

Alsace meets Asia

At Tiong Bahru Hawker Centre last Saturday, a Frenchman stood out in the sea of locals during lunchtime. After taking pictures of hawker stalls, he gleefully returned to his table, poured himself and his two local guides a glass of wine, and said: "I am posting this on my blog."

The foreigner in question was Etienne Hugel, a 12th-generation member of wine producer Hugel & Fils. The business is based in the well-to-do village of Riquewihr located in Alsace, north-eastern France.

Alsace is known for many things – its Germanic influence and the strong gastronomic culture, for example. In the wine arena, however, it is the general adherence and deference to tradition that impresses.

For a winery that still adopts traditional winemaking methods, Hugel & Fils is surprisingly progressive. For one, it has stayed committed to Asia for the last two decades, one of the first Alsacien wineries to do so. During the Sars epidemic, Hugel

was also one of the few winemakers who continued to visit Singapore. In fact, he considers Singapore his "second home" and has adopted the country as his base for the next 2½ months that he will be based in Asia.

There are also admirable progressive marketing ideas which he dreamt up, such as convincing one of Hong Kong's most renowned wine speakers to hand-carry hundreds of xiaolongbao (soup dumpling) to the Vinexpo exhibition in Bordeaux, France, where they were then steamed using four rice cookers. Paired with Hugel white wines, they were an instant hit.

For the Tiong Bahru expedition, it was, in part, a pursuit of more Asian food and wine pairings and to prove that Alsace wines and Asian food make a good marriage.

Hugel had brought along a half bottle (375ml) of the Jubilee Riesling 2007 (not available here yet) and Pinot Gris Vendages Tardives 2001. From the 2006 and 2007 Classic range, all the wines

were sealed with Diam corks, which have undergone treatment to extract the elements that cause cork to taint.

This was a decision made after 10 years of experiments and increasing frustration with cork taint and bottle variations, he explained.

So what did the wines go with? The menu included raw fish salad, congee, otak, fishcake variations and also prawn noodles with chilli.

The sight of two Singaporeans and a foreigner trying out hawker dishes with wine must have made an impression, enough to attract the attention of the drink-stall owner, who loudly asked Hugel: "You want ice or not? Is it white wine you are drinking?"

Hugel, good-humoured as usual, pulled out his bottle from the wine cooler bag and said: "This is also the best wine to go with Asian food."

Read Hugel's blog at <http://blog.hugel.com/en/>



Taste test

This wine does not use Diam closure as it is the 2004 vintage. A lean wine with elegance and poise.

A mix of floral, peaches and a touch of minerality, rounded by a clean finish.

Pair with

Fresh seafood, sashimi, fish.

Available at

Hock Tong Bee,
61 Geylang Lorong 17,
#01-00, Cornerstone
Building, tel: 6732-0555,
E-mail: admin03.sg@cornerstonewines.com

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