

# Inspired Readings

**Armed with passion, knowledge and intuition, connoisseurs are able to divine truly valuable vintages.**

By HENRY HARIYONO

**W**hilst there are many subjects for collectors of rare objects to indulge in, the word connoisseur is most frequently linked with fine wine.

The topic of wine collecting and its place as an investment vehicle has received a lot of attention recently. About a year ago, the pitch was that investing in wine—be it in the form of a wine fund or owning actual cases of fine wine—was a viable and consistently profitable alternative to the usual bevy of financial instruments. Yet, recently, this form of investment does not appear to be as immune as was originally promised. Or is it?

There are a few factors that affect a wine's value. A wine with high scores received from influential wine critics such as Robert Parker and publications such as *The Wine Spectator* has seen positive correlation with rising prices especially in the secondary markets. The pedigree of a wine such as the famous names from classified growths of Bordeaux on the label is another sure-fire recipe to commanding top dollars, especially if they come from the best vintages. Depletion of supply of past top vintages as they reach maturity and get consumed also injects a second wave of price escalation.

But is the art of wine collecting and investment so mechanical and predictable? For some, the answer is yes. This position is taken by those who see wines as purely an investment vehicle. The



portfolio taken by these people leans towards the heavily-traded, high-volume brand name wines that go in and out of the auction floor and moves from a cellar to another with worrisome frequency. However, this is also the same portfolio that will take the biggest beatings whenever constant downward pressures in the financial markets exert the same negative influence on such wine's values no matter how temporary.

And then there are also those who have committed themselves to a lifetime of study and discovery of fine wines and who eventually come to a deep understanding of both their intrinsic and

commercial values. To this rare group of people do the true wine connoisseurs belong.

An element of taste is always involved when discerning the value of fine wine. Connoisseurs always apply their keen minds and palates when assessing fine wines and, curiously, often arrive at more or less the same conclusion as to who the next star winery would be. This is because they look for a few key unique indicators such as a highly original and daring approach to winegrowing, exquisite and unique wine flavours, limited production and consistent and enthusiastic wine commentaries by specialist critics. In short, an earnest connoisseur seeks authenticity, originality, quality and, quite often, rarity. The wines of these newfound future stars have imminent value, which is eventually reflected in the wine prices presumably in the not-so-distant future.

A good example is the grower Anselme Selosse who makes Champagne Jacques Selosse. Selosse's champagnes challenge and throw away all preconceived notions of what constitute a great champagne. Indeed, his winegrowing and winemaking methods, most of them unabashedly radical and

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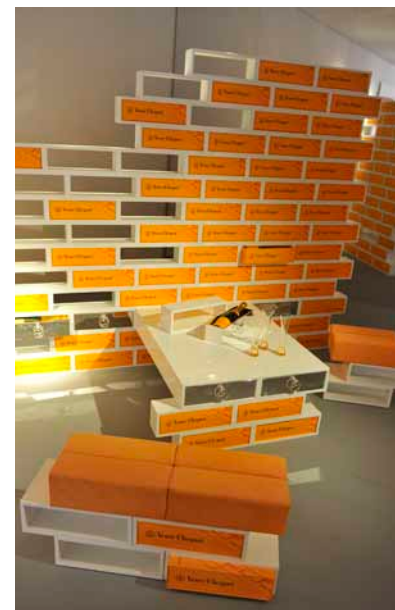
fanatical, have redefined fine champagnes. The originality and quality of his wines have seen the prices of his wines going nowhere but up. This value is created not just by the rave reviews of wine critics, but also the endorsement of many collector-connoisseurs who realise and buy early into the virtues of his wines. A limited production of approximately 50,000 bottles per year serves to only further exacerbate the pricing of his wines. Selosse is essentially a cult name today. But without connoisseurship, his talents would have gone largely unnoticed.

Going further back in history from the same wine region, one will notice a similar theme in the champagnes of Salon. The first vintage of Salon was 1905. Even back then, what Salon was doing was against every grain of its contemporaries: using the fruits from a single site as opposed to blending, producing only one champagne cuvée (vintage dated) without any non-vintage bottling and

only when the vintage is deemed good enough. These are antithesis to the common wisdom of his days. And then there is the measly production level. Even then the connoisseurs readily exalted the irreproachable originality and quality of Salon's wines. Before long, Champagne Salon was to be found only in the most prestigious establishments; and today, it is one of the most sought after wines on the auction floor.

Connoisseur's wines, so to speak, are always in demand and are more resilient to unfavourable forces of the market because it is always sought after for its intrinsic values and there is never enough of it to go around. Just like any other investment instruments, wines deserve its own careful study and through no better eyes can a wise judgment be made than that of the connoisseur's.

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## THINKING OUT OF THE BOX

Eco-friendly seems to be the new by-word these past years. From horology to hospital-ity, many companies in varied industries have jumped onto the environmentally conscious bandwagon. Now, viticulture has also made its mark.

Since 2002, Veuve Clicquot has achieved its carbon footprint objective and has cut water consumption by half and sorts 97 per cent of its waste. The unveiling of its new packaging at the Milan Design Week in April this year further demonstrates its environmental focus.

The new DesignBox is made entirely from paper harvested from forests under the management of the Forest Stewardship Council, an eco-label that guarantees the durable management of forests. There is also no lamination; and inks, glues and other solvents represent less than five per cent of the total weight. Furthermore, the micro-grooving technique employed uses less paper and the foldable box optimises transportation volume, thus reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

This new design has also inspired other creations. Collaborating with designers and design houses such as Tom Dixon, 5.5 Designers and Front Design, Veuve Clicquot has added interpretations of the DesignBox. For example, 5.5 Designers used the DesignBox concept as a sort of building brick, "in the tradition of cellars with walls of bottles". Each 'brick' was a bottle stored in its DesignBox. Piling 'brick' over 'brick' created a whole wall of champagne.—J.F.

## BACK TO SCHOOL

What does it take to be a wine connoisseur? Definitely, not just a simple love of the fine elixir—it takes years of experience and extensive knowledge to be able to sniff out the terroir or pinpoint the vines of a particular vintage. Now, however, one can learn to do all these in a shorter time and within the comforts of our home country with the expertise of Bordeaux accredited educators in Singapore such as David Chan, a lecturer at SHATEC, and Lim Hwee Peng, a familiar name in the local wine circles.

What Lim's credential translates into is the exclusivity of being one of only five people in Singapore and one of only 160 persons in the world who are recognised tutors of the L'Ecole du Vin de Bordeaux (Bordeaux Wine School), which has been offering courses to professionals and consumers around the world since 1990.

According to statistics provided by the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux (CIVB), also known as the Bordeaux Wine Council, Singapore was the 12<sup>th</sup> export market of Bordeaux wines in 2008 (refer chart). With this interest, it seems opportune that Singapore continues to develop wine education.

The Wine School courses teach just the basics of identifying the specifics of the Bordeaux vineyard, tasting techniques, and food and wine pairings. Since wine tasting is an emotional and subjective experience rather than a theoretical concept, the expression of taste and sensations is left to the student to discover and experience. —JACINTA FREEMAN



	VOLUME (HL/100 LITRE)	% CHANGES OVER 2007	VALUE (€1,000)	% changes over 2007
White	444	+ 76	360	8
Red	5,445	- 9	7,160	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,889</b>	<b>- 6</b>	<b>7,520</b>	<b>4</b>