

Q&A

Off the Cuff: A Q&A with Air France and Rosewood Hotels' Xavier Thuizat

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Air France announced Mr. Thuizat's head sommelier appointment in May 2024.

By AMIRAH KEATON

Introducing "Off the Cuff," a new Q&A series from Luxury Daily exploring the career paths, current projects and next steps of those shaping the world's best luxury brands.

The interviews feature a Proust-style twist, allowing readers to get to know industry leaders on a personal level. The eighth edition features Xavier Thuizat, head sommelier at both Air France and Htel de Crillon, a Rosewood Hotel.

In this Q&A, Mr. Thuizat discusses the evolution of luxury consumers' relationship with gastronomic experiences, the art of wine tasting and more. Here is the dialogue:



In 2024, Mr. Thuizat was awarded the Michelin Guide's Sommelier Award. Image courtesy of Rosewood Hotels & Resorts

What was your first job ever? What did it teach you?

I began my professional career as a Commis Sommelier at the esteemed three-star Michelin restaurant Bernard Loiseau.

It was there that I mastered the core aspects of my profession, focusing on restaurant service, restaurant setup and guest interactions.

Which skills have been critical to your success? Did you gain these skills within or outside of the workplace?

Through a diverse range of experiences, both professional and personal, I have cultivated several invaluable skills that hold great significance for me today: curiosity drives me to engage with winemakers, delve into their histories, and grasp their expertise, enabling me to passionately share their stories with guests.

Rigor and consistency are foundational principles essential in the luxury gastronomic realm, guiding my approach to work diligently and uphold high standards.

Generosity fuels my desire to inspire customers, creating experiences tailored to each individual to maximize their enjoyment and ensure every visit is uniquely memorable.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

The most valuable personal advice I've received for office settings is humility. I've learned to maintain a humble demeanor when interacting with customers and appreciate the unique and rare wines I've had the opportunity to sample.

How has your field changed since you started out in luxury, and what do you think the industry will look like in a decade?

During my tenure in the luxury industry, particularly in oenology, I've observed a significant shift in the perception of wine. It's now regarded akin to a designer dress a luxury item undergoing a transformation in sales strategies.

Looking ahead, I foresee a resurgence of the roots of winemaking over the next decade. This evolution will emphasize authenticity, simplicity, and environmental sustainability.

What recent projects have reignited your passion for working in luxury? Do any upcoming Air France or Rosewood launches excite you?

The recent openings of Rosewood's European properties have allowed me to delve deeper into local cultures and discover more about local consumption patterns.

Taking in other cultures is an endless source of motivation for me.

Who, in any industry or sphere, would you most like to share a long lunch with and where would you take them?

Axel Marchal is a distinguished French oenologist and recipient of Decanter's Rising Star Award who delves into the intricacies of wine tasting. I first encountered him at a gathering and was struck by his modest yet scientific approach to the art of tasting wine.

I'd take him to Le Bon Georges restaurant, which has a huge and very varied wine list, and I'm sure we'd have lots of interesting debates and discussions about their wine list!

How do you get into the right mindset before a big meeting or presentation?

Ahead of any presentation or significant meeting, I set aside time for rigorous training and thorough study of a subject matter.

My goal is to internalize it completely, ensuring I'm a master of a subject on the day of the event.

I approach each opportunity with the mindset of bringing my project to life for the audience, fueling my motivation to give my utmost effort and leaving with no room for regrets.

On your days off, what can you be found doing to relax or have some fun?

On my days off, I like to spend time with my children and create special memories with them. I also enjoy sporting activities and traveling to clear my head.

What does luxury mean to you?

What captivates me about the luxury industry is the chance to share my passion with customers, providing them with exclusive food and wine pairings, and guiding them in discovering exceptionally rare bottles.

This industry also affords me the opportunity to engage in unique experiences and explore exceptional wines.

Whether a product or experience, what is your favorite luxury indulgence?

My favorite luxury experience is our Exclusive Encounters wine tasting, which takes place in the property's private dining area, La Cave.

During this experience, I welcome guests for an hour and a half of wine tasting, during which they're presented with five tastings from singular and prestigious vineyards accompanied by five culinary bites created by our executive chef. This is a special occasion I cherish with a dozen or so customers.

We explore wines centered around a specific theme. Our upcoming event on Sep. 12 is centered around the great wines of Bourgogne.