

## Sunny Hodge



Sunny Hodge is the founder/owner of [Diogenes the Dog](#) and [aspen & meursault](#), two multi-award-winning wine bars associated with challenging the status quo of wine.

Multifaceted, like many are within the hospitality industry, Sunny has carved out a niche that draws upon his personal interests, professional expertise, and blue-sky thinking, to accomplish his mission of dispelling the romantic myths and jargon used within the world of wine. Through exploring his own interests which lie in the evidence, science and legal aspects behind climate change, sustainability, and regenerative farming, Sunny's focus on the science behind wine has created a hospitality concept that is more inclusive and leaves no room for pretension. Today, Sunny is at the forefront of creating a new experience for education within hospitality for both valued guests and those working with him.

Diogenes The Dog opened in late 2018 in Elephant & Castle - a location that has been deemed up-and-coming for the last 10 years, at a time where catalysing a local economy and community was key. Inspired by the infamous Greek philosopher who founded the philosophy of Cynicism, the new-wave wine bar and shop shares the same inquisitive nature of Diogenes, questioning what we know about wine, discarding common trends and bringing to the table lesser known and better drunk alternatives. Today the neighbourhood wine bar has been rated as one of London's top wine bars for the likes of Condé Nast Traveller, Eater London, The Spectator, and many more, as well as garnered wine list awards from the likes of Decanter and Winelist Confidential, and most recently awarded Hybrid Retailer of the Year 2023 at The Drinks Retailing Awards.

Sunny's second venture, aspen & meursault, opened in 2021, in Battersea. Here the wine bar and shop have a real focus on understanding how our food and wine gets to our table and low intervention methods of wine production. It's focus on learning, sleek design and meaningful interpersonal connections have catapulted the neighbourhood wine bar into the realms of Gentleman's Journal, GQ, and voted one of Time Out's "Best New Bars in the World 2021".

What sets Sunny's bars aside from the rest is the innovation that comes from within. Choosing to list and profile the unique and unusual wine producers from forward thinking wineries, has meant that often

the two bars are the sole importers of certain wines in Europe. Applying the same attitudes to business also has meant that Sunny is able to create services such as a phone sommelier service (throughout the global pandemic), and create products of his own such as a low-intervention box wine from Puglia, Italy

These sensibilities lean into what Sunny was before his own businesses. A graduate of Mechanical Engineering from UCL, author, survivor, explorer, and award-winning Front of House professional. Aside from his ventures into literature: Sunny self-published 'Stray Pavements', a philosophical short novel about adolescence and consciousness, and motorbiked across Europe; his hospitality career started over 10 years ago as a trainer for Nando's where he organised and led training at both management and ground level for new openings across the UK. Rising through the ranks at Gaucho, becoming 'Host of the Year' before assisting in the opening and management of two high end restaurants - Margot and The Fordwich Arms - both having reached UK's Top 100 Restaurant Lists within 9 months of opening, and the latter achieving Michelin star status, are all within Sunny's repertoire.

Outside of the bars Sunny also consults within wine and hospitality projects, as well as being a commentator within the field of wine and hospitality for the likes of the Evening Standard and The Times. He is also an annual judge for the prestigious IWSC awards and was awarded "Entrepreneur of the Year" in the 2022 Southwark Business Awards. Things to look forward to in the near future will be Sunny's attendance at Food & Fire, a new event from The Good Life Society where he will be a part of the all-star line-up in May 2023.

#### **Diogenes The Dog**

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