

Simple palates, seriously

Greetings everyone! A special reminder to the slower amongst us, it's time to shake-off the holiday hangover and get back to work. Yup, welcome to 2008! For me, a new year calls for a new challenge; and to start off, it's all about getting more organized. I'll be starting to write my PhD thesis and trying to finish it by March, but that doesn't mean I'll be sacrificing all my relaxation time which, as most of you would know, involves the rather simple process of 1 or 2 bottles on the weekend. I'll keep up my drink accounts, but have in mind a more structure way of presenting it. And that's exactly what this new 'newsletter' project is all about. It was quite an arduous (but undeniably enjoyable) task of providing drink reports and reviews every few days. I think condensing them into a more presentable and readable layout will be advantageous for the reader and myself. So without further ado, this issue will start from the Christmas period and cover my New Year trip to Macau. Hope you guys enjoy the read. Cheers to happy and responsible drinking in 2008! Terence.

Belated Christmas report

Amidst the usual ho-hum of the relatives gathering at my place for a good spot of Christmas feasting, there was still enough stomach room to sneak in a few stellar drinks. The evening started with a half forcedly consumed **Torbreck 2005 Saignee** and a thoroughly delicious **La Spinetta 2005 Bricco Quaglia Moscato D'Asti**.

Earlier in the day, I had decanted a **Saint-Florin 1996** but it was dull and lifeless. A mere and rather pointless exercise to clear space in the wine fridge. A previous remark that we should be drinking aged reds prompted me to bring back a bottle of **Petaluma 1990 Coonawarra** from Melbourne – a nice, simple Cab Sauv and merlot blend to accompany our Frankville cheese sausages and Mediterranean ham.



A short hiatus in gorging allowed me to catch my breath and turn my attention upon two Chateaufneuf du Papes. Both 2001s – **Beaucastel** and **Vieux Telegraphe**. My cousin had brought the VT and I thought that it'd be good timing to bust out the only Beaucastel I had left in Singapore. Talk about a timely drink! The cork showed a fine streak of wine seepage, but with great Christmas fortune, it was transformed into a perfectly aged potion and was drinking beautifully. The vibrancy of the VT, flowed over by the elegance of the Beaucastel, carried me into a world of sunny forest fields along a running river, drawing the curtains on the first part of my festive holidays.

During 2007, my interest in Burgundy grew, stemming from the very approachable 2005 vintage. However, my wallet remains flat as ever, and I have only been able to purchase entry level Bourgogne rouges. It frustrates me as I am well aware of the spectrum offered by Ville Villages, Romanee Conti and Eschazeux. I upgraded to a **Nicolas Potel 2000 Clos de Vougeot** upon my arrival back in Singapore; but my education in the age-worthiness of Burgs came in the form of three bottles older than myself. Here's a little plug for **Le Benaton** where the **1976 Huguenots** were purchased from. Store owner Patrick runs a tiny store near Great World City retailing mainly burgundies with a choice selection of regions, affording anyone keen an opportunity in tasting through various regional produce from a single domaine (for example, I saw at least 5 different bottles from Bissey).

The **Fixin**, **Les Fontenys Gevrey-Chambertin** and **Bourgogne Hautes Cotes de Nuits** made for lovely food pairings with Wagyu beef fillets, chicken chops and fresh apple tart with their silky smooth, toned-down, soil-like strawberry sublimity.



Spinning in 2008

I was in Macau for one week with the full intention of winning in 2008 at the Baccarat tables. For those unfamiliar with the region's history, Macau is an island off Southern China which was ceded to the Portuguese and was only returned to China in previous decades.



It's only one hour by ferry from Hong Kong and is connected by a short strip of land to the mainland (Zuhai). The main attraction here is the casinos, which have been developed so much so that Macau is quite seriously the Las Vegas of the east.

However, given the huge European influence it has soaked up, Macau does offer a wide variety of cuisines, both traditional (Chinese and European) as well as fusion (the local Macau style is like a mix of Portuguese and Chinese). For me, the ultimate draw card is the freshness in all your orders, knowing that the produce used (in most hotel restaurants) is of high-quality and that most cooks/chefs have the skill to place a mouth-watering, visually appealing and tastebud tingling dish in front of you.

The one place which I absolutely had to dine at was **Robuchon a Galera**, located in the **Lisboa Hotel**. Executive chef **Joel Robuchon** needs no further introduction to those with some knowledge of the culinary circle, but the fact that he was named French chef of the century, well, I'll leave it at that. As I learnt the hard way (NEVER trust plebby food review sites), reservations are ESSENTIAL. So unless you're capable of consuming an oogling wine display featuring DRC LaLas, Chateau d'Yquem and Mouton Rothschilds, my suggestion is call early to make a lunch reservation the day of your choice. For a mere HKD\$328-538, one can select a four to six-course luncheon. Take your time trawling through the volume that is their wine list exceeding 3300 while munching on the freshly baked breads (I loved the sweet walnut bread while the cheese bun was not shabby either). The lightly smoked foie gras with fruit and nut glazed in port was sublime. Not too rich on the mouth as the fruity sweetness refreshes your palate. The artichoke veloute was a good follow up, as was the white mushroom soup served over crayfish and truffle ravioli.



A brilliant caramelized quail breast fillet had heated foie gras soft enough to ooze out as my knife sliced through the meat, accompanied by a dollop of perfectly weighted, creamy mashed potato. My delight over my main course was further broadened by what I thought was a good pairing an Usseglio 1999 Mon Aieul although the sommelier thought otherwise. Not the best of years and still young, it was surprisingly not 'closed' and the tight structure was well broken down and emphasized by the richness of the quail. My lunch was ended with house-made vanilla ice-cream and white chocolate Christmas cake wheeled-out on a dainty cart.

