

# Confessions of a Sommelier #180

## Assemblage [ah-sahm-BLAHJ]

The French term for “assembling,” referring to the ancient art of blending.

By Jamie Drummond

Many, many moons ago, I was working as sommelier for one of Scotland’s top dining establishments. Twelve months earlier I had been introduced by a Mr. Martin Callis, one of our regulars, to the fascinating Bonny Doon bottlings of the great Randall Grahm. In particular I was drawn to Grahm’s Cigare Volant (or “flying cigar”, with reference to an obscure French law forbidding UFOs from landing in the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape). Grahm’s Cigare Volant was a heady mix of Californian Syrah, Mouvèdre and Grenache, and it was unlike anything my developing palate had ever experienced.

One evening, a table of four English “big shots” entered the restaurant and asked to see a sommelier. One of these gentleman asked if I would recommend a Californian wine, “something a little different,” and so I immediately began to wax lyrically of the virtues of Cigare Volant. I asked the restaurant’s other sommelier, Richard, to grab me a bottle from the cellar. Looking back, I recollect Richard looking at me rather strangely. But I soldiered on, saying a hearty good evening to Mr. Callis, who had just walked through the door and was being seated beside the Bonny Doon table.

Richard had been in the cellar for quite some time but he eventually appeared, duti-

fully opened the bottle, and poured a little tasting for the host before retiring behind the bar in a suspiciously sheepish fashion. The host sniffed and slurped at the glass, turning up his nose a little. “This certainly does not show in the manner I was expecting...” I nervously explained that there tended to be quite an interesting vintage variation with this particular bottling. Mr. Callis had been listening in and politely interrupted, proudly stating that he had visited the Bonny Doon tasting room just



Sommelier Jamie Drummond.

“This certainly does not show in the manner I was expecting....”

two weeks before, and that the Cigare Volant was one of his favourite wines. The chaps passed the pouring over to Mr. Callis and invited his informed opinion. He swirled and nosed the glass with much exaggerated deliberation before declaring it even better than the wine he had tasted “alongside Randall.” A rousing cheer went up.

Returning to the bar area I spied the cellar door slightly ajar, with a small puddle of red wine creeping out. I peeked inside to find Richard on his knees, hurriedly mopping the floor with napkins, looking extremely guilty. Three open bottles of red wine and a plastic funnel were scattered about. “What the...?” I asked.

It transpired that during our busy period we had sold out of the Cigare Volant and Richard had concocted his own approximation. He showed me how he had carefully taken 60% Clare Valley Shiraz, 20% Catalonian Garnacha and 20% South-western French Mouvèdre, mixed them in an empty Cigare Volant bottle, then re-corked it. I was shocked at his unacceptable actions but rather intrigued at the bugger’s ingenuity. Looking back at the table of gentlemen heartily enjoying Richard’s proprietorial blend, I decided to hold my tongue...

Around half an hour later I was restocking the wine cellar for the next day’s lunchtime shift when Richard poked his head around the door. He looked white as a sheet.

“Shite... Jamie... They want another bottle...” **CB**

Sommelier Jamie Drummond oversees the wine program for Jamie Kennedy’s various establishments. Names in this story have been changed to protect the guilty parties.

**Veritas**  
LOCAL FARE

SEASONAL FARE FROM LOCAL SUSTAINABLY HARVESTED INGREDIENTS

**BISTRO. LOUNGE. COURTYARD.**  
234 King Street East | dine.to/veritas  
info@localfare.ca | 416.363.8447