

# WineSource's Melchior Club Unforgettable experiences

Victoria Daskal looks at the latest in vinous purchasing power for 100 fortunate club members who can rise to the annual €10,000 fee and then enjoy experiences their money could not buy otherwise



It's good when you have locals tell you the best places to go," muses Philippe Kalmbach, recounting a recent trip to Naples, where one of the highlights was sailing off the coast of Capri and having fresh red prawns cured in Amalfi oil from a hidden coastal seafood restaurant accessible only by boat. That theme of local and expert knowledge seems to be woven into the fabric that makes up the WineSource business. A global fine-wine company founded by Kalmbach in 2010, WineSource specializes in supplying the world's best restaurants and wealthy private clients from its portfolio of small, reputable producers, as well as sourcing hard-to-find wines and spirits. He proudly illustrates the strength of its network through a story of how one day his team spotted a post on social media about

"unicorn wines" that listed a dozen bottles anyone should buy if he or she were ever so lucky as to have the opportunity. The following day WineSource assembled its Unicorn Case, having been able to source all of the bottles on the list. The company's global GM Mathieu Jullien describes the small size of the company and high caliber of its employees as the reasons it is so quick, dynamic, and energetic. The all-star team of ex-sommeliers and salespeople are experts in navigating the fine-wine scene for their prestigious clientele. "We are very proactive, and we've hired people who thrive in this fast-paced environment, who have the talent but were maybe stifled in bigger, more bureaucratic settings," Jullien explained at the company's UK Portfolio Tasting at Hotel Café Royal in London in September. The room was packed, and Jullien pointed out at least a dozen well-known sommeliers and Masters of Wine mingling as they tasted through the selection. At that same tasting, WineSource announced its latest partnership with Champagne Gosset and took the opportunity to stage a masterclass for sommeliers with *chef de cave* Odilon de Varine, who presented his findings on lees aging, comparing Gosset NV Champagnes with different disgorgement dates. Claire Thevenot, France's first female Master Sommelier and now on-trade sales director at WineSource, was there to rally her troops, engaging with all of the sommeliers and encouraging them

Above: New York, a Melchior Club destination city. Opposite: WineSource founder Philippe Kalmbach.

to take their new knowledge with them onto the restaurant floor. WineSource sustains an impressive program of masterclasses and wine tastings for its restaurant clients. Jullien maintains that this is a key factor setting it apart from many of the fine-wine brokers and online wine companies competing in the same sector. It is committed to "add[ing] value and grow[ing] the brand in the right circles," while educating the gatekeepers on its wines.

**The Melchior Club**  
Earlier this year, the company launched the Melchior Club as a private wine club that's part fine-wine concierge/part personal sommelier service. Kalmbach sees this as a natural extension of what the company was already offering on an ad hoc basis to its private clients. "I get a lot requests for recommendations on where to eat and what to drink—and sometimes quite unusual demands that we are able to pull together thanks to our deep ties in the industry. "What we offer, money cannot buy," Kalmbach asserts. "Melchior unlocks



priority allocations, invitations to the châteaux, and bespoke experiences around the world." Based on its office locations and strongest producer links, the current roster of destinations includes global cities (New York, Los Angeles, San

Francisco, Hong Kong, Macau, Paris, and London) and classic wine regions (Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Piedmont, and Napa). The experiences are crafted specially for the members and tailored to suit their schedules, preferences, and budget. Whether they wish to visit wine producers, taste verticals of fine wines tutored by a Master Sommelier in a Michelin-starred restaurant, or have an expert come to their home and help them assess and organize their wine collection, this all falls under the Melchior membership, costing €10,000 annually and capped at 100 members to ensure impeccable service. Kalmbach is clear on the club's objectives: "Even if someone has money, if he or she says, 'I want to spend a night at Château d'Yquem,' they will reply, 'We're not a hotel.' But we have the relationships to create these experiences. Our goal is for the club to be known for its unforgettable experiences. We are not just selling members wine; we are starting them on a journey and holding their hand through it."

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