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La news Association des Barmen de France® april 2021

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With this new spring and the renewal it brings, we are cautiously hopeful, anew, that our establishments will reopen soon. Other hopes also blossom with the spring as it is currently the time of the year when students pick their career choices for the upcoming year. And you barmaids and barmen are definitely a source of inspiration.

Indeed, each of us can play a role in drawing the younger generation's attention towards our initial training course, the Barman training programme (Mention Complémentaire Barman), by demonstrating, through your own professional journey, the wide range of opportunities afforded by our craft. You can also show how important solid initial training is and how it allows for a good command of the fundamentals in bartending and service providing.

For its part, the Association des Barmen de France has started assembling portraits of inspiring figures from the world of bartending for the purpose of sharing them as widely as possible. This month, we're inviting you to become better acquainted with Alexis Taoufiq, who among other things recounts his experience in the *Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France* contest. Now settled in the Canadian province of Quebec, he often reminds students that: "*getting your education in France, through the Barman training programme, is a fantastic opportunity. It gives you a full year to learn the basics, and thus receive a solid qualification. I don't know of any other country where training of this calibre is proposed, for free to boot*."

The ABF among the MAF contest's partners

The Association des Barmen de France just signed an agreement with the Société nationale des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France (National society of France's best craftsmen) as well as our friends of the Association des Professeurs Enseignants en Bar (Association of bartending professions teachers).
The goal of this partnership, which we're happy and proud to now be part of is to bring our support to the SnMOF in the organization of the next editions of the Meilleur Apprentis de France's contest (*France's Best Apprentice contest*). We see this as an opportunity to concretely fulfil our mission, which consists in passing down the knowledge and know-how encompassed in the various bartending professions, through a contest dedicated to excellence.

Alexis Taoufiq, Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France, incognito in Québec

Alexis Taoufiq was only 24, in 2015, when he became *Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France*, in the Barman category, alongside Henri Di Nola and Christophe Davoine. This makes him, to date, the youngest barman to have ever received this title. As far as Alexis is concerned, the world of restaurants is a family matter, as he has worked in kitchens beside his father – a chef – from the age of 15. He followed a traditional training path: attending the Strasbourg Ecole Hôtelière after he graduated high school to prepare his advanced vocational diploma in hotel and restaurant management, which he completed with the Barman training programme. This led to his first internship, at the bar of the Beau-Rivage luxury hotel in Lausanne. Then the call of unknown and faraway places seized Alexis and he left to work for a year in a cocktail bar located in Melbourne, Australia. He returned to France in 2011 and joined the crew of one of Paris' oldest bars, Le Forvm. After, he joined the team at Le Bristol as barman to later become head barman.

In 2015, Alexis had once again the opportunity to leave France, this time heading for Montreal, where he's been since. For a year, he was barman-butler for a private corporation, before becoming director of operations for 4e mur, a cocktail bar ranking among the top 10 best cocktail bars in Northern America in 2017. Since 2018, Alexis Taoufiq has been working as an independent consultant, and has created his own company Bar sur mesure, now sharing his diverse and extensive experience with his clients, whether the topic at hand is creating cocktail menus, training personnel, custom-designing bars, or selecting products.

Photo credit : Alexis Taoufiq

The youngest barman crowned MOF in the Barman category

"*I registered fairly quickly for the Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France contest in 2015*," Alexis explains. "*The time was perfect for me as I had gathered competing momentum, my head filled with a great deal of fresh knowledge and the required discipline already part of my routine*." Indeed, as early as 2009 Alexis had won the Silver Shaker at the Ecoles Hôtelières National Contest. He'd then participated in the Scott cup in 2011 and 2012, and won 1st prize at the Diageo World Class contest (France), and 2nd prize at the Havana Club – Cuba Grand Prix (France) in 2013. "*Preparing for the MOF contest entails two solid years of work, regularly carving out time for studying. You have to create a database with reliable sources, go into greater depths with regard to fundamentals, always push the boundaries of knowledge further, learn more, learn new things. In short, you must become an expert*."

Alexis Taoufiq considers that the contests in which he took part before Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France also were part of the learning curve. You can discover, and explore new things. Of the contest itself, Alexis has pleasant memories: "*The organization was highly straightforward like for the Scott Cup, which I found nice*." And then there was the slight stroke of luck for the salesmanship test during the qualifications round. "*We had to receive a group of European parliament representatives in a hotel in Strasbourg and create a bar service option for them. As I am from Strasbourg, I was able to talk about my origins. It was a lovely moment and quite helpful. I was rather lucky, indeed, but overall through the dozen tests involved, the goal must be to keep the part that sheer luck can play in the process as small as possible. Work really is the key here.*"

For instance, for the MOF contest, Alexis had to specifically expand his knowledge with respect to tea. "*As the highest weighing factor applies to the written test, which is a knowledge test, you have to delve into every area, including that of bar products: learn about the various types of woods used to age cognac, for example, or the name of the moulds used to ferment sake. You simply need to learn everything down to the smallest details.*"

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A title not quite like any other

Becoming a MOF instantly had an impact on Alexis' career. There definitely was a "before" and "after". He was offered a contract with Café Kitsuné, located by the Louvre museum in Paris, specifically hiring him to create original cocktails. "*The title comes with its own dose of trust and confidence, it's undeniable, as it's the guarantee of a certain quality,*" Alexis comments. "*But however sure a value, it is nonetheless little known in Quebec. Over there, French excellence and know-how are promoted through the French community and the French Consulate General in Montreal. The few MOFs who have established themselves in Montreal participate in the Goûts de France (A taste of France) event, which showcases French flair and know-how.*"

This incites one to remain humble, and not lose sight of the work that still needs to be done. Indeed, Alexis observed that the MOF title brings its own share of pressure as well, as you must maintain your level of excellence and never stop learning.

"*It's up to each barman to expand their personal knowledge. Nothing is set in stone. For instance, a classic cocktail can be made in different ways depending on the country you're in. As a matter of fact, cocktails evolve constantly. Products, practices and rules are different from one place to another. I would tell young people who are currently in training programmes that as future professionals they need to bear in mind that being passionate is essential, but that relentlessly*

cultivating your knowledge is a must. And for those who are considering taking part in contests, here is what I've learned: 'The surest way to win a competition is to lose plenty of them first'."

Follow Alexis Taoufiq on **Instagram.**

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