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Dirty Work and Discipline

TRACING **ELIZABETH KELSO'S** PATH TO BECOMING CRAFT LOS ANGELES' NEW BEVERAGE DIRECTOR

by Kyle Billings

ELIZABETH KELSO'S BAPTISM by fire in hospitality was founded on the ill-fated timing of a liberal arts degree and a global recession. Recalling her time spent working as a server in an art gallery after graduation, the newly minted Beverage Director

have to be willing to go work in a retail wine shop for hourly pay to get exposed to some of the labels that you didn't know before and learn a side of customer service that you never saw. You have to be willing to do some things that are not

"Every job that I've had in the restaurant world makes me better at the job I have today," she says.

At Craft, Kelso faces the challenge of managing an extensive wine list and lofty expectations. She's no less ambitious about the potential of the selections on that list: "I want to sell wines of integrity at a company that has integrity," she explains. "It's not just, 'We don't spray with pesticides'—there are so many things that this industry needs to do to support itself to create a sustainable lifestyle and profession for everyone at every step. I want to buy wine from people who believe in that also." ❧

PHOTO: JOE VAN DYKE



of Craft restaurant in Los Angeles' Century City neighborhood says she craved an intellectual outlet eventually satisfied by wine. "It's history; it's philosophy; it's anthropology, geology, geography," Kelso explains. "It's so many things if you're interested in learning on an ongoing basis."

Kelso attests that her success in the industry is the natural extension of a path peppered with no small number of detours, delays, and doubt. "If you want to be successful in this, you have to be willing to do some dirty work," she says. "You

necessarily glamorous or part of the plan you may have had in your mind, but that will really put you ahead of other people not willing to do that."

This blue-collar ethos and sense of discipline have advised and accelerated Kelso throughout her career: Her resumé includes tenures as a sommelier and educator in local enclaves as disparate as Downtown L.A., Venice Beach, and Beverly Hills. This wide swath of experience was rewarded last April when Kelso won the esteemed Ruinart Sommelier Challenge:

Crafted Advice

"We have a changing industry as far as working as a sommelier on the floor. My recommendation is to learn how to manage a restaurant, because most restaurants at this stage of the game really want you to wear two hats: Assistant General Manager and Wine Director. You have to learn other skill sets that are not just about this location of this vineyard in Gevrey-Chambertin. You need to know how to use Excel, Aloha, and Micros. You need to know how to use accounting software. You need to know financial management strategies and techniques in the restaurant world that don't solely apply to wine." —Elizabeth Kelso