little bit about your family's restaurant history?

Actually my background is marketing and trade. My father was in international trade and was an investor in hotels in Switzerland, and a restaurant in Lebanon. My husband André comes from hospitality lineage (his father Hippolyte founded the Bristol Hotel in Paris), and I became involved in La Caravelle restaurant when we purchased the restaurant. I always loved cuisine, and above

all hospitality. So I applied my knowledge to the restaurant.

Describe the path that brought you to Champagne

When we owned La Caravelle restaurant, both Andre and I already had a special love for Champagne (and wine in general. André is a Chevalier du Tastevin and managed the beautiful wine cellar at the restaurant). In 1998, we had the opportunity to create our own Champagne cuvee for La Caravelle only. We also introduced La Caravelle Lustrac, and later on 2 Cognacs.

When we closed La Caravelle Restaurant (beautiful exit as just before closing we were nominated for the Outstanding Restaurant Award by the James Beard Foundation) in 2004, we thought we would stop everything, however a number of our guests and friends suggested we continue with La Caravelle Champagne and Lustrac. After thinking about it, we decided to go ahead with that, and it became my main activity. What helped us tremendously was the special relationship André's family (back to WW2 resistance days) and La Caravelle restaurant had with one of the greats of the Champagne world, Bernard

de Nonancourt.

What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced moving from working in the restaurant industry to operating a winery?

We didn't really open the winery, however we work with a winery/producer to produce the Champagne. First, the challenge of establishing the brand as a stand-alone Champagne brand was great, coming from a restaurant brand. It took a long time (think years) but I'm pretty persevering and I also benefited (and still do!) from an amazing support from restaurateurs and sommeliers. Getting the sommeliers/wine buyers attention was a challenge at the beginning. Truth be told, I also support the restaurants, shops, bars and their sommeliers, with great joy.

Other big challenge: finding good, honest distributors out of NY State to sell the Champagne. I had a couple of really losing episodes so I learned from that setback. Obviously I needed a new set of skills, and had everything to learn about selling and marketing champagne, selling was difficult for me. I am more of a promoter/marketing/promoter person. But with hard work and perseverance,

it gets easier and pays off eventually. Also, being by myself is now getting difficult due to the hefty amount of work, therefore I'm starting to bring in some help and build a team.

Do you have any other projects (or future projects on the horizon) outside of Champagne?

We actually have a Listrac wine that is part of the portfolio. And I am working on an additional Champagne Cuvée and a still white. Stay tuned.

I also have another activity; I consult for hotels for their food operations, and am also working on a marketing project in the luxury industry, not connected to hospitality.

What was a wine that changed your life and why?

Burgundy was my entry to wine life, my father was a Chevalier du Tastevin and gave me my first taste of Clos de Vougeot (where he was intronised a Tastevin). I flashed when I had my first taste of Volnay by Marquis d'Angerville (who also happened to be a friend of Andre's family). Another life changing one was Salon

champagne. To this day I absolutely love wines that let the fruit shine.

What is your go-to beverage aside from wine?

Other than wine & champagne I drink only 2 cocktails: Margaritas (especially Leo Robitschek's version Hot Lips at the NoMad) and Negronis. Otherwise: water!!! Never tap by the way, always bottled or filtered.

What do you love most about your job?

Definitely interacting with people, and the industry is full of amazing professionals. I also kept in touch with a number of La Caravelle restaurant guests who have become friends. I really enjoy dining out, as I view it to be an essential part of my job, knowing what dining experiences are available, and it's also a way to support the restaurants/somms/shop owners who support La Caravelle. It's an all around positive and good situation ! I also learn so much by tasting with somms and winemakers-- I enjoy learning tremendously.

If you had to work outside of the food + wine industry, which career would you pursue?

Definitely producing movies, any work with colors; also voice-overs.

What are some new restaurants that you've recently visited and loved?

Not necessarily in order and not necessarily new: Jean-Georges, Le Coucou, L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon, La Mercerie, Manhatta, Le Bernardin, Flora Bar, Loring Place, Momofuku Ssam Bar, Legacy Records, Air's Champagne Parlor/Tokyo Record Bar, Lilia, Satsuki, and so many more, and this is only NYC!

What are some of your hobbies outside of food + wine?

I love watching movies, traveling, cooking, being with my sons.

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