



JAY JAMES
Director of Sales, Chappellet Vineyards



An alumnus of Georgia Tech, Jay grew up in Atlanta, Georgia dreaming about playing guitar in a rock band (which he did), flying jets (which he did not) and got into the wine business by accident - just like everyone else.

In 1989, following a three-year, highly educational stint with the Ritz-Carlton, Atlanta, Jay was teaching guitar lessons and working as a part-time employee of the 400-seat Ray's on the River in North Atlanta. It was here that Jay was first charged with creating a new wine program. Never comfortable bearing down on any one subject to the exclusion of others, Jay found himself completely at home in the study of wine, a field that embraces: chemistry, biology, history, art, literature, geography and geology, among others.

Master Sommeliers Fred Dame and Evan Goldstein urged Jay to prepare for the Master Sommelier exam, which he passed in 1997 becoming only the 32nd American to successfully complete it. The exam consists of three parts: theory, covering wine, spirits, beer, ale and cigars; a grueling practical service exam followed by the blind tasting and identification section which requires complete classification of six wines, presented double-blind, within 25 minutes. Jay also worked as Wine Director for the Peasant Restaurant Group in their flagship restaurant, the City Grill Atlanta, as Sommelier and Assistant General Manager at Nikolai's Roof at the Atlanta Hilton and Key Account Sales Representative for Atlanta Wholesale Wine.

In 1998 Jay joined the opening team of the Bellagio Resort in Las Vegas as the Director of Wine, where he developed new systems for the management and delivery of 120,000 bottles of wine inventory cellared in 20 separate locations. Jay selected and managed a team of 15 sommeliers and provided wine education for more than 2,000 service staff serving in 26 restaurants under one roof at the resort. Bellagio was generating in excess of \$30 million in annual wine revenues when he departed and was recognized at the time as the most successful single hotel wine program in the world.

In 2005, Jay joined Southern Wine and Spirits of Nevada, ultimately achieving the post of Vice President of Fine Wine. SWSNV is a remarkable company that provides top-tier wines to the finest restaurants in Las Vegas - now one of a handful of great restaurant destination cities in the world.

2013 saw Jay move to the Napa Valley in order to join Chappellet Vineyards as Director of Sales. He leads Chappellet's sales efforts in all trade channels as well as guiding marketing endeavors.

Jay is often a featured speaker at top wine and food events. He has appeared in a long list of national publications including The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Forbes, The Wine Spectator, Restaurant Wine and other wine and beverage specific magazines. He has competed as a United States finalist in both the Grand Prix du Sopexa Sommelier Competition and the Concours Mondial du Sommeliers. Jay is a member and past officer of the Court of Master Sommeliers and remains actively involved with the organization's education and examination efforts. He currently serves as Chairman of the Board for The Guild of Sommeliers Education Foundation (sommfoundation.com), a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation that exists to further beverage education, elevate the sommelier profession among the industry and provide relevant scholarships and educational opportunities.