

# BLUEPOINT HOSPITALITY

## Natalie Tapken

*Chef Sommelier and Wine & Beverage Director*

Natalie Tapken is one of New York City's top sommeliers. While pursuing her PhD in philosophy, Natalie was introduced to the world of New York City restaurants, which led directly to her immersion in the wine diaspora. She quickly found herself drawn into the New York culinary community, helping to shape innovative and successful wine programs at top-rated restaurants.

In 2006, Natalie began contributing to *Wine and Spirits Magazine* and accepted the position of Wine Director for *Lure Fishbar* in SoHo. She was quickly promoted to the Corporate Beverage Director for all of *Mercer Street Hospitality*, whose restaurants included *Lever House*, *Lure Fishbar*, *Miss Lily's*, *Burger and Barrel*, *Bowery Meat Company*, and *Sixty Thompson Hotel*. Additionally, Natalie consulted on countless wine lists including the *Empellon Group*, *Sauce*, and *White Street*. She has cultivated strong relationships with wine growers and sellers around the globe and traveled to many of the world's top vineyards, from the Napa Valley to New Zealand.

While traveling in France, Natalie developed a passion for the wines of Burgundy. She was honored with induction into the prestigious *Les Piliers Chablisiens* for her promotion of the wines of Burgundy. After over a decade with the *Mercer Hospitality Group*, Natalie's mentor, Becky Wasserman convinced her to pivot from the restaurant floor to the world of importing fine wines. Natalie partnered with *Pas Mal Selections* and embarked on a career importing some of the top wineries in France and representing them for the New York and New Jersey markets.

Natalie's philosophy of wine is that behind every wine is a person and a philosophy. At *Pas Mal*, Natalie sought to find wines of passion and craftsmanship. After fifteen years of high-end restaurant experience, Natalie has gained informed knowledge of what the market wants and what constitutes a good wine, good relationships, and good business. Natalie has the honor of representing some of the top French wineries including *Hubert Lamy*, *Denis Bachelet*, *Georges Noellat*, *Georges Vernay*, *Pierre Gerbais*, and *Hure Freres* just to name a few.

Due to her passion for the New World in addition to the Old World, Natalie expanded her portfolio to represent top domestic estates as well, including *Hourglass*, *Lithology*, and *Hundred Acre*. The portfolio of wines is featured at top restaurants by the glass and on the list including *Per Se*, *Le Bernardin*, *Eleven Madison Park*, *Daniel* and *The Modern*. Overall, Natalie's wines are featured at over 1000 locations in New York and New Jersey. Natalie also enjoys working with passionate, young up-and-coming winemakers and introducing them to the market such as Jesse Katz, Nine Suns, David Moreau and Sylvain Pataille.

While working at *Mercer Hospitality*, Natalie befriended the principal of *Bluepoint Hospitality*, Paul Prager. Natalie manages wine cellars for top collectors around the world and began to secure wines for Mr. Prager's personal collection. When he decided to open a restaurant group in Maryland,

Natalie's love of hospitality and understanding of Mr. Prager's vision, made her the logical choice to become the beverage director for the group. While Natalie was not planning on returning to restaurants, Mr. Prager's love of fine wines and attention to detail made this a dream job. The challenge to build one of the finest collections was a chance Natalie was happy to accept.

As the Chef Sommelier and Wine & Beverage Director of *Bluepoint Hospitality* in Easton, Maryland, Natalie leads a wine program that is the 2021 recipient of three separate, prestigious *Wine Spectator Awards*: *Bas Rouge*, *Bluepoint's* flagship fine dining establishment, received the coveted *Best of Award of Excellence* for the third time; the newly opened *Wardroom* also garnered the *Best of Award of Excellence*; and *The Stewart*, based solely on its Champagne offerings, was honored with the *Award of Excellence*; An extraordinary accomplishment for a small town on the Eastern Shore.

Natalie's work as a distributor and importer has led to *Bluepoint Hospitality* securing top allocations from most prestigious producers around the world. Every bottle selected is hand-picked for the list. Natalie visits the vineyards and cellars every year to better understand the wines and practices. She is creative and thoughtful when making the selections for the list. Natalie also works closely with the culinary team to ensure the best pairings for the guests. Each dish is paired with a variety of wines and tasted with the entire front and back of the house teams before ultimately deciding which wines and dishes make the cut. The desire for excellence is one both Executive Chef Harley Peet and Natalie share.

Natalie's main mission at *Bluepoint Hospitality* is to educate her team and become a mentor so that others can discover the world of wine working in restaurants as she did at the age of 18, working at *Café Atlantico* in Washington DC so many years ago. Weekly tastings, classes, and an annual sabbatical with guest lecturers on wine appreciation are a few of the things Natalie does to elevate the team's knowledge. Natalie's goal is to increase their understanding of wine, so her team has a skill set for life. For example, she mentored Davonte Douglas who became the cellar master at *Bas Rouge* while working on his degree on environmental studies at Howard University. While wine will likely not be Douglas' ultimate career choice, he will have a new skill set and passion for life. She also works with others on the team who do see wine as a lifelong career. At *Bas Rouge*, Kelsey Wilson and Emma Schumann are starting on the sommelier certification path under Natalie's guidance. As a working mother of two daughters, Natalie has a desire to mentor young women and help them find their own profession to be passionate about and excel. Natalie did not grow up in the world of wine but was fortunate enough to have great mentors that fed her passion. Becky Wasserman was the primary mentor for Natalie who started selling Burgundy domaines to America, so she would have an income to support her two sons. Natalie wants to carry the torch and ignite the passion of wine through education and hospitality. Whether it leads to a career in wine or just a passion for the world of wine, Natalie hopes to uplift others with her love of wine where she has found her academia, philosophy, and ultimate calling.

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