

# WINE ECONOMICS & FINANCE

**Topic 6:**

**Propose an approach to  
assess the quality of a  
restaurant's wine list  
and apply it to a  
sample of  
Swiss  
restaurants.**



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# INTRODUCTION

"A great wine list has to have passion and focus, and give something that shows why a person built that. Sometimes you see quite schizophrenic wine lists that go from one end to another, and that, for me, makes it a bit unbalanced."

**Francesco Marzola**

**T**His business report aims at proposing an approach to evaluate Swiss restaurants' wine list.

This project has been undertaken to highlight the importance of a wine list in the choice of a bottle by the customers. Indeed, as wines are an important source of revenue for restaurants, the creation of such a tool seems to be advantageous for both, restaurateurs, and customers. Some references like the Michelin Guide or Gault&Millau already exist to evaluate the cuisine, service, and setting of a restaurant. Still, nothing similar exists to assess wine lists. Specialized websites such as Wine Advocate offer a qualitative assessment of a restaurant's wine list, but nothing based on a systematic and objective study, as can be done by food critics.

The main result of this project is the creation of an Excel tool that will allow the assessment of wine lists and award restaurants with a score out of a maximum

of twenty points. The model will be based on criteria determined through numerous interviews with experts in the field. A questionnaire has been sent to potential restaurant customers to get their perception of criteria that play a role while choosing a wine at the restaurant. A more detailed explanation of the model will be given later in this report.

The study will focus on a sample of twelve Swiss restaurants based in different cantons, namely Valais, Vaud, Graubünden, and Geneva. These four cantons are famous wine-producing regions in Switzerland. In addition, the restaurants have been chosen from the Gault&Millau guide.

Would such a rating system influence a consumer's choice of restaurant?

According to Mister L'Hostis:

"Yes, it could work if the approach and the arguments behind this model are valid. But you have to be careful because it will never be completely objective because of the system's complexity."



# SOURCES OF INFORMATION



## Literature review

The competitiveness in the restaurant industry is rising yearly. To counter this increase and differentiate themselves from each other, restaurants have different possibilities, such as having an attractive wine list (Taylor & Francis, 2008). While it is known that a good wine selection, qualified sommeliers, and fair price/quality ratios bring in extra revenue, it is still unclear how the design and creativity of a wine list play a role in a customer's buying perspective (Corsi, A. M., Mueller, S., & Lockshin, L., 2012). Furthermore, there is evidence that wine consumption is undergoing a renewal, and consumers are becoming increasingly amateurish (Adocc Agency, 2020; Frydman, A., 2021). As a result, wine rating platforms, such as Robert Parker and Wine Advocate, are becoming increasingly important (Leve, J., 2011). However, there is no existent tool to evaluate the quality of restaurant wine lists, as it exists with manuals such as Gault&Millau or Michelin Star to assess restaurant meals.

Furthermore, existing sources do not explicitly mention rating criteria to assess wine lists, even though beverages represent 30% to 50% of an average restaurant bill (Fefin, 2022). Therefore, there is an opportunity to create an entirely new rating system to give customers a new criterion when choosing a restaurant. Due to the lack of academic sources, to support the project it was necessary to contact experts on the topic, such as sommeliers (Mr. Fefin, Lecturer & Sommelier at EHL / Mr. L'Hostis, Lecturer at EHL) and restaurateurs (Mr. Ahlgren, Alumni & Owner of the Vieux Lausanne).

In order to create the scoring tool, it was essential to gather existing data on wine list creation (Taylor & Francis, 2008) to have a complete view of what key points were already comprehended and use them as criteria in the tool. The data being not comprehensive enough, primary research have been conducted through interviews with experts (Mr. Fefin, Lecturer & Sommelier at EHL / Mr. L'Hostis, Lecturer at EHL / Mr. Ahlgren, Alumni & Owner of the Vieux Lausanne). The experts underlined the complexity of such an assessment system due to the resources and time required, but also due to the subjectivity linked to the context and customers' preferences and perception. Regarding the collection of consumers' points of view, a survey has been conducted and the 77 responses mostly helped in determining and validating the criteria employed in the rating tool.



# DATA



A survey has been created to collect data regarding customers' wine list preferences while being at the restaurant. The goal of the survey was to obtain several criteria that would then be used to create the rating system. The survey was composed of seven questions: the two first questions focused on getting to know the respondent (age and knowledge on wine), and the five remaining questions targeted the way customers choose a wine and their preferences regarding the presentation of a wine list. On these five targeted questions, one was opened to allowing people to be creative and not get biased answers. The survey has been open for around two weeks, and 77 responses were collected.

## At the restaurant, how much wine would you order?

This question enlightened the fact that the rating system should not consider differences regarding wine by the glass or by the bottle as it depends on the occasion and would not be relevant for a grading. Half of the respondents answered they would get a bottle (39) and the other half only a few glasses (24 for 1-2 glasses and 12 for 3-4 glasses).

The questions focusing on the way people would choose their wines allowed to validate and create criteria for the tool. For both types of restaurants, Gastronomic and Bistrot, the price, the grape variety, and the region were respectively mentioned in 55, 45, 62 answers for Bistrot restaurants and 42, 40, and 53 answers for Gastronomic restaurants.

The wine-food pairing suggestion was a criterion given as an answer and was respectively mentioned 35 and 59 times for Bistrot and Gastronomic restaurant.

However, after interviews with professionals and reflection, it has been decided not to consider it as it has been assumed that a sommelier would be able to give suggestions and that pairings were very rarely written on wine lists.

At the same time, several interviews have been conducted. The objective was to get a different point of view regarding a wine list grading system. Three experts agreed to answer questions on the topic:

- A sommelier from BDS, Mr. Fefin
- An EHL enology teacher, Mr. L'Hostis
- The tenant of the restaurant "Le Vieux Lausanne," Mr. Ahlgren

The interviews were based on six different questions, which led to fascinating conversations. The main point of these talks was the complexity brought by the model, and the difficulty of adapting the system to different restaurant types. Indeed, customers would have different expectations and look at different characteristics when choosing a wine. This criterion will not be considered in this project.

"When having a lunch or dinner at a brasserie, a client looks for something not too expensive, easy to drink... while at a gastronomic restaurant, you would look for a specific wine, with a history behind it, difficult to find."-Mr. Fefin.

The design of the list is a criterion that came out in the survey, but experts' opinions are divergent on the topic:

"Even if you have good wines on a wine list, if this one is not well presented, bad quality paper, stains, ... you would probably reconsider the way wines are preserved in this restaurant"-Mister Fein

Another criterion often stated was the organization of the list. Customers and experts assume it should be sorted by region, color, way of cultivating the grapes, even by vintage.

According to the interviewees, the coherence of the wine list is essential: it should be diverse, dynamic, and aligned with restaurant dishes, prices, and atmosphere.

Finally, one of the most important criteria to consider would be the terroir. The wine list should correspond to the region's restaurant terroir.

"What would Vaudois think if they go to a restaurant in Lavaux, but there are no references from local wine on the list?"-Mister L'Hostis



# METHODOLOGY



In order to create the wine list assessment tool, the first step was to collect primary data

(customer surveys and expert interviews) and secondary data (academic papers, magazines, reviews, etc.). The second step was to analyse the results obtained to elaborate on the criteria. The third step was creating a tool and its scale to assess the wine menu based on the pre-defined criteria. The fourth step consisted of interpreting the results of tests done on existing wine lists, followed by system adjustments. Once the model has been fitted and validated by an expert, Mr. Fefin, the last step was the application of the tool to a sample of Swiss restaurants differently rated by the Gault&Millau guide.

As to ensure a comprehensive set of data and an efficient organization of it, a research agenda has been followed:

## Agenda:

**February 25<sup>th</sup> - March 3<sup>rd</sup>:** secondary data collection and definition of the work's limits

- First data base elements
- Definition of today's wine consumer expectations

**March 3<sup>rd</sup>:** start of the primary data collection.

- Launch of the online survey
  - Evaluation of the average consumer's sensibilities concerning a wine menu

**March 3<sup>rd</sup>:** start of the primary data collection.

- First interview in the BDS Hesse Room with Mr. Fefin, Lecturer and Chef Sommelier at EHL
  - Reflection on the qualitative aspects of a wine menu
  - Definition of the concerns of the Swiss customers when reading a wine list
  - Listing of common mistakes of a wine list

**March 11<sup>th</sup>:** Interview with Gary Ahlgren from Le Vieux Lausanne restaurant

- Definition of the criteria taken into consideration by the restaurateur when creating a wine list

**March 15<sup>th</sup>:** Interview with Gildas L'Hostis, Senior Wine Lecturer at EHL

- Additional requirements of a wine menu

**March 16<sup>th</sup>:** Final collection of the online survey results

**March 21<sup>st</sup>:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview at EHL with Mr. Fefin

- Model validation
- Correction of ambiguous criteria.

The association of secondary data, the online survey, and the interviews of wine experts helped to optimize the quality of the wine list rating system. The goal was to build a complete and coherent model, while considering limitations, in bringing together customers and restaurateurs around the common values of wine.



### Assessment tool

The model itself has been constructed via an excel sheet and is composed of sixteen closed questions with unequal coefficients (Figure 1). Once all the assessment tool questions are answered, the result is automatically delivered. The best grade is 20/20. There are three distinctions: a one bottle certificate (12-14 pts), two bottles (15-17 pts), and three bottles certificate (18-20 pts). This system of points and bottles could be compared to the Gault&Millau four "toques" and points model.

Among the sixteen questions, nine are worth 1 point if the answer is "yes", while seven count as 1.5 points. These seven questions are more valuable as they relate to the most frequently raised criteria in the survey. Gathering 24%, 21%, and 18% of respondents' answers, the region, the price, and the grape variety are the most critical aspects of a wine list (Figure 2). Another relevant aspect is the clarity of the menu (Figure 3).

# RESULTS & ANALYSIS



The results of this business paper have been found using the Excel tool created to assess Swiss

restaurants' wine lists. Out of a sample of twelve restaurants graded differently by the Gault&Millau guide, the model has proven to be successful in assessing the wine lists and comparing the grading with the one given by Gault&Millau. Indeed, the research is particularly interesting as it shows, with a correlation of 0.3 (Figure 4), that the grades given by the wine list assessment tool are not significantly linked to the grades provided by Gault&Millau. The two restaurants that illustrate this result best are the "957 Grill" and the "Brasserie Suesswinkel," which both have 12/20 points at Gault&Millau while being top performers in the wine list classification with a grade of 18/20 (Figure 4).

Looking closer at the results, with a median of 17 out of 20 (Figure 4), the restaurants chosen received, on average, very satisfying grades. It can be explained by the fact that the restaurants of the sample are classified by Gault&Millau, which proves they all answer to strict qualitative criteria.

When analyzing the results of the restaurant that ranked the lowest on the wine list scale, "La Vache Qui Vole" has mainly lost points due to the format of the menu rather than its content. Indeed, the bistro missed to respond to criteria such as "The local winemakers are clearly highlighted on the menu," "the menu is clearly divided by regions," "the wine menu is free of spelling/typo mistakes" and finally, "the wine list design is aligned with the restaurant ambiance." Considering that those criteria are important for the consumer (Figure 3) and rather easy to improve, "La Vache Qui Vole" could increase its current score of 12/20 to a 17/20 by improving these few previously stated points.

Regarding the most successful restaurant, "Là-Haut" and "Talvo de Dalsass" stand out from the sample mainly in offering diversified wine lists in terms of grapes, vintages, and vineyard regions. That said, not only the content of their lists is exhaustive, but the wines are clearly organized by colors, by regions, and put forward the local soils. Another important criterion from the customers' standpoint is the price (Figure 2), and the winner restaurants managed to have prices aligned with the meal offering.

# MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The future implications of this rating system are relatively broad. Indeed, this wine list performance scale can represent a real asset for the development of the gastronomy sector. In one hand, according to the survey (Figure 5), customers would be influenced by the establishments' wine list rating while choosing a place to eat. In the other hand, restaurant owners could use their rating as an asset to attract new customers in the same way as they use their Gault&Millau or Michelin rating.



In order to implement such a system, collaborating with existing company like Vivino, which already offers its users an interactive platform for rating, represents a real opportunity (Vivino, 2022). Indeed, the development of a new facet of the application would allow users to access a register of restaurants whose wine list has been rated and thus to choose the best destination for their next meal. It also seems possible that customers could give feedback on an establishment' wine list in the same way they rate the wines they drink today. Moreover, restaurant owners could also consult customers' opinions on their wine list in order to improve in the future.

Another possible partnership would be to join forces with a restaurant rating organization already in place, such as Gault&Millau (Hostis, 2022).

Indeed, one could imagine that during the rating of the restaurant by the culinary experts, a wine expert could be rating the wine list. The result would be two ratings: the first one on the dishes and the second one on the wine list. Both results could then be included in the Gault&Millau guide, which would simplify the search for information for consumers.

Finally, one could consider a last implementation of the rating system by developing an independent referencing and dedicated platforms system. Although this solution would allow more room for future development, it would be more expensive to implement. In addition, this option would possibly be hindered by the fact that the branding of the rating system would have to be built from the ground up rather than adhering to an existing system (Hostis, 2022).



# CONCLUSION

**T**hanks to this business paper, it was proven that the correlation between the Gault&Millau scores and the wine list scores were not strongly correlated, only 0.30. On the other hand, the overall average of our sample obtained for the wine list is relatively high (17/20). Moreover, some criteria are more important for consumers than others when trying to evaluate a restaurant's wine menu. The survey that was carried out highlights five points that, according to the customers, are most important in obtaining a good score:

- Region
- Price
- Grape variety
- Wine-food pairing
- Organization of the menu

Developing such a model would be an improvement for the gastronomy industry as it would be a win-win exchange between professionals and customers. The restaurant owners could advertise their restaurants by highlighting their wine list rating results. The customer would no longer go to the restaurant exclusively for the food served but for the quality of the wine list as well. After all, the food offered should ideally match the wine list, or vice-versa.

As of now, it was decided to validate the model with the help of Mr. Fefin. Still, to further validate this experimental tool, it would be essential to create a questionnaire to test it on consumers. This questionnaire would function according to the following steps:

- The research team would first rate several wine lists using the model that has been developed.
- In the questionnaire, the respondent would have the possibility to compare two wine lists and score them
- Cross-referenced questions should be created. This would allow the answers to be related and to identify any links between them. For example
  - First: compare wine list A with B
  - Then compare B with C
  - And finally, A with C

On a final note, Mr. L'Hostis underlined the importance of social media to create such a tool:

"It would be essential to rely on and use social media to develop such a product. Nowadays, more and more amateurs are becoming experts and their opinions, as consumers, count."





# APPENDICES

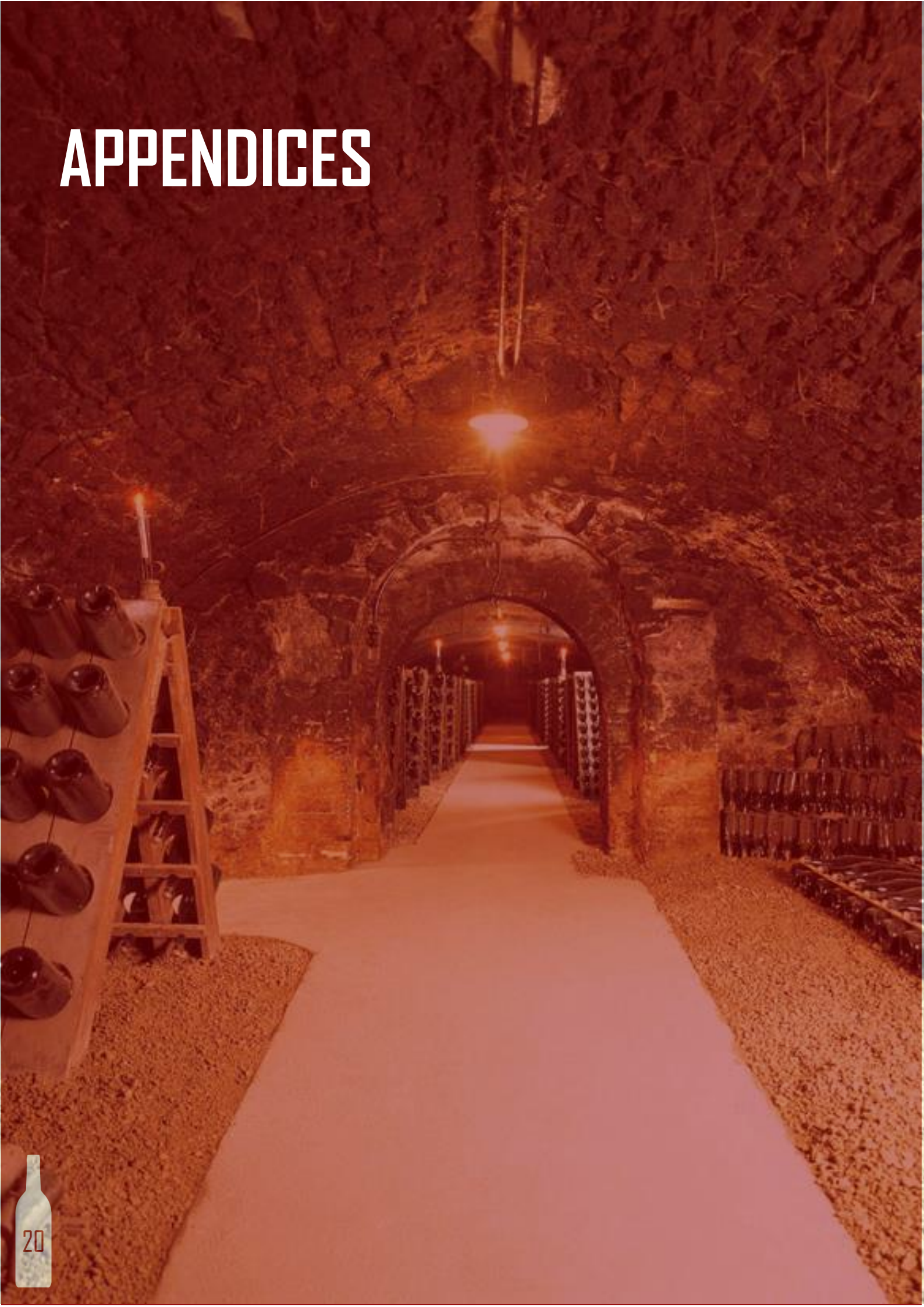




Figure 1: Example of the Assessment Tool:





 <b>Rating for wine menu</b>		Score
1. How many types of wine are available on the menu (red, white, rosé, sparkling, sweet)	5	1
2. Does your wine menu provide two or more winemakers of your canton?	Yes	1.5
3. Are local winemakers clearly highlighted on the menu?	Yes	1.5
4. Is the wine menu diversified in terms of regions or countries?	Yes	1
5. Is there New World wines offered on the menu?	Yes	1
6. Is the wine menu diversified in terms of grapes?	Yes	1.5
7. Is the wine menu diversified in terms of vintages?	Yes	1.5
8. Is there at least one prestigious wine available on the menu ?	Yes	1
9. Are there biodynamic/biologic/natural/demeter wines suggested on the menu?	No	0
10. Have any of your winemakers been ranked among the 150 best winemakers in Switzerland by Gault et Millau?	Yes	1
11. Are the prices of the wines aligned with the prices of the dishes offered by the restaurant?		
12. Is the wine menu clearly divided by the colors of the wines?	Yes	1.5
13. Is the wine menu clearly divided by regions?	Yes	1.5
14. Are the vineyard, the vintage, the appellation and the price of the wine available on the menu?	Yes	1
15. Is the wine menu free of spelling/typo mistakes ?	No	0
16. Is the wine list design aligned with the restaurant ambiance ?	Yes	1
		Grade
Score Results		18
12-14	15-17	18-20
		
-	-	congratulation !

Figure 2: Survey's answers "In a restaurant, how would you choose your wine?"

Criteria	Bistro	Gastro	Total	Percentages
Price	55	42	97	21%
Vintage	8	22	30	6%
Grape variety	45	40	85	18%
Region	62	53	115	24%
Description/Story telling	10	26	36	8%
Wine-food pairing	35	59	94	20%
Design of the list	8	5	13	3%
		total	470	100%

Figure 3: Survey's answers "What do you like the most in the presentation/organization of a wine list?"

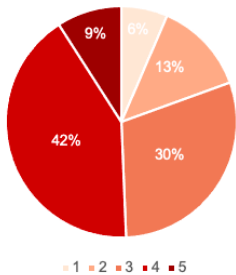
What do you like the most in the presentation/organisation of a wine list?
Region
Clarity and precision
Story telling
Diversity
Design/Easiness of comprehension
Description
Classification by colour
Food pairing
Suggestions
Classified by biodynamic or not

Figure 4: Results of the sample grading

RESTAURANTS	Wine list grades	Gault&Millau grades	Differences
VS-La vache qui vole	12	12	0
GE-La maison rouge	13	13	0
GE-Le Cigalon	15	17	-2
VS-Pas de l'Ours	16	18	-2
GE-La Micheline	17	14	3
GR-Da Mulin	17	15	2
VD-L'Hotel de Ville Crissier	17	19	-2
VD-957 Grill	18	12	6
GR-Brasserie Sueszwinkel	18	12	6
VS-The Omnia	18	15	3
VD-Là-Haut	19	16	3
GR-Talvo de Dalsass	19	18	1

Correlation 0.30  
Median grade of the wine lists 17

Figure 5: Survey's answer "how much would you be influenced, in choosing a restaurant, by a wine list grading system" (on a scale from 1 to 5)



# REFERENCES





## Interviews

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