

## Top Sud de France sommelier is... Italian

14 Sep 2010 by Tamlyn Currin

Sud de France held their annual Languedoc-Roussillon Sommelier of the Year competition on Monday amid slightly less fanfare than the [inaugural event](#) last year, but much fiercer competition.

About 50 sommeliers from around London entered, representing a sparkling clutch of Michelin stars and other top gastronomic locations. Chairman of the judging panel was Richard Bampffield MW, and judges were Frederic Grappe of Dynamic Vines, myself and Romain Henry, last year's winner and just-appointed head sommelier of Hibiscus. At the last minute we had to do without talented chef Bjorn van der Horst, whose Eastside Inn near Smithfield closed down, sadly, a couple of weeks ago.

After a fairly gruelling semi-final event in the morning, which included a written exam, a wine list loaded with deliberate errors and a blind tasting, the three top scorers to go through to the finals were (photograph above, left to right) Arnaud Goubet, head sommelier of Le Manoir aux Quatre Saisons near Oxford; Sara Bachiorri, assistant head sommelier for The Glasshouse in Kew; and Alexandre Ceret, sommelier at The Greenhouse in Mayfair.

In the afternoon, the finalists were given a four-course regional dinner to taste: snails à la Narbonnaise, cassoulet, cheese and crème Catalan. They then had seven wines to taste and decide which wine to pair with which course. This was followed by a presentation of their choices and finally the pouring of a magnum of Blanquette de Limoux into 16 flutes. The competence, knowledge and charm displayed by all three was exceptionally impressive and the judges spent a long time locked in feisty debate, but in the end it was Sara Bachiorri's graceful style and beautifully communicated knowledge of the region as a whole that won the day.

Sara comes from Perugia, and it's good to see the Italian flag flying in a French regional competition! After starting off as an accountant, she made a move into hospitality and achieved her Professional Sommelier Diploma in 2007. After a year with AIS (Italian Association of Sommeliers), she moved to London and started working for Maze in 2009. Her move to Maze Grill, with a wine list focusing on Languedoc wines, and a visit to the region clearly had a lasting impact. Her achievement is all the more laudable considering she is fairly new to the job, so we wish her well in what one hopes will be a long and rewarding career as a sommelier.