

The Table That Recommends: The Day's Specials and Off-Menu Wines

Here is my script — notice where the difference lies. The opening: “Before you look at the menu, let me tell you about today: this morning we got in a fish straight from the fish market that we’re cooking over the coals, and the rice dish we only make on weekends. I’ll let you take your time.” Two things, told with relish, and then you step away — the opening sows; it doesn’t reap.

The wine, when taking the order: “For that fish, if I may, I have something off the menu: a white from a small winery in [region], barely three thousand bottles a year — we brought it in because we fell in love with it. The bottle is [X] more than the one on the menu. I think you’re going to love it.” Count the seconds: twenty. A story (small, human, true), a match with THEIR dish and the price said naturally. And the finishing touch, with dessert on the table — never with the check: “Shall we pair it with a glass of champagne? It’s the ending this dessert is asking for.”

The two mistakes I read most often in this exercise: the story that turns into a lecture (at forty seconds the wine no longer matters; what matters is that you stop talking) and the whispered or hidden supplement — which turns your gem into an ambush. The rule of lesson 5, applied to the dining room: telling them what you offer AND what it costs is exactly what turns it into service.