

## **Wilma van Grinsven- Padberg: profession: professional olive oil taster and EVOO Sommelier**

Wilma van Grinsven – Padberg is an established olive oil sommelier. She is one of the first professionals to acquire this qualification, still little known to consumers, and she has used these studies to make it a profession.

Wilma educates professionals and consumers in the correct use and consumption of Extra virgin olive oil. In particular, her lessons are aimed at future chefs on whom she aims for a widespread dissemination of EVOO culture. Wilma supports the thesis that in the restaurant, just as the customer pays for the wine and water, the same must be done for EVOO. According to Wilma, a menu card should be dedicated to the EVOO product, just like wine.

Let's find out more about Wilma from her words.

### **1) When did you start approaching the world of EVOO and when did you decide to specialize in the subject to make it a profession?**

When I became responsible for the total Mediterranean assortment of an international retail chain in 2007, it was right up my alley. However, there was one product group that I knew very little about and did not understand the differences in taste: olive oil. I visited as many producers as I could, but I still did not understand why one olive oil was delicious and the other was not. During my search for knowledge I stumbled upon the oldest olive oil school in the world O.N.A.O.O. in Imperia. If you pass the technical course, in other words do you have a good nose, then you can finish the school and nowadays that takes 2 years (in my time 3 years). This school is not only for curious people like me, but especially for olive oil producers. You learn to recognize by smell and taste what in the process went right and wrong. You need this knowledge to be able to give an organoleptic qualification to the olive oil. Is it extra virgin, virgin, ordinary or lampante? And you understand that the better the quality, the higher the yield for the producer will be. In 2018, I passed cum laude and have been allowed to call myself a "professional olive oil taster" ever since. Say that out loud when someone asks you what your profession is (smiley). In 2017, Olive Oil Times by Curtis Cord hosted the first-

ever olive oil sommelier training at the International Culinary Center in New York and after successful finishing this course I've been using that title as my professional name ever since. It "bites" better and it piques curiosity. O.N.A.O.O. teaches you what went wrong with 'dirty' olive oil and the sommelier course teaches you to distinguish good olive oil from fantastic. I can heartily recommend both courses. The nice thing is that the sommelier course lasts only a week, making it a fantastic gift to yourself.

**2) Once you have obtained the title of Olive oil sommelier, how did you use it for your professional purposes?**

Nowadays I spend 100% of my time on olive oil. I train chefs, I teach students but also groups of interested people but the most important thing I do is to train the Dutch (and Belgium) olive oil panel. At the beginning of this year, the Ministry presented me to the EU and they presented me to the IOC (International Olive Council) in Madrid and in February I founded the Olive Oil Institute together with partners. The Olive Oil Institute also has a laboratory with an e-nose. This electronic nose has a so-called perfect and defect screener. 'This nose' knows after measurement if it is an extra virgin olive oil, or not. If there are no defects found then the olive oil is organoleptic tested by a panel of at least 8 people. The panel works with a 100-point system and according to the height of the score a hallmark is awarded. This certification applies to a specific lot (batch) and gives the consumer certainty about the quality. Later this year the database will be online and both buyers and consumers will be able to check what they (want to) buy. For smaller producers in particular, this is a great opportunity to become visible. I do not think that mainstream suppliers like what we're doing because the bad olive oils are going to disappear from the shelves. As long as there are no quality marks on the bottles: go to specialized shops or if you have to go to a supermarket: buy the most expensive bottle. Because one thing is certain: good olive oil is never cheap. It is not called liquid gold for nothing.

**3) You are the author of the book "The Olive oil Masterclass. Lessons from a professional olive oil sommelier ". Can you briefly present the topics covered in your book?**

When I had completed both courses (then - December 2018 there were only 2 people in the world - me and someone in the USA) I was asked by publisher Lannoo to write a book about olive oil. I never thought I would ever do this but it was not at all difficult. I really enjoy writing and I just wrote down all the questions I ever asked myself and gave the answers. I think there are very few questions left if you have read my book. And of course I'll finish with some special dishes where olive oil plays the main role. I wrote the book in Dutch and it has been translated into English, French and German. By now they are all in 2nd printing and I am quite a bit proud of that. And since half a year my 2nd book is available and it is called "The Mediterranean Diet". Unlike the title suggests, this is not a diet book but it tells the

story of the Mediterranean way of living and of course olive oil is the common thread. I hope that this book will also be translated.

- 4) There is still little knowledge of the EVOO world. While the wine is respected, the consumer believes she/he can buy any Extra virgin olive oil and that this choice does not make a difference. Can you explain why this is not the case and why "making olive oil" requires complex skills and methods even more than wine?

Back in the day, about 50-60 years ago, you ordered a glass of red or white wine. Mentioning grape varieties or wanting to drink wine from a specific region was still almost unheard of. Knowledge about grape varieties was sporadic. Nowadays, you can hardly imagine that. I don't know all the details about making good wine but I do know that making a good quality olive oil is a true art. Believe me when I say that it takes craftsmanship to make a good quality olive oil. The right time of pruning, the condition of the soil, the weather conditions, the time of harvesting, not to mention what needs to be done at the press to ensure quality. To mention one aspect: olives that have been off the tree for more than 24 hours and have not yet been pressed: this can never produce an extra virgin quality olive oil. It is true that I also did a Master Miller course at E.S.A.O. school in Spain but making a good olive oil is much more than making the machines work properly. You could write a book about it...

- 5) The average consumer, who loves to consume a good EVOO but is often unable to choose between the offers on the market, how can she/he defend herself/himself and select a true olive oil?

This is a very difficult question and probably the most important of all. If only you could trust the label that would make life a lot easier. The only truth is that a good extra virgin costs money. Cheap good olive oil does not exist. Maybe this will happen some day when evolution has done its work. It would also help if all restaurants served good olive oil. Now it is often on the table for nothing and so it may not cost much. What if they would mention the olive oil choices on the menu with the accompanying story and just start charging money for it. After all, per centiliter, this is the most expensive ingredient of the entire meal and why get it for free. That is asking for 'junk', Of course there are restaurants that do it right but these are still too few in number. And a quality mark for all bottles on the shelves in supermarkets. In the Netherlands and Belgium we are going to try to get that done. A quality mark is a guarantee of quality. There will also be a distinction between guaranteed extra virgin and a bronze, silver and gold label. Then you know as a customer what you buy. I can't wait for that to happen. Another thing that should disappear is the term 'mild olive oil'. This product is often bought by novice users who think they are buying a healthy product. They do not know that this is always a refined olive oil with only a few drops of extra virgin quality. This is pure deception.

6) What is missing in the world of EVOO oil, according to your experience to establish itself definitively with respect to the industrial product and acquire the same prestige as wine?

It will never be quite the same. You empty a bottle of wine in one evening and that will never happen with olive oil. There are so few people who know how a good olive oil should taste simply because it is not available everywhere. The consumer will have to see that the olive oil they buy has been tested by an organoleptic panel. I do not see this happening for the time being. Unfortunately.