

The Tim Smal Show – 8 April 2020 transcript

Audrey Delbarre, from La Petite Nénette, talks about wine and well-being.

Tim Smal (host): Hi everyone and welcome to the show. My name is Tim and my guest today is Audrey Delbarre from La Petite Nénette. Audrey is passionate about oenology, which is the study of wine. Audrey, welcome to the show.

Audrey Delbarre (guest): Thanks, Tim. And thank you for inviting me. I'm very happy to be here and share a bit of my story with all of you.

Tim: Wonderful. I'm glad to have you on the show today. Perhaps we could start off our conversation with you telling us a little bit about who you are and how you became interested in the world of wine.

Audrey: Yeah, of course. First of all, I'm French. I live in a wine country, which is very famous for wine. It's in our education and culture to drink wine quite regularly. But if you look at my professional career, I do not come from the wine industry at all. Because I used to work for a major pharmaceutical company for more than nine years, where I was in charge of procurement activities. So it was radically different from what I am doing today, because I used to develop market strategies, source suppliers and negotiate big contracts for the vaccines industry worldwide. I used to travel a lot and work with big companies as well, setting up strategy and project management with multi-cultural teams across the world.

And in 2017, I needed a change from this career and the “fast-paced, under-pressure” work environment. So I applied for a humanitarian mission for six months within my company and I got the chance to be one of the selected candidates. And I was deployed as a volunteer for an NGO named 'Care International' in Zambia in Southern Africa. And there I was working for a social enterprise and my purpose was to improve access to medicines for local Zambian people. This six-month experience made me see life differently. I received some answers to my big questions: “Why am I here? What is the purpose of my life?”

And while I was in Zambia, I registered to do some courses at The Cape Wine Academy in Cape Town. And I decided to take some courses and I passed the Certificate Course at the Cape Wine Academy. I learnt a lot about South Africa wines, because I didn't know South African wines at all – you know, French people drink a lot of French wine, but not a lot of wines from outside of the country. And just for the story – it's not very easy to find international wines within wine shops in France. So it was a really nice discovery for me, these South African wines. And I really fell in love with the country, with the people, with the beautiful landscape, with the climate conditions – which are amazing. And The Cape Wine Academy, which I really recommend, gives high quality courses. I really learnt a lot. And it was not easy, because I was the only French girl learning and studying in another language other than my mother tongue. And I had to get more familiar with some aromas and flavours which are very local. Some flowers, for example, do not exist in France – like “fynbos.” And it was really a nice discovery for me. And I loved it so much, that I decided to learn more about South African wines later on.

So one year later, I came back to South Africa and I volunteered at a wine farm in Stellenbosch, called 'Vredenheim' farm. They also have a cat park there and it was very family-orientated. And there I had a very nice role, because I was hosting clients, and also

French clients. I was giving them tours within the winery and the wine farm. And I was also teaching wine tasting techniques and explaining the food pairings with the wines in the restaurant. And I enjoyed it so much, that once I returned to France, I decided to quit my job and launch my business around well-being and wine workshops. Because when I was in Africa, I reworked the purpose of my life and I decided that I love human relationships and I love well-being. I worked a lot on psychology concepts around well-being. And I love wine. So I said, "Why not combine all these things by creating and developing workshops around wine and well-being." And this is how my company started last year.

Tim: So what I love about the workshops that you do, is that you combine wine with the concept of well-being. So, of course, when people drink wine, it helps them to relax. But now you're taking it a step further by introducing aspects of psychology - like activities in self-awareness, for example - to help people discover more about themselves. Can you tell me more about how that works.

Audrey: Yeah, sure. First of all, when I started the business and I said that "I'm creating well-being and wine workshops," a lot of people looked at me with big eyes – they were quite surprised. Because for them, well-being can not be compatible with the word "wine." But I say, "Why not?" Everything in this world, if you take it moderately, it not harmful for you. You just need to drink moderately. And this is what I teach in my workshops.

Sometimes we spend an hour just to drink one small glass of wine. Because we spend a lot of time on learning to listen to your body and to your five senses. So I use mindfulness practises and techniques around the eyes. We first work on the colours of the wine. Then we play also with touching some different fabrics to liase some typical wine with some typical fabrics. And we play with this. And we play with also the nose. I create some games for team-buildings around nose and aromas to recognise. I also created a game that I called "Olfactory Mastermind", which is memorising flavours in a certain order. And then you have to set up again the aromas in the right order in a team, and then you gain or lose points, and it's very entertaining for the group, and it creates a team-spirit among the people, while you're really working on your memory in your brain. Then after, only then you start tasting the wine.

So for the people who come here only for drinking wine – yes, you will drink wine, but at a very slow pace. And you will learn to develop each sense, one by one. And once you have the wine in your palate, we spend a lot of time working on how you feel, what are your emotions. I let people also express themselves, because it's also a way to gain confidence in yourself, to express yourself through words and emotions. Sometimes through poetry, sometimes with music - we can do wine and music pairings as well, to release emotions within the people. And with the food pairing, it's also another way to test the infinite combination of food parings with different flavours, like saltiness, sourness, sweetness, bitterness, umamis. And I also have created some workshops with the environment, like the... *[to be updated]*

So all these kinds of activities are tailored depending on what people want to develop in their mindfulness or well-being expectations.

Tim: So what you're doing essentially, is you're bringing the concept of mindfulness to the world of wine. And perhaps that is a new concept for people, because generally speaking, people tend to drink their wine too quickly or perhaps they drink too much. But they're not necessarily being mindful and present in the moment, in terms of connecting with the beverage in front of them and how it makes them feel internally.

Audrey: Yeah, I totally agree. And I used to be like that, I remember. Before I used to drink a bottle of wine quite quickly with friends, without paying attention to what I was feeling, without putting any words behind the flavours I could feel. And since I've been practising these techniques on myself, my relatives and friends, I've never drunk so slowly. Really – I consume the wine at a better pace. And I really study the wine behind the label – I want to understand the story of the winemaker behind the label. I want to get images in my brain of the places, of the vineyards, of the sunshine, of the weather conditions – to bring me more emotions while I'm drinking the wine. And I think that these workshops will help people to increase the quality of the experience that they have when they drink wine in the future.

According to the feedback I got so far, people now see a glass of wine differently after attending one of my workshops. They said that they spent more time analysing the wine, but analysing themselves as well. Because they see things differently afterwards. They can express their emotions, they can put words to their feelings. And they can also practise their memory. So it's also a good exercise for brain memory, to memorise flavours and aromas, because it's one of the more complex parts of our brains. Our nose is able to detect one billion different aromas compared to our eyes, which can detect one million different colours. So we can practise and practise everyday with our nose, and there is an infinite combination of possibilities of exploring aromas with our nose. Developing our self-awareness to better reload our batteries. I'm pretty sure it's helping us to also be more resilient in our continually changing and fast-paced environment.

Tim: So I have an interesting question for you: When I go to a wine festival, where there often over 100 different wines to try, I can feel a little bit overwhelmed, because there's such a huge selection – and of course, I want to try as many as I can. Is there any merit in trying to slow down and focus on just a handful of wines, instead of trying to get through as many as you can at the event?

Audrey: Yeah, I totally agree with what you are saying – it's not a marathon. And here, you just need to bear in mind, why you are here: You are at the festival for your own pleasure. You are here to have pleasure and enjoy the moment – enjoy the instant moment. If you want to enjoy the instant moment, don't rush like a competition – you are not in a competition. Indeed, there are so many wines displayed on the tables and you cannot drink everything.

If you really are an expert and looking for a specific wine – yes you will be tempted to try different wines. But then you will spit out and, I guess, you will be with your little book to take some notes to measure and assess each wine.

But if you are here for pleasure and spending a nice moment, then maybe try a couple of them – spit out on some of them and just select the ones that you really enjoy. And then take time to really discover the wine and the atmosphere around you – the environment will play a lot on the appreciation. The music, the weather, the conditions, the decoration – all of these factors will influence the pleasure you will have in your palate and in your brain, and will bring you some specific emotions that you will not be able to reproduce in another condition or environment. So taking notes also, or memorising some pictures of what you're tasting is also a great way to develop your self-awareness and your search for pleasure.

Tim: One of the most loved aspects of the wine industry is, of course, the travel. And you've been running wine and well-being workshops in many different countries all over

the world. What has the reception been like so far?

Audrey: Yeah, indeed. So I introduced myself to different wineries and companies offering, first of all, team-buildings – just to entertain the team and create a team-spirit. I also used to be a trainer in well-being within my previous company, and to give me more credibility, I wrote a book around this. And also attended a Buddhism retreat in Japan to really learn the techniques around mindfulness and meditation, which I combine now and use in my workshops. My business is quite recent, so I'm just starting and getting some contracts in different wine regions – in France, in Belgium. Because in Belgium there are also wineries now, as the climate is changing and also in Portugal. But I would love to develop that also in South Africa, like with the wine farm Vredenheim in Stellenbosch that I'm working with and I used to work for. I think there is a place for this kind of workshop. I just need to convince people that we don't need to see things in the extreme opposite that “wine is bad” and “well-being is good”, but as long as we practise things moderately – whether we are consuming alcohol or even practising sport moderately. Things moderately anyway, in general, is a rule for the well-being and the good balance for everyone. And I just need to convince people.

But once people attended the workshops, I received very good feedback and some people drastically changed their way of consuming food or consuming drinks. And it makes me happy to see these changes and more self-awareness, because the world of food and drinks is just amazing, with so many combinations and pairings possible. And we underestimate the capacity of our five senses, especially the nose and the palate. It's something that makes our brain work more, our memory to work more – so it's even good for on the long-term perspective for everyone, because you create images in your brain and memory. And we underestimate quite too often this capacity.

Tim: Wonderful. Well, if the listeners would like to visit your website, it is lapetitiene.net – there will be a link in the podcast description. But I wanted to ask you, how exactly did you come up with the name La Petite Nénette?

Audrey: Yeah. I was looking for a name for my company, but I didn't want a generic name. Usually big brands, big names – there is always a story behind the label. And I said, “Well, “I lost my grandma in a tough time for me, but it was also an event that changed my life in a positive way.” And I decided to honour my grandma by using her nickname when she was a little girl, which was 'La Petite Nénette', because she was small – “petite” meaning “small” in French. And I said “OK, let's try this nickname for this company.” And this is the story behind it.

Tim: Alright, Audrey. It's been really wonderful talking with you today. I've learnt a lot about your background and the work you do. So thanks so much for coming on the show and I wish you all the best for the future.

Audrey: Thank you so much and have a great day.