



AURIC PACIFIC

“selling wine with passion!”

Auric Pacific Fine Wines

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Dear All,

Terroir Debate

It's easy to make an opinion. To get a consent of your opinion - is a total different challenge.

I feel so strongly after reading several articles on the internet that denying the existent of "terroir", or what **Matt Kramer** would so poetically called it, the **sense of place** in wine. After several attempts in trying to put it in print, all those proves that I could squeeze out of my resources to defend my belief that terroir truly exist, I finally gave up.

Obviously, we are discussing a subject that today's science has disapproved. That somewhat, terroir or mineral that's found in wine has no relationship whatsoever with the piece of earth that the wine was raised.

Being a fanatic of Burgundy wine and knowing that the burgundian would pride themselves for the uniqueness of their soil that constitute the individualistic of their wine. I felt a strong responsibility to defend those anti-terroirists out there. However, I soon realized one issue that stop me for pursuing further - the individual perception of greatness. It would be pointless to discuss the concept of terroir if the audience does not share the same significant. It's like everyone coming to the dinner party for a different reason. Some uses wine as a form of tool to enter to a social circle, other simply treat it as the trendy, yuppie's hobby. Obviously, there is no lack of serious drinker, which look upon the excitement of the fast changing wine world, some also quickly realized that the huge demand for a niche group of fine wine can equally be as lucrative like the commodity found in stock exchange. But the fact remained. How many people truly pay attention to what they have consumed? How many of us really look beyond wine as not just another alcoholic beverage?

We are living in the world that are "plague by sameness". One of my designer friend recently told me, "did u realize the problem with our shopping malls? It's all the same! You see the same Levi's store, McDonald's, Starbuck's, Giordano, U2, Watson everywhere. Where is the diversity?" The fact that, the same scenario can well apply to the modern wine drinking world. Reliability, predictability has becoming the key element to succeed in the consumer's world, much like Coca-Cola or McDonald's burger did. Their success lies in the secure return of the same. "We are happiest of course when every year behaves more or less the same. Especially for those recently-come-to-the-party wine connoisseurs, who behave a lot like a child; they never seem to tire of hearing the same song played over and over again." said **Randall Grahm** of **Bonn Doon Vineyard**.

Speaking of *terroir*, it linked almost exclusively with old world wine. The fundamental of *terroir* lies on the differences in wine. **Brian Croser** of ex. Petaluma has so correctly pointed out the essence of terroir, "the product with terroir is unique. Nobody else can make that wine unless they own that piece of ground". It was through such respect of nature, the acceptance of ambiguity that the burgundian becoming the touchstone for *terroir*. In Burgundy, the formation of what today the village crus, premier crus and grand crus were through generation of Cistercian monks who studiously compare vineyard-to-vineyard, plot-to-plot and carefully delineate and codify. To them, they do not ask the land to replicate the qualities of another, but instead, they look for distinction. "Chambertin was Chambertin if for no reason that it consistently did not taste like its neighbor Latricieres", quoted from **Matt Karmer's** book, **Making Sense of Burgundy**. In the same context, burgundian believed that *terroir* can only be found, not made, which explains why, winemaking, grape variety were merely the vehicle of the voice. "Man must humble before

their vineyards. The genius resides in the vineyards and not in the hand of man. Man can only take something away from the vineyard, but can not add anything important", said **Frédéric MUGNIER**.

I recently read a book from a Canadian conservationist, **Terry Glavin** on extinctions. In his view, the increased modernization, globalization, monoculture where the dark side of sameness have slowly taken away our biological and cultural diversity. He further said that, "we may be headed for a titanic human struggle between two human "survival myths", those of **engineers** and of **naturalists**. The engineers are those who fear and hate nature, who loathe complexity and diversity, who espouse the murderous ethic of the Puritans, who seek protection from fear and danger and death in genetic engineering, cryogenics, the homogenization and desensitization of humanity and culture, separateness from "nature as other", immortality, and the extermination of all life that is not in the service of humans. The naturalists are those who suffer the grief of biophilia, who embrace complexity and celebrate diversity, whose ethic is one of sacred responsibility and respect for all life on Earth, who oppose technologies that increase ecological fragility and uniformity, and who accept that we are part of, not part from, all life on our planet."

The naturalists in this case refer to the terroirists. Were they deeply ingrained by the belief that wine is made by nature, not by man? The fine examples should reflect their place of origin. The engineers or anti-terroirists in this case rely on technologist and belief all great wine can be made in any corner of the world with the help of modern, sophisticated gadget and talented winemaker. Science, which demand proof by replication has fail to deliver the true value of terroir. - AT

"Truth is not that which can be demonstrated by the aid of logic. If orange trees are hardy and rich in fruit by this bit of soil and not that, then this bit of soil is what is truth for orange trees....Logic, you say? Let logic wangle its own explanation of life".

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Wine, Sand and Stars*

Raffle's Primum Familiae Vini Tasting

" I am terribly sorry, we must have met before. But, by the way, your name is?" What a nice way to start a conversation. That is how I was greeted by **Etienne Hugel**. It must be nearly ten years since I last saw Etienne, along with late **Gérard Jaboulet** in Vinexpo. Etienne later took me to his booth, and lead with me through with his 2004 whites. I must say, I enjoy the 2004, which was not an easy vintage for Alsace due to the rain-threat harvest. The humid growing condition also results in the spread of grey rot and vintners have to fight hard to get their fruit ripened properly (apparently, those who picked early and eliminated those rotten grapes made the best wine). Hugel's style is on the elegance side, which unlike those from **Ernest Burn, Albert Mann, Zind-Humbrecht** that has shown more fatness and sweetness. His 2004 is fresh and dried, with very distinct varietal character. His top cuvée is his **Jubilee** and indeed, I enjoy his **2004 Riesling Jubilee** immensely. Still in its infancy of primarily fruit, quite creamy-feel (Etienne called that the baby-fat), with limey, floral notes. I like the present of the natural acidity, which keep the wine firm and focus. Etienne later poured me his "under-table" bottle of **1998 Riesling Jubilee**, which was to me, the pure essence of diesel - mineral. The palate shows good fatness and aged honey element. However, the zesty acidity remained present throughout the palate. Etienne later told me, he and Paul Jaboulet Aîné has both left Maxxium Singapore (previously known as Rémy Singapour). They are now distributed by Hong Tong Bee (or CornerStone, Tel: 6732 0555). I believe, the current switch of their distributor in Singapore might have something to do with the recent sale of Paul Jaboulet Aîné to Jean-Jacques Frey, owner of **Château La Lagune** and part-owner of **Billecart-Salmon** Champagne.

Primum Familiae Vini, or first families of wines was first form in 1993, with the aimed of combining all the strength of world-known, family-owned producers in promoting the value of 1) family-owned businesses; 2) exchanging vini/viticultural information among the members with the concept of terroir in mind; 3) to promote wine as a culture and moderation consumption of alcohol. Every year, members of Primum Familiae Vini traveling around the world, organized press conference and tasting in promoting the above values. The **December 1st** afternoon tasting at Raffles Ballroom is a All-Stars event. At the entrance, I saw **Paul Symington** of Symington Port (owner of Warre, Dow's, Graham ports), SQ (Singapore

Airline) panel of wine experts, **Steven Spurrier** and **Michael Hill-Smith MW**, **Frédéric Drouhin** of Domaine Drouhin, **Marc** and **Pierre Perrin** of Château de Beaucastel, **Egon Müller IV** of Egon Müller Scharzhof, **Priscilla Incisa della Rocchetta** of Sassicaia, **Pablo Álvarez** of Vega-Sicilia and a rare appearance of **Baroness Philippine de Rothschild** of Château Mouton-Rothschild. Believe me or not, I have visited Mouton for half a dozen of time, I never have the opportunity to meet the Baroness, even during Bordeaux's future campaigned (en primeur). No wonder, I witness a well-suit Caucasian gentlemen that literary kneeled down for her "majesty". What a privilege!

At the **Domaine Joseph Drouhin** counter, I have the first glimpse of **2005 Chablis** Vaudon. Clearly, this vintage has more flesh, and shown more obvious ripeness (or fruitiness). Somehow I prefer the more austere, limey, racy 2004, which shows better terroir definition and unmistakable chalky, stony Chablis style. Fortunately, the second wine of **2004 Chablis Grand Cru Vaudésir** just does that. I found that Drouhin's Vaudésir has more of that typical 04's "cut" compared to say, William Fèvre, which was richer and more expressive. Typicité Chablis mineral of oyster shell and iodine notes can be easily spotted in this Chablis. Clearly more transparent and details than 2005. In my opinion, there are no better Beaune white than Drouhin Beaune "Clos des Mouches". The **2004 Clos des Mouches** is a lovely wine with delicious personality and yet the classic 04's acid has gave the wine the focus and delineation.

I have always been curious about that, why the local importer of Château de Beaucastel never bring in their fabulous, 100% **Roussanne, Châteauneuf du Pape Vieilles Vignes Blanc**. I finally found this wine in the tasting. The 2004 is discreet yet rich, with peach-cocktail like fruit and unctuous palate that recall those of Condrieu. However, the wine is much more stylish and has more acid-firmness than the best Condrieu. In my opinion, this simply is the best southern Rhône white money can buy. After tasting the exotic, flamboyant **2003 Perrin & Fils Vacqueyras "Les Christins"** (from blend of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre and Carignan). I find it hard to appreciate the **2001 Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf du Pape**, which was in fact a better wine. I was surprised to learn that this wine was not decanted. Far more subtle, compared to the almost syrup-sweet Vacqueyras, with more complex fruit profile of dark berries, black cherries, earth and mineral. It has better middle depth and shown better elegance than the former wine.

Egon Müller junior led us through the display of his three Scharzhofberg Riesling. I like his **2004 Kabinett**, crisp, details and refreshing. I however thought that his **2003 Spätlese** to be lack of precision and absent of that typical cleansing-acid finish. Müller admitted that, heat-affects 2003, where sugar was abundant (drought-year, with sugar risen rapidly and often outrace the phenolic ripening), but acidity was running at the frightfully low level. This is the first time that the German official allowed the vintners to add tartaric acid to their musts, which previously, süsreserve (sweet reserve, or unfermented grape juice) were more commonly apply to counterbalance the high-acid, tart flavor of German's Riesling.

Sassicaia 2003, which is currently represented by our very own wine guru, the soon-to-be 80 year-old Dr. NK Yong (his company is called Giron Fine Wines, Tel: 6474 0076) is an usually profound, immensely delicious juice. Plenty of sweet blackcurrant, in a gentle, silk-like palate. Very sexy and attractive. The **2004 Guidalberto** despite do not share the same richness and scale was nevertheless compensate with a better verve and firmer palate.

I am not a fan of **Torre's Mas La Plana**, despite it was the most important red wine of Penedè and previously won the best Cabernet-based wine at 1979 Gault-Millau Wine Olympiades in Paris for their **1970 Mas La Plana**, beating such famous Bordeaux like **Château Latour 1970** and **La Mission Haut-Brion 1961**. The wine is an unmistakably Cabernets, with its blackcurrant and tobacco smokiness. However, I am not sure anyone could guess in blind for being a Spaniard. Torres new wine, **2000 Grans Muralles** (from blend of Monastrell, Garnacha Tinta, Garró, Samsó and Cariñenaare) is more likely my cup of tea. More linear, more acid-buffered berries scented fruit, which shown more palate penetration and liveliness. Mediterranean-like of edgy, earth, red-black berries fruits that is clearly not repeatable in new world. The wine despite not as suave, nor as rich as the Mas La Plana, however, it offset with better

details and sappiness than the former wine (Torres is currently distributed by Culina. For enquiry or order, u contact Chee Wee at 9680 9922).

Every year, I meet **Pablo Álvarez** of Vega Sicilia and his winemaker, **Xavier Ausás López de Castro** in Bordeaux for the annual en primeur tasting. I am glad to see Pablo here for the occasion. His **Pintia** (vintage 2003?) from **Toro** belongs to those concentrated, wood-infused (mocha, chocolate), new wave, internationalization school. I was more delighted to see that sense of elegance with the following wine of **Alion** (sorry I don't remember the year? That afternoon tasting, I did not take any notes and it was entirely reliant on my memory. It appears that, my little brain cell could only remember so much.), which despite made in the modern style for **Ribera del Duero**. **2002 Valbuena** was to me, more balanced and elegant. Very silky and sexily smooth. Not a blockbuster like Pintia, however, it offers better fruit purity and more flavored persistent palate (older vine?). Previously, I often think Valbuena is one of the most highly recognizable wine in the entire Vega Sicilia's portfolio. As the use of American oak for aging, makes it obvious for Spaniard and unmistakably Valbuena (however, with Xavier as the new winemaker, it is seemingly being replaced by French oak barrel for aging). Pablo told me, there will not be any Unico produce for 2002, which all the "grand vine" will be blended into Valbuena, which explains the over achieved quality on this consistently been referred as the second vine of Único. I love the **Único 1995**, beautiful lively blueberry, dark cherry fruit aromas from Tempranillo. The palate has however shown more Cabernets, with more currant element and depth/textured that's obviously not a solo Tempranillo can attribute. Although it is delicious now, I found the wine is still not at its best. That somehow trapped, waiting to be burst-out fruit...time will unveil the fullness. Again, I was disappointed, the Único was not served from a decanter.

Here comes the commercial - our latest arrival! Don't miss the offers from **Sauzet's 2004**. Is among my favorite vintage from this famous Puligny-Montrachet producer. Also, despite the steep prices from **Dal Forno, Romano**. However, he is consistently regarded as the finest producer of Valpolicella and Amarone (along with Giuseppe Quintarelli). They are both made in tiny quantity and highly regarded by critics around the world. Don't miss.

9 bts. 2004 **Etienne Sauzet** Bâtard-Montrachet, Grand Cru at 358.00 nett each (rated 94+ points by Tanzer)

12 bts. 2004 **Etienne Sauzet** Bienvenues-Bâtard-Montrachet, Grand Cru at 345.00 nett each (rated 93 points by Burghound)

8 bts. 2000 **Romano Dal Forno** Amarone della Valpolicella Vigneto Monte Lodoletta at 590.00 nett each (rated 95 points by Tanzer)

16 bts. 2001 **Romano dal Forno** Valpolicella Vigneto Monte Lodoletta at 155.00 nett each (rated 90 points by Tanzer)

All the aboves are our final prices. We regret, no further discount will be entertained.

Cheers.

All prices quoted for per bottle in Singapore dollar. Prices indicated "in red" are inclusive of 5% GST.
Free delivery for purchases of S\$350 and above, otherwise S\$15 per delivery will apply.

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