

Eau de Vie

a wine, spirits, and travel newsletter

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RESERVATION REQUIRED

It was Monday night and Sara and I were in the south of France, in Provence, in the ancient Roman city of Arles. We were in the heart of the city walking around the outside of the Roman amphitheater. We were searching for an open restaurant.

Most of the cafés, brasseries and restaurants hugging the street that circles the ancient venue were closed. In France if you are open on Saturday you close on Monday. It makes perfect sense: Saturday night is busy and Monday isn't. A sensible work / life balance philosophy says everyone needs two days off each week. In Arles, in the restaurant trade, most take off Sunday and Monday.

We eventually found the only open restaurant and went inside. It was about 1/3 full. We asked for a table and we were asked if we had a reservation, we said no. The waitress looked around and pointed to a table we could take. We asked if we could eat outside on the patio, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "Of course!"

We were guided to a table in front and we proceeded to start the customary multi-course French dinner. We were sitting next to a German doctor who was vacationing alone and we chatted with him about travel, home and culture. When the waitress came to

take his order he asked if he could order a vegetarian option, despite one not being on the menu. She said she'd have to ask the chef but returned shortly saying yes, this was possible and his option was this - I don't remember what it was but his meal didn't include meat.

We had a very nice evening. I had roasted lamb with rosemary that was paired with a robust Provencal Syrah. The temperature was cooling as the sun set and we watched the fading light dance purple shadows on the ancient arches of the amphitheater.

But we also witnessed a constant stream of hungry patrons arrive at the restaurant. The interactions were all the same. They went like this: party of 4 arrive, ask for a table, there were many open spaces in the restaurant, inside and out, the waitress asked if they had a reservation, they'd say no, and she'd say sorry we are full.

At first I was surprised. The restaurant was only 1/3 full. My initial thought was, wow this place is going to really fill up. But as the night wore on and more patrons were turned away rather than seated I slowly came to an understanding.

The waitress was working alone. Possibly the chef was her husband and they were the only two that

night. If she seated everyone that arrived she'd be overwhelmed, the kitchen would be overwhelmed, and her level of service and the kitchen's level of service would suffer and her customers would leave feeling annoyed rather than fed and satisfied.

Rather than allow the service to decrease she simply turned away new customers so she could properly serve the ones she had. It seemed to me that to her, service and her working pace were paramount. Monetary gain seemed secondary.

I write this story not just because it's an interesting cultural aside but because it reminds me that great service is a two way street and that street is paved with respect. It is respectful to ask if space is available, to ask if the menu can accommodate your diet and as a provider to turn away customers so that the level of service is as you would want it if you were receiving it.

In France the customer is always wrong. Why shouldn't they be? Are they the expert? No. There are hidden reasons behind decisions that result in customers not getting what they want and this is a service to them.

As we all struggle with the ongoing effects of the Coronavirus we need to remember to weave respect into the service we receive and the service we give.

NO FLY LIST

Last century, I worked for an industrial pipe supplier. I was an inside salesman. I answered the phone when anyone called.

I had one customer who would always call late in the day and demanded a rush delivery of less than \$100 worth of parts. Randy always dangled the prospect of a larger order in the future if he could get this small order right away. I would take the order and press one of the warehouse guys into one more late delivery in Denver's growing rush hour. Sales I made directly paid a small commission and these helped supplement my \$8.63 an hour wage. Of course, the large order never came. But our "the customer is always right" policy kept me trying to keep him happy.

Until one day when Terry, the top salesman in the company, told me that not every customer is valuable and the trouble customers cost you more time and effort than they are worth. He was talking about Randy and he was encouraging me to fire him as a customer.

What a revelation! I told Randy we could no longer rush his parts to him. He got mad and eventually stopped calling. The warehouse guys were certainly happier, I was happier, and I was just as broke as before but my job got easier.

I mention this because I learned that earlier this week, on a flight from Detroit to Atlanta, two passengers that had boarded a Delta flight with masks on, refused to wear them while on the plane. As aircraft was taxiing for take off

they engaged the flight crew in a test of wills. They lost. The pilots returned to the gate, the passengers were escorted off the plane and promptly placed on Delta's no fly list!

Delta's CEO says that as of last week they have over 120 people on their no fly list. These passengers will be banned from flying Delta for life.

Awesome. Not every customer is needed. American Airlines also maintains a no fly list and United Airlines is considering starting one.

Delta currently maintains a very extensive travel requirements section on their website. You can look up any destination, state, or country and find their current travel requirement.

For example: Did you know that you can't travel to Alaska, Hawaii, Maine or Massachusetts without first getting a negative result on a Covid19 test 72 hours or less before departure? Did you know that if you go to New Mexico you'll need to quarantine for 14 days? Did you know that if you travel to Chicago from Wisconsin you need to quarantine for 14 days?

[Here is the link to the Delta website for current travel restrictions.](#)



Well....here we all are....waiting for the Coronavirus to be defeated by sunlight or bleach or a miracle.

Unfortunately, I think the miracle we will need is actually the will to control our desires and science.

I've been kicking the can down the road regarding the wine pairing classes, canceling the spring then summer classes and hoping that maybe we'd get to do one in....It's time to acknowledge that the last two events should be canceled too. So with a shrug of my shoulders, I'm going to puff and pivot and cancel both *Diner en Blanc* and the Fall wine class.

We've only had one class in 2020, Wines for Winter, was a raging success. So as soon as can we get vaccinated, as soon as we can summon our collective discipline and get this pandemic under control, Sara and I will host wine classes again. I promise. In the mean time I'll keep sending you the *Eau de Vie*.

À votre santé!



* Here are two pictures of the area around the amphitheater in Arles.