

Spurrier's World

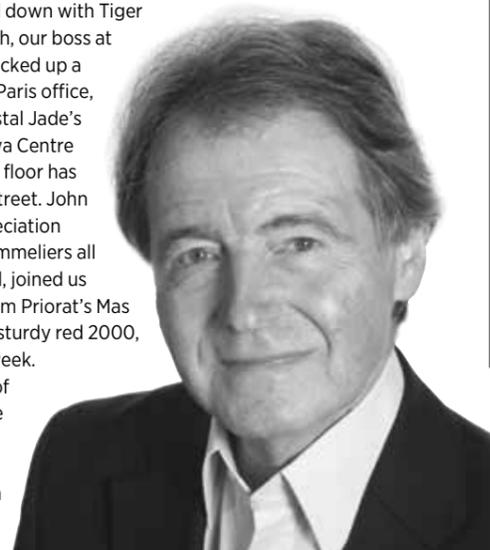
Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor gives us a round-up of recent tastings, his views on current issues in the wine world and top bottles to drink or keep

So long, Singapore Airlines

THIS MARCH SAW my last of twice-yearly weeks since 1989 spent in Singapore as one of the three wine consultants for Singapore Airlines. Since the official retirement age there is 62, I have had a long innings, spending more than a calendar year in this city-state, where, on my early visits, if one wanted to drink wine with the huge variety of Asian cuisines, one had to bring glasses as well as bottles. Now the island must be one of Eurocave's and Riedel's best clients.

While I knew that my co-consultants Michael Hill-Smith and Jeannie Cho Lee, respectively Australia's and Asia's first Masters of Wine, had planned a final dinner for me, I had no idea of the array of wines that I'd enjoy in wonderful company over five evenings. Saturday found Hill-Smith and I strolling from the Ritz-Carlton where we have stayed since it opened in 1995 to No Name Restaurant for chilli crab washed down with Tiger beer. On Sunday, Khean Hooi Goh, our boss at Commercial Supplies who had picked up a taste for wine while running the Paris office, invited me to join his wife at Crystal Jade's top restaurant in the Takashimaya Centre on Orchard Road, whose ground floor has more luxury brands than Bond Street. John Chua, founder of the Wine Appreciation Group, comprising 120 airline sommeliers all educated to WSET Diploma level, joined us and brought along two wines from Priorat's Mas Doix – a nutty white 2005 and a sturdy red 2000, which were a good start to the week.

Philippe Capdouze, founder of Ficofi, the world's most exclusive wine club, and now living in Singapore, had not been able to attend my going-away dinner on



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Tuesday, so invited the three of us to join him and his wife for supper on the Monday. The aperitif, a brilliant Cristal 2004 showing much more precision than in the past, preceded two Chevalier-Montrachets from Bouchard Père et Fils – a white flower, creamy-textured 2008 and a richer yet still fresh 1998. Then followed three grand cru reds: a 2003 Chambertin from Joseph Drouhin, with warm fruit and good grip despite the heatwave year, still evolving well; a youthful 1996 Richebourg from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, with a nose of wild violets and still some leanness from the vintage with a good future, and an extraordinary 1999 Richebourg from DRC – exotically rich and seductive, with magical spice, energy and depth, a very, very great wine with decades still ahead of it.

There were only four guests for Tuesday's dinner at Imperial Treasure on Orchard Road, which serves the city's finest Peking duck, although we had about a dozen other courses too – Ignatius and Janice Chan of Iggy's and other restaurants, whose Burgundy lists are second to none, and Lou (a foreign exchange trader turned wine dealer) and Diane Ghiradello MS. We'd all brought bottles and began with Hill-Smith's Tyrrells, Vat 1 Hunter Semillon 1998, a lovely floral-waxy, vibrantly long wine. Iggy Chan had remembered that we had met the year I joined SIA, when he was a sommelier at Raffles so he brought a briary, slightly gamey 1989 Pommard from Robert Ampeau and a marvellous irony-earthly magnum of 1989 Château Petit-Village, a great year for Pomerol. Before these, Cho Lee poured her 1982 La Chapelle Hermitage from Jaboulet Aîné, a beautiful wine with great purity and warmth of fruit – the best wine of the evening for me, possibly because I had worked there in summer 1965 and enjoyed the 1961 in its infancy. Then came two 1995 clarets – Lou Ghiradello's classic, grandly firm Montrose outclassing Hill-Smith's Margaux which was young, tannic, even a little raw. The deep, spicy richness of

Ghiradello's Torbreck, Run Rig Shiraz 2004 matched the Singapore noodles to perfection, while my 2008 Ornellaia showed chocolatey Merlot flavours with good structure (at 15% abv, compared to Montrose's 12.5%) for the future.

The following evening our joint bosses from Commercial Supplies and Inflight Services had arranged a grand dinner at Sam Leong's Chinese restaurant on the touristy Sentosa Island. Kicking off with a delicious Charles Heidsieck NV from last year's stocks (Singapore Airlines is currently pouring Bollinger's Special Cuvée in Business Class before changing to Taittinger's Prelude Grands Crus NV), we moved to a beautifully textured 2007 Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Riesling Kabinett from Reichsgraf von Kesselstatt and a still young and very Tuscan 2007 Chianti Classico Riserva from Castello di Fonterutoli. With wok-fried beef tenderloin the surprise was Penfolds Grange 1990 – the last three bottles left over from the airline's launch of the double-decker Airbus A380: mocha-coffee, powerful yet smooth, an utterly, totally 'grand vin'. A golden, spicily sweet Doisy-Védrières from the great Sauternes 2001 vintage came with Japanese pearl rice and Hokkaido scallops, before ending on the superb current release of Krug's Grand Cuvée for the goodbye toasts.

Nothing had been planned for the Thursday evening, Hill-Smith opting for an early night, but Cho Lee said she had been asked to join three local wine-loving friends at Nicolas, a tiny but top French restaurant, and asked me along. What a finale! Dom Pérignon 2002 for aperitif, brilliant and lifted, before a very rare 1964 Barolo from Giacomo Conterno, with a surprisingly fresh wild-roses bouquet and a lovely finish. Then a trio of 1964 St-Emilions: Canon (recorked in 2004) with fragrance and warmth from this hot vintage, pure and expressive; Ausone, more robust and earthy, giving an impression of very old vines; and Cheval-Blanc, looking 20 years younger than its age – spicy, slightly exotic, the best of three great wines. Finally, with one of the hosts remarking that white Burgundies went well with cheese, we had a gorgeous, stunningly fresh 2006 Le Montrachet from Remoussinet: a perfect end to a wonderful week.

It will regretfully be goodbye to Singapore Airlines, but for Singapore friends, food and wine, just au revoir.

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster

From the cellar Aged Rivesaltes: rare wonders

One of the most extraordinary tastings recently has been of 19 Rivesaltes Vin Doux Naturels from 2000 to 1933. These naturally sweet fortified wines from 16% to 17.5% abv, were unearthed by Montpellier-based oenologue Philippe Gayral. They are still in cask, to be bottled under his brand L'Archiviste. In 1950, 60 million litres of Rivesaltes VDN were drunk in France; today just 1 million. Soon they will cease to exist. One or two bottles are a must for every cellar. **Château Mosse 1933** (£45), 30 years old, orange-peel nose, elegant and spirit warmth, 19/20 (96/100)pts; **Château Sisquille 1946** (£40)



vibrant sweetness, nutty and smooth, 18.5 (95). Then five vintages of **Château Priure du Monastir del Camp**, a religious order that ceased making these wines after 1970: **1945** (£45) burnt molasses nose, terrific richness, spicy almost dry finish, 18.5 (95); **1949** (£40) tighter and more grip, less rich, 18.25 (94); **1951** (£40) lovely burnt nose, clear fruit, 18.25 (94); **1959** (£40) lifted spices, less rich, 18 (93); **1967** (£35) full amber, wild roses and orange peel nose, lovely clarity like a dry Oloroso, 18.5 (95) *Per bottle prices in bond from Farr Vintners; minimum order three bottles.*

For the cellar Bodegas y Viñedos Aalto, Ribera del Duero

Bodegas y Viñedos Aalto was set up in 2000 by Mariano García and Javier Zaccagnini, the grapes coming from some 200 parcels of vines aged from 45 to more than 100 years old. A tasting of vintages from 2005 to 2011 justified the reputation of this modern legend. Both **Aalto** (150,000 bottles) and **Aalto PS** (Pagos Seleccionados, 15,000 bottles) are 100% Tinto Fino. **Aalto 2005** (£43.33), black fruit spices, rich and smooth, good tannic back-up, 17.75/20 (92/100)pts, drink 2014-2025; **Aalto 2007** (£40) good but not the richness of 2005: a cold year, 17 (90), 2014-2020; **Aalto 2010** (£25) rich, chocolatey spice, still has puppy fat,

great future, 18 (93), 2016-2030; **Aalto 2011** (£21.67) richer, sweeter, more open, very good but less depth, 17 (90), 2016-2025. **Aalto PS 2005** (£80) dense fragrance, superb warmth, finesse to come, 18.5 (95), 2015-2030; **Aalto PS 2006** (£65) terrific vigour, tannins still there, 18.25 (94), 2016-2030; **Aalto PS 2010** (£53.33) dense black fruits, Latour-style depth, great long-term wine, 18.5 (95), 2018-2040; **Aalto PS 2011** (£48.33) more precise, internal richness, very good future, 18 (93), 2016-2035. *Bottle prices in bond from City Wine Collection.*



Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p100)



Schramsberg, Blanc de Blancs, North Coast, California, USA 2010

£26 **The Vineyard Cellars**
The Davies family is still running this Napa estate; a vintage of this wine was served in Beijing as a 'Toast to Peace' by US President Nixon. The 2010 has a lovely green apple and brioche nose, lively creaminess and an elegant finish. **Drink 2014-2017 Alc 12.5%**



Ottoventi, Zibibbo, Sicily, Italy 2013

£10.50 **The Wine Society**
The delightful Zibibbo (alias Muscat of Alexandria) grape, if well handled, can capture roses and lily aromas without losing its freshness, and this silver-pale example does just that, together with a lifted finish. It's totally charming – happiness guaranteed. **Drink 2014 Alc 12.5%**



Domaine Henri Gouges, Pinot Blanc, Bourgogne, France 2011

£17-£19 **Flint Wines, OW Loeb**
This Pinot Blanc is a rarity from the Côte de Nuits: white flower aromas and fresh apple on the palate. It is crisp and clear now with roundness to come and a fresh minerality on the finish. It is a regular in the Spurrier cellar. **Drink 2014-2016 Alc 12.5%**



Maison Cazes, Les Clos de Paulilles, Collioure, Roussillon, France 2012

£17.49 **Les Caves de Pyrène**
From superbly terraced vineyards facing the Collioure bay, old Mourvèdre (65%) vines ripen to give deep briary fruit, 30% Syrah adds spice and 5% Grenache rounds it off to make an exciting wine with depth and originality. **Drink 2014-2017 Alc 14%**



Ravenswood Winery, Old Vine Zinfandel, Sonoma County, California, USA 2010

£11-£14 **KWM Wines, Templar Wine**
Joel Peterson adds 9% Petite Sirah, 6% Syrah, 4% Carignan and 1% 'mixed black grapes' from 80-year-old vines on volcanic soil for a succulently layered wine with blackberry fruit and tannin. **Drink 2014-2016 Alc 14.5%**



4 Kilos, 12 Volts, Mallorca, Spain 2012

£19.99-£23 **Harvey Nichols, Indigo Wine**
The makers of this marvellous wine say that 12 Volts works like an energy accumulator. The blend of 50% local Callet grape with 30% Syrah, 10% Cabernet and 10% Merlot has produced a lovely, fresh, spicy, lifted, totally captivating vineyard wine. **Drink 2014-2016 Alc 13.5%**