

Ordering Wine? There's an App for That

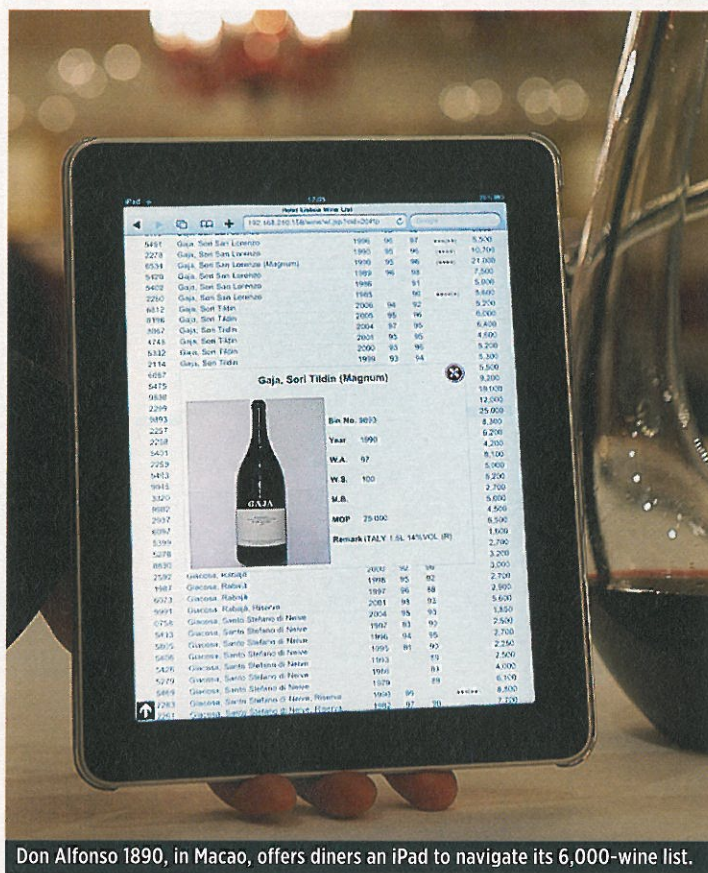
Until recently, most electronic wine lists were more techie toy than fully realized tool. Diners often had trouble navigating cumbersome menus with limited search options, and wine directors complained that they had to manage multiple wine lists. But Apple's iPad is beginning to change that.

"The iPad was such a sensation that we coupled an overdue product for the restaurant industry with a hot new product," says Jennifer Martucci, founder and senior vice president of product development and marketing for Incentient. The firm's SmartCellar wine list software for the iPad is being used by roughly 40 restaurants, though most of those restaurants are still developing their customized versions. Todd English, Gordon Ramsay and Cleveland's Michael Simon have all signed on. New York's South Gate at the Jumeirah Essex House introduced its iPads featuring SmartCellar July 15. New York's SD26 was the first restaurant to use SmartCellar, but on different hardware, and owner Tony May contributed to the product's development. The restaurant switched to the iPad Aug. 2.

Martucci says that SmartCellar can be customized for each restaurant. At South Gate, guests can tap through the iPad wine list, searching by glass or bottle, red or white, grape variety or keyword. Results can be sorted by multiple options, such as price or name, with selections saved to a personal list. For some wines, guests can also drill down for more information on varieties or regions. Standard information is provided by Incentient, but restaurants can add their own notes or graphics.

Mauro Cirilli, wine director at Barbacco in San Francisco, has done just that, since his wine list features many lesser-known indigenous Italian varieties. "You can bring info to the guest that you don't normally have time to bring," says Cirilli. "Vineyards, labels, varieties and info about how a wine is made. Guests are more excited about wine."

At South Gate, the iPad is fully linked by Wi-Fi to the restaurant's inventory. "If you sell the last bottle of a wine, the list is updated [immediately]," says sommelier Olivier Dufeu. "There's nothing worse for



Don Alfonso 1890, in Macao, offers diners an iPad to navigate its 6,000-wine list.

the guests than selecting a wine that has just been sold."

Incentient is not the only firm to capitalize on the iPad. Delicias, a *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence winner in San Diego, is the testing grounds for a similar app, called i-Somm ("somm" is an industry abbreviation for sommelier). Delicias owner Owen Perry also owns the software firm behind i-Somm.

Delicias general manager and sommelier Gino Campbell says i-Somm doesn't currently link to the restaurant's point-of-sale system, but he hopes that once it does he can customize the software so that when stocks run low, it will automatically order more.

In China, Johnson Chan, who oversees operations and wine programs at three Grand Award-winning restaurants—Don Alfonso 1890 and Robuchon à Galera in Macao and L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Hong Kong—also uses an iPad wine

list. With a core wine cellar that's approaching 200,000 bottles and more than 6,000 different labels, an iPad list is nearly a requirement. "For a large wine list, it offers the convenience of [being light-weight], as well as selection by price range, vintage, size, year, grape variety, etc.," says Chan. He developed his software in-house and says that the cost is minimal compared with that of managing paper wine lists.

Apple prices the iPad from \$499 to \$849 depending on features, but companies like Incentient rent and maintain the devices for a monthly fee. Most restaurateurs agree with Chan that costs are relatively minimal and were not a factor in their decision to use the iPad. Delivering additional information and excitement to their guests is worth the price. South Gate, Barbacco and Chan all still keep paper copies of their lists for guests who request them. They also report that the iPad has yet to increase wine sales, though Martucci says that wine sales have increased for most of her clients.

Could a fully integrated iPad wine list push sommeliers out the back door? Cirilli, Dufeu and Campbell say that their guests still expect to see them tableside to assist with wine selection. "A lot of guests are regulars and prefer to talk to me," says Campbell. "They prefer to have interaction with a human."

—Nathan Wesley

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