

Interview with Chad Walsh, Domestic Brand Manager for Skurnik Wines & Spirits

NYWGF: When was the moment you fell in love with wine/wine industry?

CW: I grew up in the restaurant business—after a long career in Washington D.C. restaurants, my father opened his own restaurants on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. His late brother was a restaurateur on Nantucket, and in general, I grew up around food and wine. With that said, working in restaurants in high school and college was just using my somewhat innate knowledge to earn some extra cash, and it wasn't until I was exposed to really extraordinary wine during my tenure at Aureole's original location on 61st Street, that I found a combination of the business I knew with the intellectual component that wine provided. I was an English major, and had a love of narrative, and here, in a glass, was an entire story. It was there that my sommelier career began, and when the restaurant moved to 42nd Street, I became one full-time.

NYWGF: What's your best experience/event since you've been part of the industry?

CW: That's a really, really hard question to answer, because there are so many magical moments: New Years Eve at The Dutch pouring from a giant bottle of Champagne, earning a Michelin star in our first year at Agern (and partying really hard afterward), skeet shooting off the side of a mountain in Napa while sipping old-vine Riesling, or celebrating the summer solstice with bonfires and fireworks in the ancient town of Spitz, in Austria's Wachau.

With that said, when I was selected as one of Food & Wine magazine's Sommeliers of the Year, everything that surrounded that was really awesome. The team at Agern, not to mention my friends and family, were so proud and supportive, and going to Aspen for the F&W festival was magical. Because I was never on the Court of Master Sommeliers track, recognition for my work could sometimes feel elusive—sure a shoutout in the various restaurant reviews, or an article here or there, but this was something tangible that ensured my level of expertise. Even the photo-shoot, on a very cold April day, with my good friend and fellow nominee Caleb Ganzer was fun, even if we were both super awkward!

NYWGF: What's the one wine you can't live without?

CW: Champagne. Now that I work for Skurnik, and have access to the amazing Terry Thiese portfolio of growers, my fridge and cave are dangerously well-stocked! I love producers like Aubry, Vilmart, and Egly-Ouriat, but my absolute favorite Champagne is Salon '96.



