

Q&A

ARTURO SCAMARDELLA
 HEAD SOMMELIER AT DINNER BY HESTON
 BLUMENTHAL, ATLANTIS THE ROYAL

INTERVIEW BY Alice Barnes-Brown

Q. Why was Dubai chosen for this international outpost of Dinner by Heston Blumenthal?

A. The expat community is quite large in Dubai, so many already know Dinner as a brand and Heston Blumenthal as a chef. Dubai is a multi-ethnic city, so Italian, French, Greek and other Mediterranean restaurants are popular – but what we have achieved with the British cuisine served at Dinner is the balance of flavours and quality of ingredients, which has been really well-received.

Q. Can you describe the vibe?

A. Atlantis The Royal has really bright decor, so the arrival room [of Dinner] is quite dark. We want you to be ready to enter the restaurant. As soon as guests get to the dining room, they'll see the unique pineapple-shaped mechanical art, which connects the restaurant's whole concept – from the kitchen to the pineapple roastery. We also have music playing all night to create atmosphere.

Q. What are your favourite dishes from the Discovery tasting menu?

A. It's seasonal, so the menu depends on the ingredients available. One of my favourite dishes is the salmagundi, which is our chicken salad with bitter leaf and horseradish cream. It doesn't sound complex, but then when you taste the flavour profile, it gives a kick on the palate. On the mains, I like the roast halibut with green sauce – it's a really striking colour


ARTURO'S TOP TIP

Ask to see the wine cellar – around 60% of guests request to see it. We show them where we store the wines, including the most expensive bottles like the Romanée-Conti, which costs about £94,000.

and takes a lot of time for the chef to balance, but it's one of the best sauces I've ever tried (and as a sommelier, there's lots of opportunity for wine pairings to match it). For dessert, there's the pineapple tippy cake – it's something you won't be able to stop eating.

Q. What's in the wine cellar?

A. We have around 1,300 different labels. It's an extensive list and we're adding wines all the time. We have lots of American wines, like those from Sonoma in California. Some are really hard to find, such as Screaming Eagle, a cult wine from Oakville, near Napa. There is wine from the Middle East and Lebanon, including a vintage of Chateau Musar from 1966, plus we also have wines from China, Turkey, Greece and even England.



“As soon as guests enter, they see the unique pineapple-shaped mechanical art”

PICTURES: Atlantis The Royal

Q. How do you decide what makes it to your wine list?

A. We observe what our guests enjoy and what can go well with our dishes. We're also trying to introduce smaller producers and smaller appellations; when there's a tasting for a new producer coming into Dubai, the other sommeliers and I will go to discover new wines. I was in Burgundy recently and had the opportunity to try the new vintages; when they arrive in Dubai, I will source them. That's the beauty of this job – I go to winemakers to see how they make wine and learn about the history behind the label.

Q. Dinner is known for its Sunday roasts – which wines do you recommend pairing with them?

A. With chicken, I really like viognier wines, so maybe something

from the Côtes du Rhône with a rich, full body. For lamb, I'm Italian, so I will say sangiovese (probably a chianti classico) makes a classic pairing. You can pair so many wines with roast beef – for example, a bordeaux blend like cabernet. For vegetarians and vegans, we do roasted cauliflower with truffle, which I would recommend with a pinot noir from Burgundy or even the US. When they age five to six years, they tend to have earthy, mushroomy notes, which go well with strong flavours.

Q. How did it feel to win the Michelin Guide Dubai award for best sommelier?

A. It was special. It was during the opening of Atlantis The Royal [in 2023], so there was lots of work to do. To share the passion I have for wine and to be recognised for that made me really proud, especially against such good competition. **TW**