

## Gregory Astudillo: A Sommelier with a Painter's Flair

Ocean House sommelier Gregory Astudillo brings a passionate and unique approach to an award-winning wine program in Rhode Island

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Ocean House

### **Sommelier Gregory Astudillo.**

Gregory Astudillo found his way into the **wine cellar** by way of the kitchen, where he started cooking for a wedding caterer when he was just 15. He went on to cook for fine dining establishments in West Virginia and Virginia, but left to attend college at Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island.

It was at Johnson and Wales that Astudillo, looking for a new challenge, bought a few painting supplies and began to pursue a burgeoning passion. He now specializes in large oil paintings of abstract images, clouds, landscapes, and the ocean, and he even recreates images from photographs.

He brings that artist sensibility to his work at the Ocean House on Watch Hill, Rhode Island. After school, he intended **to return to the kitchen**, but fate intervened. Days from moving to Maryland, Astudillo met his future wife. He ended up staying in Rhode Island for her and was encouraged by a professor at Johnson and Wales to pursue a new passion — the art of wine — by training as a sommelier.

The training lasted 18 months, during which Astudillo spent between 16 to 18 hours per day studying and more-than-occasionally sipping wine. The hard work paid off in exceptional scores on his certification examinations and a position at a new hotel on the Rhode Island coast.

Working with Ocean House's drink program director Jonathan Feiler, Astudillo has turned a ragtag wine list of around 400 bottles into a Wine Spectator award-winning cellar of over 900 labels and an astonishing 8,000 bottles. "When I got here, the Ocean House had [a great selection of wine](#), but they weren't widely known for it," he explained. "Guests rarely tend to opt for the most or least expensive bottle you have, so by raising the ceiling of what we offered and adding more quality mid-range bottles we were able to not only sell more wine, but also elevate the reputation of the wine program at the Ocean House." That doesn't mean that the Ocean House only [carries unaffordable, high-end bottles](#) — on the contrary, Astudillo prides himself on stocking such a broad selection that he is able to sell many bottles under their retail price. When asked why he chooses to lose money on some of his inventory, his response was, "Because I want to be the one who does."

The stunning wine collection is housed in two cellars inside the brand-new, state-of-the-art Center for Wine and Culinary Arts at the Ocean House, where Astudillo runs various classes relating to wine. "I love the classes most. They make the experience very personal for both me and the guests. And it's a fun balancing act! With each class I have to feel out the attendees and basically custom-tailor it to their experience level."

His passion for his work cannot be any clearer, or more sincere, whether he's teaching an initiate what legs on a glass are, or pairing an exquisite bottle with a five-star meal. "I love the way a person's face lights up [when I do a pairing for them](#)," he told us. One of the most wonderful things about the Ocean House's wine program is how it lacks any pretension or stuffiness. "Wine reflects the atmosphere in which you serve it, and I strive to create a calm, relaxed, and fluid environment. If you hate a particular blend, that's fine, I'm here to accommodate and make your experience as great and memorable as possible."

His experience in the kitchen and in front of the canvas informs all of Astudillo's work around the Ocean House. "Food is the ultimate expression of art," he said. "You have to give it away to really experience it."