

By Jamie Drummond

# Confessions Of A Sommelier

MUSINGS ON MODERATION WHEN DRINKING FOR A LIVING

Each and every time I have a Trans-Atlantic telephone blether with my Edinburgh-based mother, she, without fail, makes a point of asking in her colloquial Scottish: “So Jamie... the demon drink... has it goat a grip o’ ye yet?”

Now, while my caring mother feels that, in my working as a sommelier, I am in the devil’s employ, she *does* have a rather poignant worry. It is no myth that the incidence of alcohol-related illness in those working in the alcohol business is markedly higher than that of the general populace.

I recall filling out a life insurance application almost 17 years ago and the computer didn’t recognize the job of sommelier. Things have changed somewhat since then, with insurance companies being well aware of the increased occurrences of alcoholism, alkalosis, cirrhosis of the liver, booze-fuelled depression and anxiety—not to mention the dreaded gout—amongst my brothers and sisters in the industry.

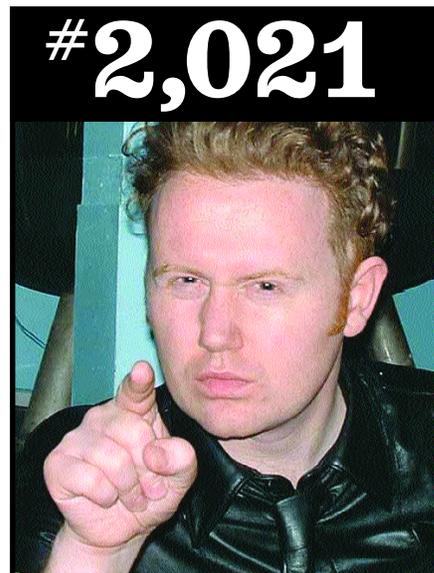
An intravenous diet of foie gras, pork belly, and Époisses—the pillars of the Winemaker’s Dinner—coupled with the sustained ingestion of innumerable 2 oz tasting pours (industry standard, you see), and the *coup de grace* of the palate’s sweet sanctuary—beers after work—do not for a happy body and mind make. Trust me. A few years back, visiting wineries in Europe with a few veteran sommeliers and wine writers, I noticed some of the tell-tale signs

of years of devotion to the noble cause: a protruding belly in conjunction with an outrageously pronounced red proboscis peppered with “gin blossoms”. Feeling my own nose with some concern and looking down at my skinny micro-gut, I shuddered and thought, “Is that the inevitable shape of things to come for Jamie Drummond?”

Thankfully, all I have to show for so many years of gallant service is the esteemed rank of “Old Trooper” and a couple of herniated discs from years of schlepping cases.

But you can’t be too careful. Here’s what you can do to combat these occupational hazards (besides, you know, *moderation*).

- 1** Know your metabolism (and your limits), being sure to punctuate your tastings with at least equal amounts of water.
- 2** Make a concerted effort to balance your diet and try not to skip on meals (nibbling artisanal cheese doesn’t count). If necessary, augment your diet with CaMg, B-Complex, Fish Oils and Lysine.
- 3** Have a good, honest relationship with your family doctor, and insist upon a thorough annual check-up, including blood work.
- 4** Get some sleep, Tiger! Working on that strobe-light tan in a dirty after-hours joint (and the inevitable Facebook/Flickr pics of you looking less-than-fresh) isn’t exactly going to forward your career, is it?



The sommelier: everything in moderation.

And then there’s the age-old question: spit or swallow? Both, because it depends upon the situation. Swallowing gives a more complete picture of the wine, but if I have to taste flights of tannic reds at 9 a.m., I spit. Not spitting during day-long tasting could lead to professional embarrassment—in bed by 6 p.m., soiling yourself in the taxi home, or both. And we haven’t even touched upon palate fatigue.

So please don’t portray me and those in my field as loquacious, pissed-up, hell-raising disco devils, I beg of you. It would probably shock you to discover that on a Saturday night there are very few things I like more than snuggling on the couch with my lady, my kitty cat, and episodes of *Battlestar Galactica*—with a nice hot mug of Horlicks malted milk drink.

You see, everything in moderation.

Jamie Drummond oversees the wine program for Jamie Kennedy’s establishments. Get more at [jkkitchens.com](http://jkkitchens.com).



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