

THE MESSAGE

Whether THE TASTING PANEL goes to the brand execs or the brands call us, there is an abundance of news to report, from the latest releases to behind-the-scenes experiences with some of the world's most influential importers, winemakers, distillers . . . well, you name it.

Brief Encounters

We may not have enough pages in each issue to devote as much attention as we would like to each person whose path we cross, but please note that if it's in the publication, we deem it noteworthy

—Meridith May, Publisher & Executive Editor



John Mitchell is the Sommelier at Stella! In New Orleans.

Spin-the-Bottle Somm

Offering a Bordeaux- and Burgundy-centric wine program in a francophile-driven market like New Orleans isn't exactly an unexpected choice for a sommelier. But now, **John Mitchell** is game for a little round of spin the bottle; this fall he's completely revamping his mainly French, 500-label list to incorporate much more of a Spanish focus.

As Wine Director for international French Quarter restaurant Stella!, Mitchell is quick to point out that the Spanish were actually the first to make their mark and establish residency in New Orleans. He cites the increasing availability of smart and surprising offerings coming out of emerging regions, as well the surging popularity of sommelier darling sherry (which he extols as “a mind-blowing style of wine”), as proof that it's a fitting time to introduce the Big Easy to what he sees as vastly underrated—and under-represented—wines.

Earlier this year Mitchell decided to challenge guests by giving them a little lesson in the classics—replacing 13 crowd-pleasing yet predictable options with all Greek ones, including largely unfamiliar varietals Assyrtiko and Agiorgitiko. “This has been greeted with great optimism and some cynicism, but the overall goal is to stop the numbing everyday routine of being served the same grape or style of wine that you might see at many restaurants.”

Turning Stella!'s wine program on its head also allows for playful fork-and-cork experimentation between Mitchell and Chef Scott Boswell—the ultimate compliment to both wine and cuisine when done right, he says.

— Kelly Magyarics