

# A Jewel in the Sea

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Atlantis is the jewel that appropriately sits on the top crescent of the revolutionary man-made island The Palm, at the furthest point on Dubai's shoreline. Inspired by the lost city that mystically rises out of the Arabian Sea, this one-of-a-kind resort opened its doors in September 2008 and realises the vision of its founder and owner Sol Kerzner of Kerzner International to 'create amazing experiences and everlasting memories for guests'.





Staggering numbers describe Atlantis, The Palm. Spread over a whopping 460,000 square metres with a two km beachfront, the property of 1544 keys cost US\$ 1.5 billion to build. An army of more than 3,000 manage almost 300,000 guests from 227 countries and their 513,600 pieces of luggage every year. Five celebrity chefs from around the world contribute to the 29 restaurants, lounges and bars that serve 4.4 million diners annually at the resort.

The beverage program at Atlantis turns over US\$ 70 million in revenue. Champagne and wine form a key pillar of this program, contributing close to US\$ 30 million – the geographical diversity of 13 countries is presented in almost 700 labels. Around 220,000 bottles of wine passed through the doors of the resort in the last 12 months, of which nearly 41,000 were bottles of Champagne to support the Champagne List of 71 labels.

Earlier this year, FINE accepted an invitation to explore the World of Atlantis to discover its wine and champagne program and experience first-hand its evolution over the nine years since we were there for a family holiday.

The tall and striking coloured blown glass sculpture made by American artist, Dale Chihuly, rising below the grand dome

and a series of hand-painted murals by Spanish artist, Albino Gonzalez on the arched ceilings welcome all guests to the Atlantis experience. Our check-in is completed at the Royal Majlis over a steaming cup of Arabian coffee and the guest relations executive offered to show us to our lodgings. This guide is an absolute must – the property is a maze and print maps have been replaced by an app, so the phone battery better be charged!

Atlantis, The Palm is an award-winning culinary destination like no other in the world. As short stay residents, we were only able to touch the tip of the iceberg – there are but three meals in the day! The Communications Team put together our itinerary

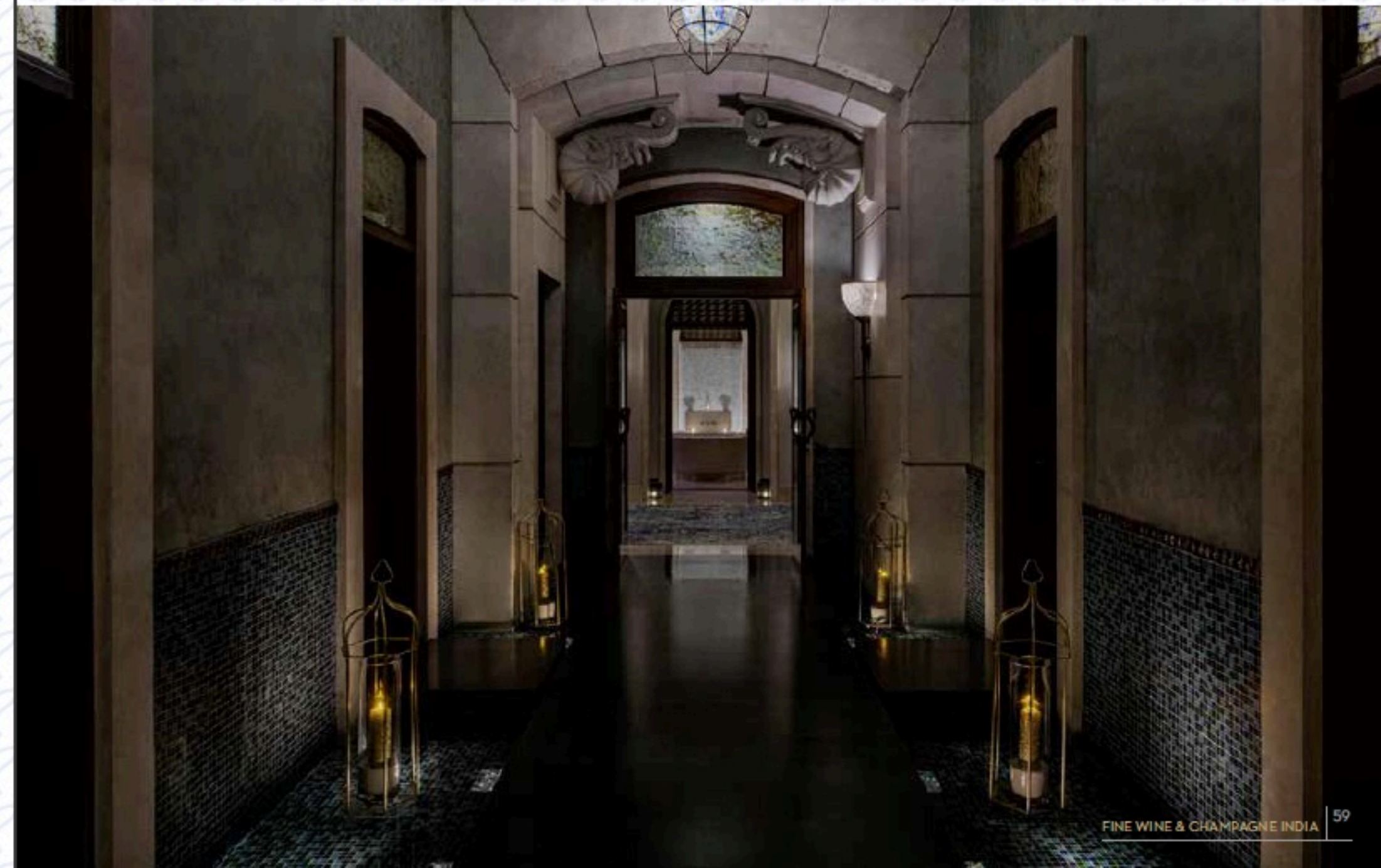


that showcased Atlantis' gems, got us across the length and breadth of the property and gave us a flavour of the delights on offer.

The Imperial Club is the dedicated lounge that, we found, pandered to every possible fancy of guests with its rather long list of round the clock services. We indulged in

the lavish spread for Afternoon Tea before heading to the Sunset Terrace overlooking the Arabian Sea to soak in the multi-hued sky with a flute of the house champagne, Moët & Chandon, as the sun went down on the horizon.

Jimmy Valentine, Director of Beverage for a little over a year, was born in Dubai, raised in Hong Kong, studied







in Great Britain, and experienced nightlife in Macau for about a decade before he circled back to 'where everything really began' – Dubai. He shared some insights, "Our beverage offer is very strong, despite the challenges presented by religious beliefs and the controlled import structure in the region. At Atlantis, The Palm, we have captured exceptionally well the growth of the hospitality business as Dubai established itself as the number one tourism destination globally. I truly believe that the sustainability of our business is in value – we offer quality and experience at a price that it is valued at. We are being globally recognised for what we do and this is important for us as an iconic brand."

"Our guests are at the heart of everything we do. They are more discerning and know what they like, but are willing to be a little more adventurous and experiment with newer beverages – even if only at the premium end. We are responsive and our focus is on that segment."

We gathered that Atlantis are serious about their wine offer. Gordana Josovic, Wine Manager, was born and raised in Serbia and followed her passion for wine to move to San Francisco to take up a glorious career in wine and wine education. She paused her study for the Master

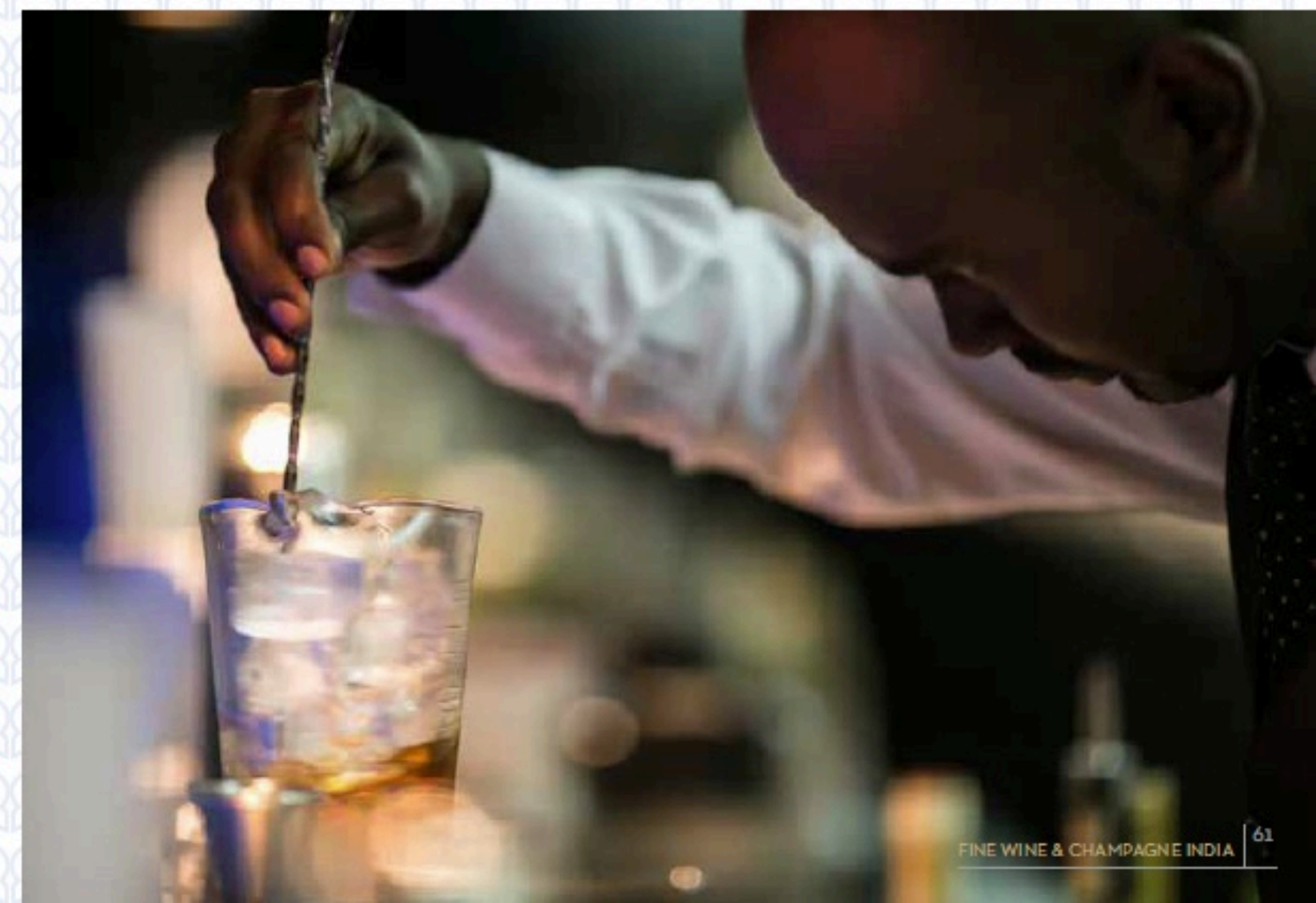
Sommelier qualification to be the custodian of the Atlantis wine program. With a clean slate to work with, she describes herself as a kid in a candy store. "My wish

list is for my wine list to be diverse; represent unknown novelties from small batch winemakers; feature organic, biodynamic, even vegan wines; and identify natural wines which are true to the category. I am

committed to support sustainable and fair trade. An intensive education and training program for the team has been initiated. So, a lot of things are coming into play to realise our wine philosophy."

About a year ago, there were two sommeliers on the property. Eight more sommeliers (from France, Serbia, Indonesia, India, Russia, Australia, Croatia and the Czech Republic) were hired, and by the end of this year, there will be 36. Gordana is pleased. "The impact showed up rather quickly, not just in sales and the not-so-well-known wines just sitting on our lists, but in the

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*Atlantis, The Palm is all about staggering numbers*  
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guest's experience, which is being transformed by the knowledge shared by the sommelier."

In deference to the local culture, the team created a Zero Alcohol offer for those who don't drink because of their belief or because they don't fancy a drink at the time. The team proudly deliver a truly first class experience without alcohol – some of the pairing menus are based on zero alcohol drinks, several of which are priced at par with their alcohol counterparts. "This is super good for



business. We are able to deliver an experience to create a better memory, so that guests come back and experience more..."

Our immersive dining experience at Ossiano had to be the highlight of our stay. We descended the flowing spiral staircase, and stepped into the grandeur of the dining space which gives diners a private view of the Ambassador Lagoon. Sharks, stingrays and snappers glide past tables bathed in the lustre of Bernardaud Campanule Lamps. Chef Gregoire







Berger brings to his cuisine childhood memories of his family home in Brittany, that looked out on the ocean. Inspired by flavours from his extensive travels around the world since the age of 16, Gregoire pays homage to the seas in his showcase 11-wave tasting menu – ‘Metanoia’. The food presentation was on a different level – conch shells carved from ice, moulds of the chef’s hands complete with the wedding band, cubes that captured seaweeds and corals, clockfaces where time stands still... Each dish was thoughtfully paired with a wine and a few non-alcoholic ‘cocktails’ that we opted for. Sommelier Danijela Tesic guided us through an elaborate wine journey and poured Champagne Blanc de Blancs & Rose, Alsace Gewurztraminer,

Loire Valley Sancerre, Burgundy Puligny-Montrachet, Yamaguchi Sake, Stellenbosch Pinot Noir, Florina Assyrtiko and Mosel Reisling into our glasses – she managed to up our ethereal experience.

On Sunday, we were booked at the Dubai outpost of the legendary Chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa for the extremely sought-after weekend brunch – this unique offering is a first for Nobu worldwide.

This was our chance to indulge in Nobu’s world famous signature dishes – the black cod miso, yellowtail sashimi with jalapeno, wagyu on hot rocks, soft shell crab rolls... The 172-cover restaurant was bursting at its seams. The chefs joined the team to cheer us in with a loud greeting “irasshaimase” (welcome – come on in). We trusted the

team to propose what we should eat with a request for smaller portions, which was somewhat frowned upon. The Japanese dishes with Peruvian influences were made in the very busy open kitchens and were enjoyed thoroughly with the champagne that didn’t end in our flutes.

An Atlantis experience wouldn’t be complete without a meal at the award-winning Hakkasan, where traditional authentic Cantonese cuisine is reimagined for the modern day. Carved wooden screens, rich jewel tones and flickering candles evoke the glamour of the London flagship, whose doors were first opened by

Alan Yau in 2001. The dim sum platter (with gold leaf and truffle garnishings) and the crispy duck salad are classics. Some select dishes only appear on the menu at Hakkasan Dubai at Atlantis – we chose the wok-seared tiger prawns with white asparagus, the lychee lobster with yuzu pearl and couldn’t resist the milk chocolate hazelnut parfait with warm chocolate sauce – no regrets. After announcing our arrival with champagne, we savoured the delightful cocktails imagined by the very talented bar team – the signature Hakkatini or the Hibitini would be worth a visit on their own.

We might have carried back at least a few extra pounds, but all our experiences were memorable – an effort was made by each member of the team to anticipate our expectations and contribute, in whichever way they could, to fulfil the founders’ vision. Can the competition even catch up, we wondered.

Rebecca Hall, Director of Communications admits, “We are all trying to sell hotel rooms and put guests on seats in restaurants. But Atlantis is unique – it is a grand brand, it is prime location and



Gordana Josovic, Wine Manager



Jimmy Valentine, Director of Beverage



it is very welcoming and rather compelling. Nobu Matsuhisa, Heston Blumenthal, Gordon Ramsay, José Andrés all chose us as their Dubai locations for a reason.”

Occupancy remained amazingly buoyant throughout the pandemic. Rebecca explained, “The British love Dubai and Atlantis. With the Indians, they are the backbone revenue generators. But our large loyal local base and very international guest mix kept us rather busy throughout the global lockdowns.”

Jimmy shared with us that the dynamic of the business changed in the pandemic. “The luxury champagne market has completely flipped on its head. Dubai is big on sparkling wines. People love bubbles. Champagne is

very popular. The Maisons and the Champenois came over to sell their champagne on an exclusive basis – no more. The strain on logistics of almost everything started to show in supply chain disruptions. We built on our relationships – it helped that we are large buyers – we leveraged this to get what our guests demanded. And where we still couldn’t, we nudged our guests to be a little more experimental. The sparkling wines of the world got a chance to make an impact – it may not be Champagne but it’s a refreshing bubbly.”

Team Atlantis are very excited about the new 795 key development next door – Atlantis The Royal. This is being touted as the next big thing in Dubai – it is set to redefine luxury for the region. Under wraps is probably the biggest wine project in the region – an



incredible plan to be the beacon of wine. Jimmy and Gordana let us in, “The wine offer in Dubai is plain vanilla. Our colleagues who wanted to change that, tried, found it difficult, got frustrated and gave up. But, we are rather stubborn and have challenged status quo so that we can deliver what our guests want – even if this is something that has never been done in Dubai before. Nothing comes easy.”

“Our beverage program will be the best in the business – maybe even worthy of the first in the Middle East Northern Africa Wine Spectator’s Grand Award. By the end of next year, the beverage revenue will be hitting \$100 million. Against all odds, we are attempting to import an additional 1,600 labels into the region. So, we are set for an exciting journey ahead and look forward to reaping the fruits of our very hard work.” 🍷

*Some weeks after our visit, the much anticipated inaugural edition of the Michelin Guide 2022 was released in Dubai. All the restaurants we dined at, made it. Ossiano and Hakkasan were awarded the coveted one-star. Nobu got an honourable mention. Danijela Tescic received the Sommelier Award. Our recommendations hit home!! Atlantis, The Palm became the most Michelin awarded destination in Dubai.*

