

Fork in the road: Gabrielle Waxman

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Galatoire's Gabrielle Waxman is the restaurant's first wine director. She also helped blend its first private-label chardonnay. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

This is Part III of a four-part series that profiles millennial Tulane alumni in New Orleans' restaurant industry. Today's installment: Gabrielle Waxman (B '08).

Gabrielle Waxman is as surprised as anyone by the career she has uncorked. She is the first-ever wine director for the iconic Galatoire's Restaurant and Galatoire's 33 Bar & Steak, on Bourbon Street in the French Quarter, and Galatoire's Bistro in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

She attributes her success to "luck and a little bit of talent," plus mentoring by a Tulane alumnus.

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Gabrielle Waxman

Originally Waxman was in the A. B. Freeman School of Business five-year program, but she called

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her mother back home in Long Island, New York, saying tearfully that a career as a certified public accountant was not for her.

Waxman traveled to Australia, New Zealand and Thailand. She worked in a café and picked blueberries. She taught English in Costa Rica for a while.

But as she perused wine selections in grocery stores, she realized that teaching was not her passion or calling. And the “unquantifiable” lure of New Orleans brought her back.

When Waxman went into Galatoire’s to interview for a position on the wait staff, she met with a panel of top brass including Bill Kearney (A&S ’84), who was CEO and managing partner. She got the plum assignment.

“It was such an honor to be hired as a waiter at Galatoire’s. People have waited tables there for 40 or 50 years,” Waxman says. But soon Kearney envisioned Waxman in a new position.

“I’ve always had a passion for wine, and Bill has a passion for wine and food. He saw that in me, and he has been a great mentor,” Waxman says.

She fits in smoothly with Galatoire’s philosophy of providing impeccable service to make a dining experience memorable.

“Working in the food industry, there is a universal truth: No matter who you are, you’ve got to eat, and people want to feel good. Food has to be good, but people come back to Galatoire’s for the service. It’s all about creating dining experiences for people,” says Waxman. Once a young man on a date asked Waxman for a “red chardonnay”—an oxymoron. She asked the man a few questions, and using her mind-reading skills, she said, “Let me bring you something that I think you will enjoy.”

Waxman is a certified sommelier through the international Court of Master Sommeliers. She meets weekly with wine representatives and orders wines and updates the 26-page wine list monthly.

As Galatoire’s representative, last year she met with a winery in Santa Barbara, California, to blend the first private-label chardonnay on the restaurant’s wine list. She describes Galatoire’s chardonnay as “aged in neutral oak for body and structure, with bright acidity.” Blending and tasting, Waxman and the vintner designed the wine to appeal to all palates.

“Italian winemaker Michele Satta told me, ‘Some wines are good, some wines are bad, and some wines are meant to evoke emotions’—and that’s what I try to do. It’s a fun thing to be a part of,” says Waxman, who keeps wine notes in her dog-eared, 3-by-5-inch spiral-bound notebook.

“My sister is a doctor. She’ll keep you alive, but I will make life worth living,” Waxman declares.