



George Miliotes
Director of Beverage & Hospitality
Seasons 52

The restaurant business is a family tradition for George Miliotes, director of beverage and hospitality for Darden Restaurants' New Business Division, and general manager for *Seasons 52*.

"I know it sounds too perfect to be true, but I really did grow up in the restaurant business," he says. His family owned Mr. Dunderbak's, a market cafe in Orlando that specialized in imported meats, cheeses and other specialty items. "I can remember my father pulling the whole family out of bed on Saturday mornings to work on the business," Miliotes remembers. They checked shipments at the warehouse, bussed tables, washed dishes and learned every aspect of the business from the bottom up. He worked in the family restaurant throughout high school

Mr. Dunderbak's was one of the few restaurants in Central Florida offering specialty and gourmet foods at the time. "If I take nothing else from my parents, I will always have an attitude of service thanks to them," he says. "People would come in and ask my dad to track down an obscure ingredient, and he would order it even if he didn't make a profit on it."



On a trip to Germany with his father while still a teen, Miliotes had a chance to taste some great wines. "It was the start of a lifelong love affair with wines," he says. "I was in the right place at the right time."

When they got back home, Miliotes told his dad he wanted to learn more about wine. His dad made sure he got plenty of opportunities to work with distributors, attend food shows and pursue more wine knowledge.

Miliotes' passion for wine grew during a trip to France's Bordeaux region in 1988. He says 1985 and 1986 had been great years for the region and things were heating up in the industry. While there, he met Christian Moulex. "It was pretty heady at the time for a young guy like me to spend a day with someone considered one of the greatest wine minds of the time," he says.

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It paid off for the family business. By that time, the family had opened Chris' House of Beef, an Orlando landmark. The wine list Miliotes created for the restaurant earned *Wine Spectator* magazine's "Best Award of Excellence" four consecutive years, from 1988 to 1991.

When the family business closed, Miliotes worked as a wine distributor before going to work for California Grill at Disney World, where he crafted another award-winning wine list. While there he also got involved with the master sommelier program and is now a candidate for the prestigious master sommelier designation.

Candidates attend a series of classes with rigorous examinations, culminating in a "final exam" that requires them to identify the grape varieties, country of origin, district of origin and vintages of six wines by taste and sight alone. "I thought I knew a lot about wine when I got involved with this six years ago," Miliotes says, "but I have learned so much more."

That's one reason he's so enthusiastic about *Seasons 52*'s wine list, which will feature more than 100 wines, with 60 or more available by the glass. "Nothing is better than going to a restaurant and being able to have a great glass of wine with a great meal," he says. "I'm really excited about tapping into the casual dining segment and taking some of the mystery out of wine."

In developing *Seasons 52*'s wine list, Miliotes traveled throughout the world and found many small wineries producing excellent wines at a reasonable cost. He's particularly impressed with a merlot from Spain that comes from 35-year-old vines. The wine will sell for just \$5.50 a glass. "I'll put it up against any merlot at three times the price," he says.

Miliotes' passion for food and wine, first nurtured by his dad in the family's restaurants, has only grown in the years since, and he's passing on that passion to the next Miliotes generation. On a family vacation to Napa Valley in California, Miliotes says he visited a winery with his then five-year-old daughter. "The winemaker poured a glass of wine and let her smell it," he says. "She said, 'It smells like plums and bitter raisins.' No coaching from me, honest! That's my girl!"

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