

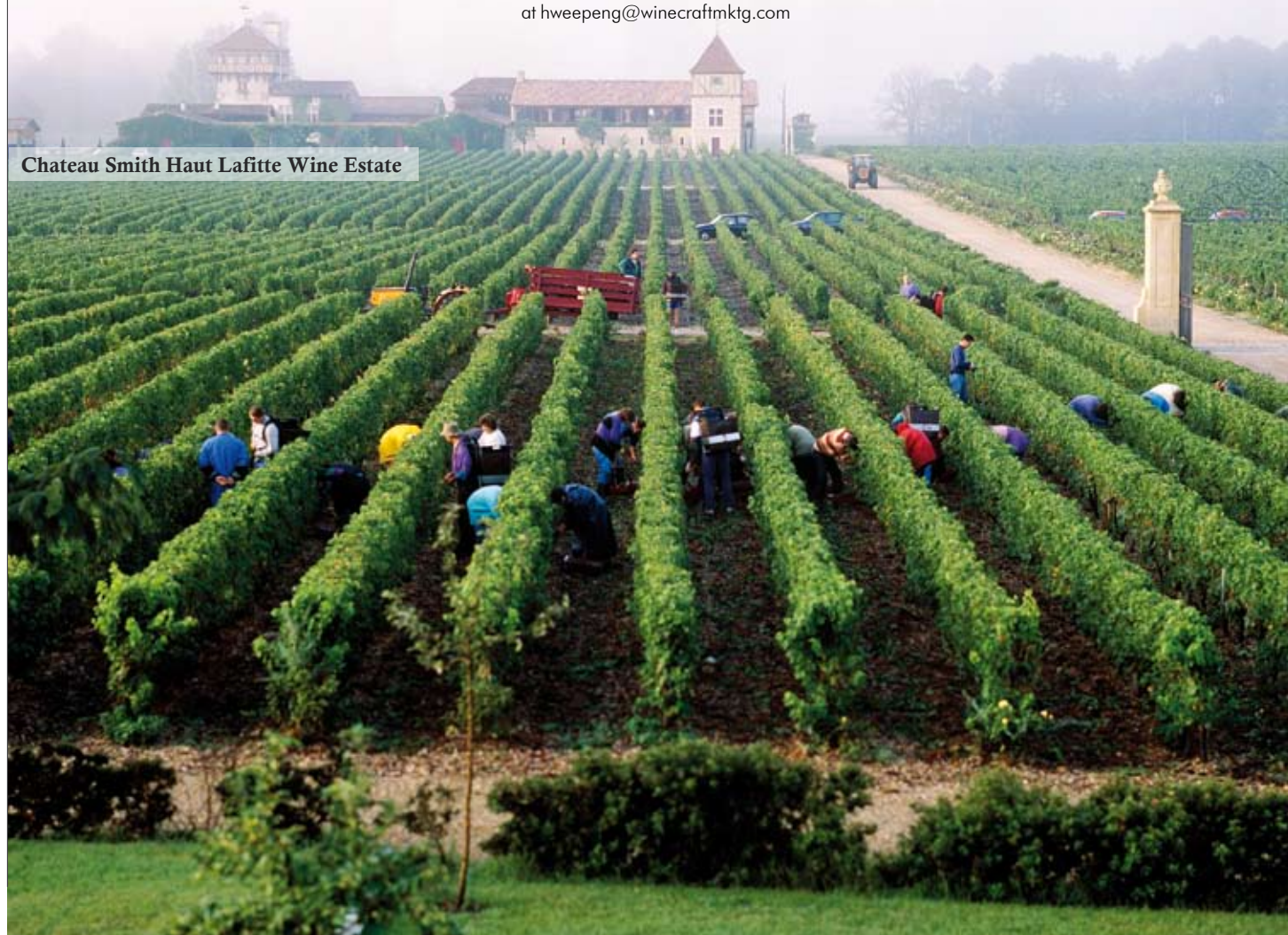
Seeing RED

LIM HWEE PENG uncorked some of the impressive reds that he has tasted in the first quarter of 2008.



LIM HWEE PENG, CSW is an experienced wine educator, certified by CIVB (Bordeaux Wine Marketing Board) as an International Bordeaux Wine Educator; a Certified Specialist in Wines (CSW) from Society of Wine Educators, USA; certified Educators from Napa Valley Vintners Association, and recently gained a Diploma in Burgundy wines from BIVB (Burgundy wine marketing board). Lim's passion for wine has also been rewarded with two World Gourmet Summit Regional 'Wine Article of the Year' awards. Some of his current pre-occupations include being the facilitator for Singapore Airline (SIA) Sommelier group; Wine facilitator for SOPEXA, AUSTRALIA and California Wine Institute. He can be reached at hweepeng@winecraftmktg.com

Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte Wine Estate



In the course of my work, I have come across many wine lovers, and similar to wine tasting, there were ups and downs in my encounters. I was glad that most were serious enough to understand the intricacies of each wine. They showed appreciation for the hard work put in by industrious winemakers, who have to toil for four unpredictable seasons in managing one of the most fabulous gifts bestowed by the Almighty. Yet, almost in the same encounter, I have chanced upon many others (some even professed to be sommeliers and wine professionals) who appeared to be enlightened in all things Gevrey Chambertin, Pomerol or Tuscany, but were, in fact, mere brand drinkers.

As I pondered on such extremes, I was enlightened that such diversity in the wine circle may not be a negative trait. At least, it justified the existence of a diverse wine style to suit every whim and fancy of many wine lovers.

Nevertheless, rather than being idealistic and lamenting on the less-than-professional attitudes of those found wanting, I chose to share and highlight some of the best wines that I have tasted during those roller-coaster experiences.

Red, Red Wines

When it comes to red wines in this part of the world, few will dispute the attraction of wines made from Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and the all-time classic Claret.

However, it was not the usual suspects that made me realise the wine world has evolved and become less predictable.

Take Pinot Noir as an example; most would regard the holy grail from Burgundy as the benchmark, yet, wine regions such as Central Otago, Martinborough (New Zealand), Oregon (USA), Adelaide, Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula (Australia), Russian River, Sonoma Valley (California, USA), and even Patagonia (Argentina) have been crafting notable Pinot Noir wines!

Are those modern renditions of Pinot Noir going to take over the reign from Burgundy? I think it is unlikely and will probably not happen in our lifetime. Nevertheless, my recent experience with new world Pinot Noir has been more of a satisfaction than disappointment.

O'Leary Walker, a young wine estate hailed from Adelaide Hills, Australia, is a case in point. Filled with red fruits and cherries, and bursting with freshness, O'Leary Walker Adelaide Hills Pinot Noir 2007 may only offer young fruits and flavours at the moment, but do not discount it as another wannabe. O'Leary Walker also produces a clean, crisp, fresh and dry Clare Valley Riesling (Polish Hill River 2007), which in my opinion, reflects Clare's Valley as a region that is

O'Leary Walker Cabernet Sauvignon



suitable for producing dry and crisp Riesling.

O'Leary Walker's Cabernet Sauvignon 2005, on the other hand, impressed me most. Crafted from low-yielding vines grown in the Armagh and Polish Hill River areas of Clare Valley, this wine oozes Claret nuances with fruit power to boot!

Of Bordeaux & Burgundy

Still on the topic of Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, I had the pleasure of sampling impressive traditional wines from the renowned French wine regions - Burgundy and Bordeaux.

First off is the Alex Gambal Chambolle Musigny 2002. This Burgundy red wine shows class and elegance even for a village-level effort. Displaying the staying power of 2002 vintage quality and deft winemaking skills from the Burgundy house, Alex Gambal Chambolle Musigny 2002 is a Burgundy rouge that serious Bourgogne lovers should seek out.

I have always enjoyed Bordeaux classic in all its different nuances (including Left, Right Banks, as well as Cru Bourgeois and the Cotes wines). Clarendelle, a product crafted by the capable hands which run Chateau Haut Brion, was a Claret that surpassed the quality expected of a Bordeaux 'branded' wines (Mouton Cadet is one example of a Bordeaux branded wine). This wine seeks not power but balance. This



Alex Gambal Chambolle Musigny 2002



Clarendelle

approach seems to reflect the excellence and tradition of Haut Brion's heritage.

Although this wine was made from an 'assemblage' of grapes from the larger part of Bordeaux, rigorous selection was carried out before vinification. Clarendelle is, in my opinion, a reliable and fabulous Bordeaux 'branded' wine. Certainly a must have,

even for a serious Bordeaux wine lover.

Grand as Chateau Haut Brion is, like many other traditional wine estates, they are facing a different challenge in their current context - space-crunch in Pessac Leognan, where historical vineyards are competing for space with the encroaching residential and infrastructure developments.

Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte is another Pessac Leognan wine estate managing such urban development challenges. The Cathiard family bought over the estate in 1990 and has

since built an extended wine-related business – a wine spa and hospitality business managed by Daniel Cathiard’s two daughters.

“Although Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte has a deep heritage, in commercial terms, my two daughters’ businesses made more money than my wine business!” Daniel Cathiard candidly shared during our tasting session.

Nevertheless, Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte exhibited class and grandeur in all the three vintages that I had tasted. I have found the 2000 vintage oozes class and concentration, although it has also shown some aged nuance; while the 2002 displayed its beauty with youthfulness, it is the 2004 Smith Haut Lafitte that I found had traditional nuances, elegant and balanced. Restrained at the time of tasting, yet in its entirety, Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte 2004 showed depth and long-term ageing potential.

The final Claret that impressed in my recent wine adventure was, surprisingly, not from Bordeaux, France. In fact, it was an Italian Super-Tuscan wine – **Ornellaia**. In the latest release of its 2005 vintage, Ornellaia unabashedly

Remaining in the same French territory, I have discovered a fun and joyous wine that was made in the same approach as L’Elephant. **HobNob Shiraz 2006**, however, aims to be “approachable, contemporary and fun.” This wine is excellent at party events, and should be able to match with most Western cuisine and local comfort food.

Someone once asked me whether it is possible to find ‘elegant’ wines in Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale, where it is renowned for its power-packed Shiraz. I personally thought that it was a case of ‘looking for love in all the wrong places’. If ‘elegant’ is Claret-like, filled with refined structure, earthiness and minerality, then there is a mismatch of expectation. Despite its reputation for making Parker-flavoured rich and choc-a-block Shirazes, Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale can produce wines with balanced flavours. An



HobNob Shiraz



Ornellaia



Domaine de L'Elephant 2006



Grant Burge Filsell 2005

exhibited its grandness and lusciousness, much like a peacock flaunting its assets with confidence and proudly basking in the limelight.

The Unconventional

I am also constantly on the hunt for wines that go beyond the norm. Luck was on my side and I have found some interesting unconventional wines with one of them having a Singapore connection!

Domaine de L’Elephant, a joint effort by Singapore wine importer, Estima Consulting, with its French partner, impresses with its pedigree. This brilliant wine hailed from a potentially high quality wine producing area of southern France - Cotes Catalanes, Roussillon. The interestingly named wine was created from a blend of 90% Grenache, with equal parts Syrah and old vine Carignan; it was made in a modern style, with new world wine lovers in mind. Rich, silky, and filled with ripe blackfruits flavours, though only into its second vintage, the wine has already found favour with US wine critics.



Champagne Veuve Devaux Cuvee ‘D’ Brut NV

excellent example is **Grant Burge Filsell 2005**. This wine, tasted together with Grant Burge, displayed fine balance in all its noticeable fruit concentration.

As I wrapped up my work week, I wanted to reward myself with a nice glass of cool, refreshing champagne. When I proceeded to my cellar in search of a suitable bubbly, I was attracted to an interesting mortar ammunition shaped bottle. **Champagne Veuve Devaux Cuvee ‘D’ Brut NV** caught my eye not only with its unique bottle-shape, it also showed classiness on the palate.

This champagne is rich, with yeasty-ness, brioche notes, hints of green apple and a touch of red fruit. It’s a weighty, firm and flavoursome Champagne that I would personally recommend to both serious wine lovers as well as brand drinkers.