

# DINE

## LIGHTEN UP

Just in time for the warm weather, three members of Bellagio's esteemed wine team open a few prime bottles with nuances ranging from apple and honey to vanilla and lemon zest. *See Page 42*



WINE WITH L'AMANT SWEDISH HOUSE MARTINI



# GREAT WHITES

BELLAGIO'S ENO-EXPERTS SUGGEST THREE BOTTLES TO ORDER RIGHT NOW

BY CHRISTOPHER CALICOTT  
PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREW SEA JAMES

In the main dining room of Le Cirque, a Michelin-starred restaurant at Bellagio, one can look across the table, out of the window and be mesmerized by the Fountains of Bellagio only feet away. This world-class environment is matched with top-drawer cooking and an international wine team that is tightly fused within Bellagio's overall wine program. *Vegas/Rated* visits Le Cirque's cellar courtesy of a guided tour led by sommelier Frédéric "Freddy" Montandon, a native of Beaune, France, who has worked at the restaurant since its opening 14 years ago; William Moss, wine director for Le Cirque and its sister restaurant, Circo; and Jason Smith, Bellagio's director of wine and master sommelier.



FRÉDÉRIC "FREDDY" MONTANDON



## TASTING NOTES

At a restaurant like Le Cirque, the profile of the property and the involvement of the staff create opportunities to engage directly with winemakers. And everyone wins when great wines are presented by professionals who believe in the product. Husic Vineyards is one such favorite for the team at Le Cirque.

And for Montandon, Moss and Smith, this is like featuring a wine made by a family member. Frank Husic is a personal friend, and Montandon has been following his wines from the start. Husic's Sonoma Valley Chardonnay (\$25 glass; \$97 bottle) surprises: There were a number of bottles on the table, and when I first nosed the wine, I mistook it for a Meursault from Burgundy—not so, as this wine is from California. It offers up flavors of orchard fruits like apple, and Montandon tastes "honey—definitely honey. It's a sipping chardonnay, but also a food wine," he adds. Its vanilla and spice notes come from present oak, but they are not overpowering. Montandon pairs the wine with a scallop dish, but he says it also stands up to the restaurant's richer French cuisine.

Transitioning from New World to an Old World chardonnay, the team shows off a wine with a decidedly different expression of the grape: Jean Chartron's 2009 Puligny-Montrachet. Smith notes, "We literally built a personal relationship with the winemaker [since it was] introduced to our market four or five years ago ... and he has been working with us so we can consistently pour this wine by the glass." Montandon pairs it "with rabbit, with tuna—anything with truffles," underscoring its immense versatility.

The Chartron offers flavors of lemon zest and a minerality Smith describes as "chalky, stony," and the palate is just as Smith describes it: "Mouthwatering," with excellent acidity. It has an incredible finish—almost two minutes of length. Knowing the winemaker personally, Smith says, "You can see Jean-Michel's personality come through in the wines." It is featured as part of the tasting menu's premium wine pairing for \$88.

With a sommelier who grew up in Burgundy and direct ties to winemakers in Puligny-Montrachet and closer to home, Le Cirque matches excellent food with versatile wines to suit guests' tastes, from California to Burgundy's Côte-d'Or.





FROM LEFT: MONTANDON, JASON SMITH AND WILLIAM MOSS

## ... AND A RED

SWEET wines are too often saved for dessert or after a meal. Le Cirque does something unique for its guests: It offers a 1929 Pla del Fount Grenache-based sweet red wine from Maury in Roussillon, located in the South of France. Interestingly, this arrives in the second course of the tasting menu. Balancing a lush foie gras and white-chocolate-and-raisin brioche served with rhubarb, this old, special wine has notes of sweet tobacco and scorched earth. It bathes the mouth in eye-opening flavors, while the acidity keeps the palate ready for the next course. Well played.



## BEST TIP

William Moss loves chef Gregory Pugin's sea-urchin "ice cream"—a cold mousse that balances a "salty component [and] texture," with fennel cream and pairs wonderfully with the Chartron Puligny-Montrachet from Le Cirque's premium wine pairing.