

JULY 2020

PRESS RELEASE

BERNARD  LOISEAU®

2 STAR RESTAURANT « LA CÔTE D'OR » IN SAULIEU WELCOMES ITS NEW HEAD SOMMELIER, ABIBA BOULAHDJEL

ABIBA; A SELF-TAUGHT LADY WHO IS DRIVEN ON BY HER PASSION FOR WINE

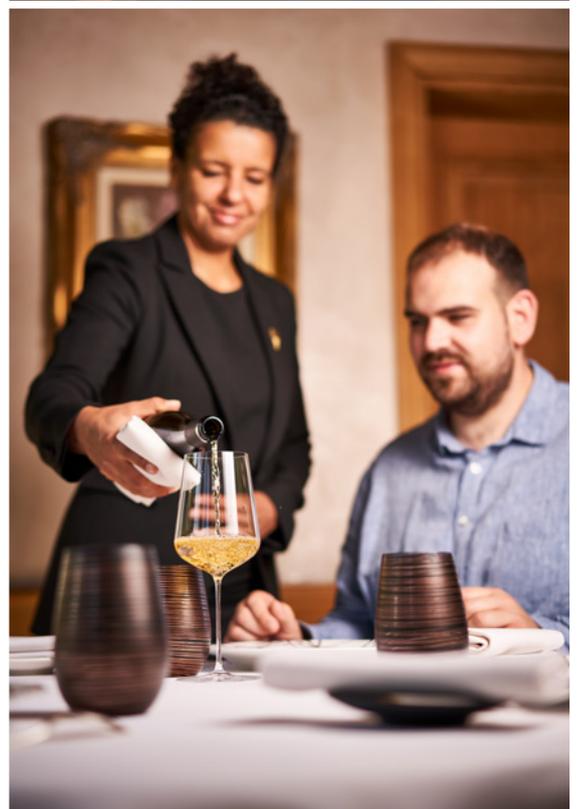
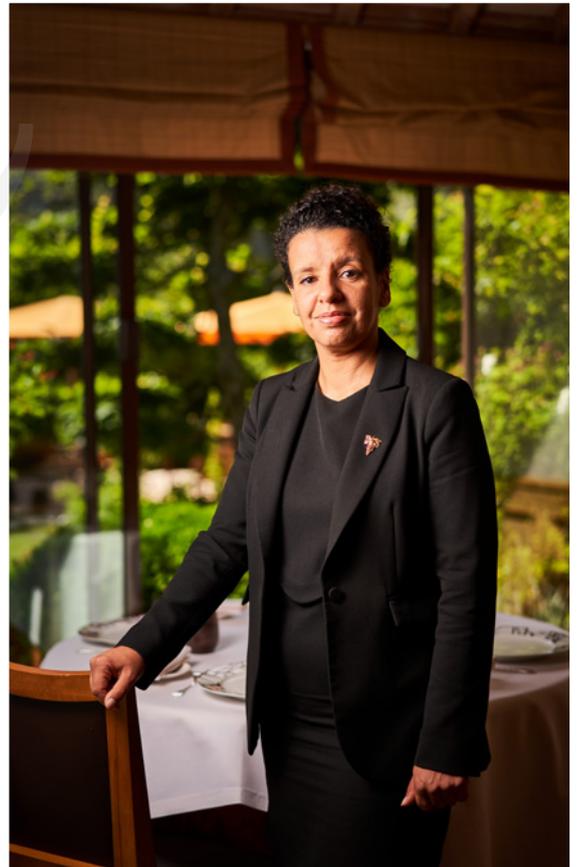
Abiba, who was born in Hyeres in the Var, is 43 years of age. Aged 22, she discovered wine and it proved to be a revelation for this qualified biochemist. Invited to dinner by the family of a close friend, she tried wine for the first time because she didn't want to seem rude: she was taken aback and realised that, in her own words, « **this wasn't alcohol; this was art...** ». It hit Abiba like a thunderbolt and she began a lifelong journey to explore her new-found love by reading, tasting, learning about the terroirs, exploring the history of wine...

She set off to Dublin in order to brush up on her English and there she discovered a brand new culture, remaining there for six and a half years. She worked as a barmaid at the chic and cutting edge Cocoon Bar owned by former Formula 1 driver Eddy Irvine. Abiba stood out among the seven barmaids that worked at the Cocoon Bar and managed to stake her claim as one of **the best known barmaids in Dublin**.

Fascinated by trees and nature, Abiba decided to go back to studying **environmental science**. In 2003 she earned her National Diploma in Horticulture from Killester College in Dublin and continued her studies by taking a BSC at the prestigious Writtle College in the United Kingdom. Her thesis on dead wood in the primary forest of Białowieża in Poland (UNESCO World Heritage site) led her to Warsaw. There she worked for a year alongside the eminent entomologist Professor Jerzy Gutowski on the dynamics of Białowieża Forest. She followed this up with a **Masters' in biology**, specialising in the taxonomy (living organisms) and systematics of microscopic fungi and subsequently became a researcher at the University of Warsaw, making notable contributions to a number of scientific publications.

Abiba was then still pursuing her two loves, wine and nature, but was reluctant to turn her passion into a profession. She liked to organise discussions around wine with her colleagues in the biology department and her friends all pushed her to try her hand in this field. This proved to be her **second lightbulb moment**.

Abiba gave herself one year to break into the wine world: she then met someone who would become her « **first mentor** », **Piotr Kamecki**, the country's leading sommelier and a finalist in both the Best



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Sommelier of Europe 1998 competition and Best Sommelier of the World 2000 competition. She was introduced to everyone, sampled wines alongside all the greats, became immersed in the wine world and perfected her art.

At that moment, she made her choice between the worlds of wine and science: **sommellerie won the day**. This was a second revelation for Abiba: someone who is so generous and touched by **human emotion** was completely bowled over by a **profession that is so client-focused**. She realised that she had found her rightful place. As head sommelier at the Rozbrat restaurant in Warsaw, which is a haunt of politicians and actors, she won what she likes to call her « first trophy »: there she realised that her wines could tell her clients a story, and that they would carry this story with them. She returned to Ireland and settled in one of her favourite counties, Donegal; « a county that remains in its wild state and in which I feel in harmony with nature ».

She had reached a certain point in her life and decided that, following a number of wonderful experiences working in some of Ireland's great hotels, she would return to France, which she considers to be the « Kingdom of Wine ». Olivier Rollinger welcomed her to the restaurant « Le Coquillage » (2 Stars) under the tutelage of Emmanuel Ackerer, her « second mentor ». He would take her under his wing and bestow upon her **a taste for excellence**. She has a distinctly Anglo-Saxon mentality, but here she would rediscover her feel for France. Burgundy and all its treasures proved a strong attraction for her: she joined the team at « La Cote Saint Jacques » in Joigny (2 Stars), staying 3 and a half years. She fell for the charms of the Burgundian terroir and she feels that the Climats of Burgundy are « a miracle of nature ». With her background in biology and her horticultural qualifications, Abiba perfectly understands all the dimensions of wine. When she learned that the Le Relais Bernard Loiseau was looking for a head sommelier at the restaurant « La Cote d'Or », she had her doubts but took a chance. Abiba was determined to honour this great man of French gastronomy.

Her wonderful sensitivity, her unique and extremely rich career path and her passion for the customer proved to be fabulous attributes that caught the eye of Dominique Loiseau (President) and Ahlame Buisard (COO): they gave her the opportunity to shine in this key role.

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CLOSED TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY



Thanks to her travels, Abiba also boasts a fine understanding of **foreign wines** and is also intrigued by **natural and bio-dynamic varieties** (so long as these are made expertly). She holds great store in meeting the wine-growers personally so that she can understand their personalities and learn their vision for wine. **As someone who was self-taught, and in view of her unique career path**, she approaches wine with **no preconceptions**. She loves to work blind with her clients, something that the ingeniously Oenoteca at « La Cote d'Or » allows her to do. Her natural curiosity has also led her to take an interest in cider, beer and spirits.

Abiba was immediately able to strike up a **wonderful partnership with Chef Patrick Bertron**: she loves his refined way with the flavours and produce of the Burgundian Terroir, his feel for the acidity or bitterness of certain dishes and his subtle touches of iodine.



Photo credits: Jonathan Thevenet

SOME KEY DATES:

- 2016 - 2019:** Relais et Chateaux La Côte Saint Jacques, Joigny, France
- 2015 - 2016:** Restaurant Le Coquillage Château Richeux, Saint-Meloir-des-Ondes, France
- 2014 - 2015:** Lough Eske Castle Hotel 5*, Co. Donegal, Ireland
- 2012 - 2013:** Restaurant Rozbrat 20, Warsaw, Poland
- 2007 - 2012:** Warsaw University (Masters' followed by thesis and work placement)
- 2004 - 2006:** Writtle College, UK (BSC Horticulture)
- 2003 - 2004:** Killester College, Dublin, Ireland (National Diploma in Horticulture)
- 2001 - 2003:** Restaurant/Bar Cocoon, Dublin, Ireland



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