

wine & DINING

J. C. FAVEROLE

Thailand's Bordeaux

Complaining is part of my nature. Those who take time to read my column with any regularity, starting its sixth year incidentally, have probably got used to skipping my regular diatribe about the adverse impact the government's dunderheaded excise taxes on wine have had on tourism, our health (not kidding), and our own wine industry. I made one of those breakable New Year's resolutions on January 1 to change my mantra after deciding my complaints were about as futile as the chronic yapping of my neighbour's "mop" dog - nobody's paying any attention. But, a phone call and subsequent meeting last week rekindled at least part of my compulsion to keep protesting. No, the PM didn't call and capitulate, but a man with a commitment to his homeland and wine, Dr Pathom Vongsuravatana, asked if I could join him for lunch.

For sure I didn't know who he was until he judiciously mentioned owning Chateau Saint Lo, a small 15-hectare Grand Cru classified property in St Emilion, France. Any of you familiar with wine will remember their distinctive label featuring the Golden Jubilee emblem of HM the King featured in so many local shops. Stay with me on this because it gets better as it goes!

I met Dr Pathom, his wife Martine, and one of their sons, Raphael (also soon to be Dr of history), at their hotel where, after being seated for lunch, we were each poured a glass of wine. Having assumed this was the latest vintage of Chateau Saint Lo, I swirled and tasted, noting the wine's

somewhat disjointed youth but distinct potential. Raphael courteously interrupted my thoughts saying "we have a little surprise to present."

I perused the label noting the name "Domaine Saint Lo",

vintage 2001, cabernet sauvignon, then at the bottom - Product of Thailand!

At this point the waiter set the bottle in front of me and I methodically perused the label noting the name "Domaine Saint Lo", vintage 2001, cabernet sauvignon, then at the bottom - Product of Thailand! What unfolded over

the next hour and a half was an intriguing story of commitment to wine and a desire by Dr Pathom to share that interest with his native country. It's also a story of success through diligence by a family that is at once very Thai and very French, uniquely amalgamated into today's global society by a patriarch with one foot firmly planted in Asia and the other in Europe.

Sent by his family to study in France in the 1960s, Dr Pathom stayed on at university in Bordeaux to earn a PhD in law and economics. Upon graduating he plied his Asian and European business acumen to developing major Cognac sales in Japan and Hong Kong. In 1991 an opportunity to purchase Chateau Saint Lo signalled a shift in his export business toward wine, while also thrusting him into the enviable position of being the only Thai owner of a French chateau, and at that just when wine started booming as a beverage of choice here at home.

Wine is as much a part of Dr Pathom's family as the distilled spirits business, with both he and son Raphael having studied oenology in Bordeaux under such notables as Dr Emile Peynaud. Upon convincing Raphael, already an award-winning author, to give up a career in academia, they bought another St Emilion estate, Chateau Le Merle, and very quietly but methodically launched a major project here in Thailand. After many months of regional climate and soil studies, a 100-hectare site in Phetchabun's Khao Kor "Little Switzerland" hill country was chosen in 1996 for a new winery operation.

Leaving the travails of developing the vineyards and winery for another column, let me advise that the first vintage is now available, and you'd be crazy not to try it. This is real cabernet aged four months in oak, modest berry and pepper aroma, medium body with good balance and pleasant finish. No excuses necessary for this completely Thai wine which represents quality consistent with competent winemaking from vineyard to bottle.

At Bt355 it's a good buy despite the double burden of excise taxes AND investment taxes. It's living proof that quality wines can be made in Thailand, and that the outrageous taxes on those willing to try it need revision. It's available at Big C stores owing to a long standing association between the family and Big C's French investor. More later on this remarkable venture by some remarkable people.

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1 Giant Leap

Thai Tunes on Global DVD



Last month saw the launch of the first vintage from Thailand's newest vineyard, one set up with the help of French specialists and the Thai owner of a Bordeaux chateau. Harry Stiles and Manond Apanich pull the cork on Domaine Saint-Lo.

Thailand's most famous contribution to the world of wine is Chateau Saint-Lo, in St Emilion, in the heart of Bordeaux. It's owned by Dr Pathom Vongsuravattana, born in Nakhon Ratchasima, who's been creating grand cru wines since he bought the property in 1991. Now he's imported that expertise and a team of French specialists into his homeland to launch the first vintage from sister property Domaine Saint-Lo.

The first seeds of Domaine Saint-Lo were sown when HM the King asked Pathom why he didn't produce wine in this country, and the business took root when Pathom met Dr Virachai Techavichit, a former Prime Ministerial advisor, and found they shared the same dream. While Pathom was busy with his 16th century Saint Lo estate, Virachai had been looking into the prospects of wine cultivation in Thailand.

Pathom's French team considered the climate and recommended an area without constant humidity – the main problem for wine growers here, along with its associated pests. Virachai had bought 300 acres below a rocky spur in the mountainous region of Khao Kor, and having tested the chemical nature of the soil, the experts gave the thumbs up. The undulating landscape was important for water drainage, preventing stagnation in the rainy season. The land, shaped like an eagle, is now home to the Peak Eagle Winery.

The specialists continue to use facilities at the Bordeaux University Oenology department to test the wines they now produce. "We're growing mainly Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz," says Raphael Vongsuravattana, Pathom's son and VP of the Saint-Lo group. "But also experimenting with Cinsaut, Grenache, Carignan and Mourvedre." Apart from the Cabernet, these are all grapes associated with the Rhone Valley, so this is obviously the French region they've identified as reflecting most closely the conditions at Khao Kor.

The analytical team is based in Bordeaux, while onsite operations are entrusted to Corbières wine grower Jacques

Peak Eagle promises a wine fiercely proud of its Thai origins

Bacou and the Chateau Saint-Lo cellar master Jean-Francois Vergne. Even the bottling is in the hands of Frenchmen.

But, while the expertise is traditional Gallic, the product is indisputably Thai. Peak Eagle believe globalisation is leading to "the same sort of wines throughout the world," and, while that is something of an exaggeration, their philosophy is to produce an original taste.

French grapes exported to fledgling industries throughout the New World are producing wines of a new character, sometimes finding very comfortable homes abroad – Shiraz in Australia and Sauvignon Blanc in New Zealand, for instance – while the classic Bordeaux grape Cabernet Sauvignon is making good, young drinking wines in Chile.

The hope is to find the same perfect mixed marriage here.

"Our objective is to create what we call a 'typicity' for Thai wine – deep colour, a real concentration and some spicy taste – reflecting the warm and sunny climate," says Raphael. "Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and any other varieties we may grow bring special aromas and flavours very different from those in other countries." In attempting to achieve these lofty ideals of concentrated flavour, Peak Eagle is committed to yields of only 15 hectolitres of wine per hectare, at best one third of the expected yield for these grapes in France. Wine improves as the vine ages, and the low yield will also help prolong the vines' life expectancy, which is very low in the Thai climate.

Peak Eagle promise not to give us "a technical wine stuffed with artificial aromas," but one "deeply rooted in its locality and fiercely proud of its origin."

"We would like Thai people not to confuse this with an industrial product," says Raphael. "Wine has nothing to do with beer, brandy or whisky. Wine is a craft and we are craftsmen."

Once they've perfected a local viticulture, Peak Eagle intend to share their knowledge with other farmers – some neighbouring owners are already experimenting – and this year they'll set up a Wine Academy, featuring seminars, weekend courses and exhibitions, and a "wine civilisation and cultural centre" in the midst of the Khao Kor vineyards.

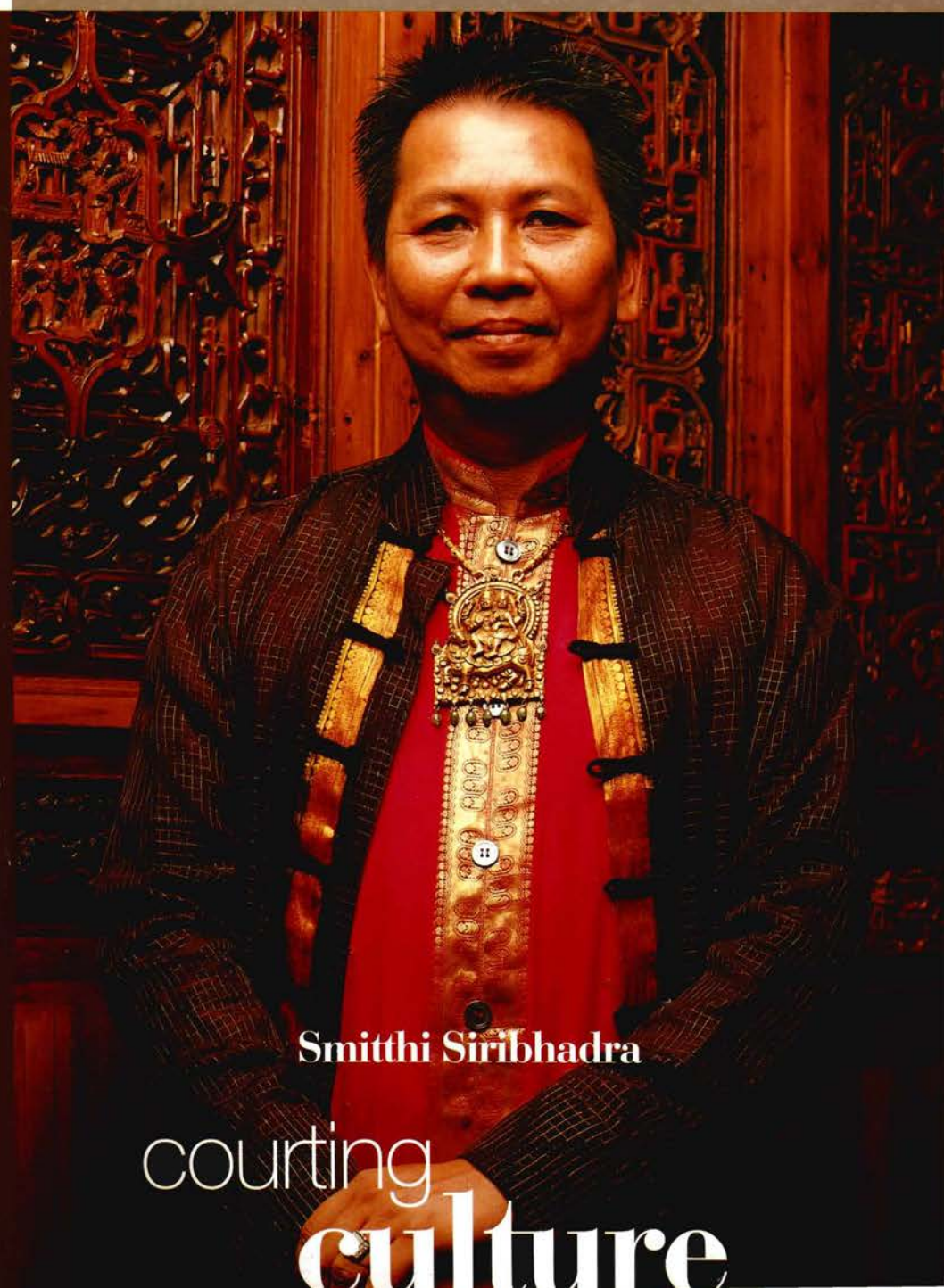
The current crop of wines should retail at around B350 a bottle, and Raphael reveals they're also planning a "Bordeaux blend" (Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) under the label Chateau Grand Virache.



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reaching the peak

You might marvel at the thought of wines to rival French vintages being grown here in Thailand, but it's already happening. In fact, as BRENDAN SHAPIRO discovers, a Thai vineyard has already produced a medal-winning wine and looks set to put viniculture in the kingdom firmly on the map

Raphael Vongsuravatana grew up in Bordeaux in a blend of European and Thai cultures. He has always felt that he belonged to both. The son of Dr Pathom and Martine Vongsuravatana of Chateau St Lo in St Emilion, he has charge of the family's impressive vineyard in Thailand, Domaine St Lo, whose first vintage was released last year to general applause. "Actually, it was our third vintage but the first which we felt was ready to be launched," says Raphael. "We entered it in a competition for new wines in Luxembourg and won a Silver Medal in the New World category."

Raphael's father arrived in France in 1954 as a 20-year-old student. Martine, who was 18 at the time and met Pathom at a university library, is on record as saying he was the most handsome and exotic man she had ever seen. And to the young Thai, her blue eyes, fair hair and French charm were equally fascinating. The couple were married after he had taken his PhD in economics and settled in Bordeaux.



above **Martine and Pathom Vongsuravatana with baby Raphael**

left **Three generations of the Vongsuravatana at Chateau St Lo**

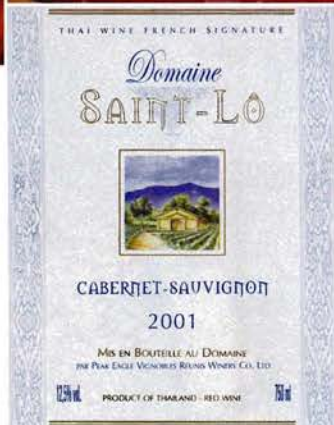


The son of a Korat businessman with a government rice-liquor concession, Pathom invested his knowledge and expertise in exporting French brandy to Asia. There was a growing demand from an emerging middle class increasingly aware of the good things of life, Western-style. Completely at ease in both Europe and Southeast Asia, he became a leading broker of cognac and armagnac, exporting to Japan, Hong Kong and, of course, Thailand. During the years of growth, he assembled the biggest collection in France of historic documents on Franco-Thai relations dating from the time of King Louis XIV and King Narai. This became an abiding interest for Raphael growing up in Bordeaux and he later made it the foundation for his own PhD dissertation, eventually publishing two books and several learned papers on the subject.

As a Thai-French family they had a dream: To own a vineyard of distinction in Bordeaux, with Thai roots in French soil. They had to wait until 1990 for their opportunity, by which time Pathom had acquired an encyclopaedic knowledge of the vineyards of Bordeaux. Chateau St Lo, a former cru classe vineyard which had lost its rating following the death of its owners, was up for sale. Pathom seized the chance to make the purchase, with the dream of reviving its fortunes. After three years of hard work improving the vineyards, winery and buildings, the right to the title cru classe was once again approved by the Institut National des Appellations d'Origine (INAO).

"Chateau St Lo sells very well in France," says Raphael, "and we've been successful in exporting much of our production. But in 1995 my father's health took a turn for the worst. This was significant because he still had another ambition to fulfil: To develop a vineyard in Thailand and make wine good enough to be a Thai export. This has now become my project and in a way it has taken me from my French roots to my Thai roots."

Good wine is already being made here and standards are getting better all the time. In this climate of improvement Pathom Vongsuravatana planned to introduce the growing methods he had learned in France and put to such good effect with Chateau St Lo. The search for a suitable vineyard location had already begun. Raphael visited some 50 sites



above The first vintage of Domaine St Lo, a full, firm cabernet sauvignon with a deep, dark flavour

far left Dr Pathom in the library that played an important part in his son's life

left The label of last year's vintage

and carried out soil and temperature tests supported by the oenological laboratories of Bordeaux and Montpellier Universities.

The family found their ideal site almost by coincidence. Another distinguished Thai with a record of public service, Virachai Techavichit, had a similar aim to the Vongsuravatana family, and had bought 750 rai of land as a potential vineyard on a well-drained hillside in Petchabun. It was sheltered by a high, eagle-shaped rock formation, so he had called it Peak Eagle. Together, Virachai and Pathom formed Peak Eagle Vignobles Reunis Winery Company with the slogan: Thai wine, French signature.

"We wanted to make a wine that had a specific Thai identity," Raphael explains. "Nothing too picturesque and not a 'technical' wine, but a natural expression of the land." They adhered to the strict regulations demanded in St Emilion. "Yields are tightly controlled there," says Raphael. "But here we've reduced them to less than half to get the concentration we want." But that can't be cheap, a point Raphael dismisses by saying, "If you're counting the cost all the time, you're missing the point."

The point being that this is a local wine made by local wine lovers who also love the land and its people. Indeed, for the two families sustainable development is not an empty slogan because local farmers can be taught viticultural methods to extend their range of produce to include quality grapes. "In St Emilion, just like other producers, we're doing our best to sell our wines," says Raphael. "There is no conflict between us. We're all growers, all farmers in a sense. We tend to believe in the saying 'In unity there is strength'. I hope it will be the same in Thailand for many years to come."

The Nation

Sunday

November 24,

2002

Hilltop winery sets Thai standards

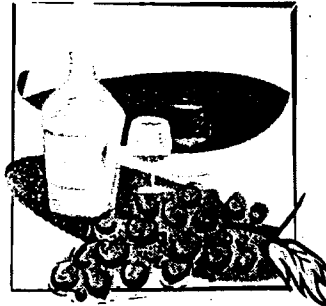
Making sure my glass was full I eased away from the crowds gathered around grills loaded with chicken, suckling pig and local sausages and headed into the double guyot trellised vineyards for a closer look. What a way to spend the afternoon. Music from a string quartet harmonising with gentle breezes, a sky dotted with puffy clouds and a glass of fruity well-balanced shiraz-cabernet in hand. It was one of those wine country idylls that addicts you to a lifestyle balanced between dreams and reality. Pushing it to the surreal was the location – not the patio of a famous Napa, California winery or the garden of a sumptuous Bordeaux chateaux, but at Wang Nam Khieo winery in the hills rising above the Korat plateau just three hours northeast of Bangkok.

This is one of those places where we have to be glad a dreamer pursued his quixotic quest to achieve peace with nature. Viravat Cholvanih, chairman of one of Thailand's most successful electrical engineering conglomerates, was obviously filled with pride as the Minister of Health, Sudarat Keyuraphan, officially opened the gates to Thailand's fifth and certainly most meticulously planned authentic winery. I was privileged to be among some 300 friends and dignitaries who celebrated Viravat's years of painstaking work and spare-nothing expense to bring the winery, vineyards and rural resort to reality.

Undaunted by the axiom that opening a winery virtually guarantees making a large fortune smaller, he was philosophical about his project. "This is not about making money but about being able to pursue something you enjoy doing every waking hour," said Viravat as he surveyed the smiles on his guests' faces.

Wang Nam Khieo has a leg up on its Thailand rivals in that Viravat has enlisted the counsel of professionals to assure that his efforts are built on a successful foundation. French winemaker and winery owner Jacques Bacou, Dr Pathom Vongsuravatana and his son Raphael, owners of Ch St Lo, a grand cru winery St Emilion, Bordeaux, are key advisers to the operation. Here, 200 rai of shiraz vineyards are managed by Kanokwan Pua-Amornpong, a master's graduate in agronomy from the University of Hawaii.

Walking through the winery underscores that nothing has been left to chance in this labour of love. Temperature controlled stainless steel fermenters, French oak ageing barrels and an automated bottling line are strategically located in this two-tier facility carved into the side of a solid rock hillside. The primary label, Chat Des Brumes, takes its name from the French word for mist or fog that often covers the hillside vineyards. The wine is an excellent first effort made from 50 per cent young vine local shiraz and blended with 50 per cent cabernet sauvignon imported from France. Medium body, good overall balance with modest oak tannins make it drink well now with potential to smooth out over the next 12 months. I'll be serving it with pride to some of my California friends during the holidays. It sells for about Bt600 at several Bangkok locations. Call for locations at (02) 273 0037, where you can also get details on visiting the winery and country resort known as Village Farms.



Bottles & Banquets

By JC Eversole

โดเมน แซงต์-โล' ไวน์ไทยสไตล์ฝรั่งเศส



เมรียอมตะ
กมลศักดิ์ ตั้งธรรมนิยม

อกแล้วครับ ในวันนีไวน์ไทยที่เป็นไวน์แท้ๆ โดยผลิตขึ้นมาจากองุ่น ๑๐๐% ก็ได้ปรากฏตัวอยู่ในท้องตลาดอีกยี่ห้อหนึ่ง คือ 'โดเมน แซงต์-โล' (Domaine Saint-Lo)

หลังจากที่ประเทศไทยเคยมีไวน์ยี่ห้อ 'ซาใต้ เดอ เลย' และยี่ห้ออื่นๆ ซึ่งผมถือเป็นไวน์มาตรฐานสากลที่มีการวางจำหน่ายมาก่อนหน้า คราวนี้ก็ถึงเวลาของน้องเล็ก โดเมน แซงต์-โล จากเขาค้อ จังหวัดเพชรบูรณ์บ้าง

ส่วนซาใต้ เดอ ชาลวัน ของ ดร.สนั่น จอมแก้วยศนั้น ผมเห็นมีแต่ข่าวดั่งสะพานยุทธจักรน้ำเมา แต่ยังไม่เห็นตัวเป็นต้นในตลาดไวน์ไม่พบสักขวด

สำหรับเมรียอมตะ-ชาวไทยยี่ห้ออื่นจากนี้ ผมเห็นว่าไม่ใช่ไวน์มาตรฐานระดับ โดยมิอะไรขาดๆ เกินๆ จนไม่น่านับถือ เป็นไวน์คูลเลอร์บ้าง เป็นฟรุตเมรียบ้าง และเป็นน้ำผลไม้ผสมแอลกอฮอล์ก็มี จึงไม่ขอเขียนชื่อเมรียเหล่านั้นให้เสียความรู้สึก

พูดถึงไวน์ไทยยี่ห้อ โดเมน แซงต์-โล (Domaine Saint-Lo) ซึ่งเป็นน้องใหม่เพิ่งวางตลาด ก็คงจะต้องพูดถึงตำนานแห่งการผลิตไวน์ของคนไทยคนหนึ่งชื่อ ดร.ปฐม วงศ์สุววัฒน์

ถูกแล้วครับ ดร.ปฐม เป็นคนไทยคนแรกๆ ที่ไปซื้อไร่องุ่นระดับเกรดแซง-เตมิญอง กรอง ครู (Saint-Emilion Grand Cru) อยู่ในแคว้นบอร์โดซ์ของฝรั่งเศส แล้วทำการผลิตไวน์ในชื่อยี่ห้อ ซาใต้ แซงต์-โล (Chateau Saint-Lo) จนพบกับความสำเร็จอย่างน่าอัศจรรย์

การผจญภัยในวงการเมรียมานานปี ทำให้เขาได้ค้นพบว่าองุ่นพันธุ์ที่ปลูกในบ้านเกิดผลิตไวน์ที่มีคุณภาพสักยี่ห้อหนึ่งที่ทัดเทียมกับไวน์เยี่ยมของโลก เพื่อเชิดชูประเทศไทยให้กระเดื่องชื่อ

แล้วความฝันของ ดร.ปฐม ก็เกิดขึ้นอย่างอัศจรรย์ทันด่วน เมื่อเขาได้พบกับ ดร.วิระชัย เดชะวิจิตร ผู้มีไฟสร้างสรรคสิ่งใหม่ๆ ให้เกิดขึ้นในสังคมไทย

หลังจากที่ใช้เวลาค่อนข้างนานในการแสวงหาที่ทางอันเหมาะสมในการปลูกองุ่นผลิตเมรียให้มีคุณภาพ ในปี ค.ศ. ๑๙๙๕ ทุกอย่างก็ลงตัวเป๊ะๆ ที่เขาค้อ จังหวัดเพชรบูรณ์

ที่ดินอันเหมาะสมมีกว่า ๓๐๐ เอเคอร์ ที่เชิงเขาภูพานอินทรี ซึ่งเป็นดินกรวดหิน (Gravel) และอากาศกลางวันกลางคืน

มาอย่างไม่ช้าช้า โดยปลูกองุ่น ๔ พันธุ์ยอดนิยมของโลกคือ พันธุ์กาแบร์เนต ไชวีนญอง (Cabernet Sauvignon) พันธุ์เมอร์-โลต์ (Merlot) พันธุ์ซีราห์ (Syrah) และพันธุ์มูเวด्रे (Mouvedre) โดยพวกเขาพร้อมใจกันตั้งชื่อไร่องุ่นของพวกเขาอย่างไม่ลังเลว่า "Peak Eagle Vignobles" ซึ่งภาษาไทยต้องเรียกว่า "ไร้โคกอินทรี"

๕ ปีในไร้โคกอินทรีผ่านไปไวเหมือนโกหก ในที่สุดองุ่นก็เติบโตจนมีผลผลิตที่ใช้การได้ แล้ว

ในที่สุดไวน์จากปีเก็บเกี่ยว ค.ศ. ๒๐๐๑

รุ่นองุ่น Cabernet Sauvignon ยี่ห้อ

โดเมน แซงต์-โล (Domaine Saint-Lo)

ก็ถูกผลิตขึ้น และบรรจุขวดวางใน

ท้องตลาดทั้งประเทศไทยและ

โพธิ์ประเทศ

อ ลาก ไวน์แดง

โดเมน แซงต์-โล รุ่นกาแบร์-

เนต ไชวีนญอง ๒๐๐๑

(Domaine Saint-Lo

Cabernet Sauvignon

2001) ตัวนี้ นะแหละ

สองดอกเตอร์เกิด

สองจิตสองใจว่าจะใช้

รูปแห่งประวัติศาสตร์

การจับมือระหว่างทูต

ลาอุแบร์ และสมเด็จพระนารายณ์มหา-
ราช ปี ๑๖๕๕ ดี หรือกระหม่อมน้อยหน้า
หุบเขาโคกอินทรี

ในที่สุดก็ลงตัวที่ฉลากจะต้องใช้
กระหม่อมน้อยหน้าโคกอินทรี แต่โลโก้ของ
บริษัท Peak Eagle ต้องเป็นภาพประวัติ-
ศาสตร์ระหว่างทูต ลาอุแบร์ และสมเด็จพระ
นารายณ์มหา

แท้จริงไวน์ตัวนี้จะใช้ฉลากอะไร
คงไม่สำคัญเท่ากับน้ำเมรียที่บรรจุอยู่
ในขวด ซึ่งอร่อยเกินราคา ยอดเยี่ยมเกิน
ฐานะ ชนิดกล่าวได้ว่า ไวน์ไทยตัวนี้จะ
ต้องมีชื่อเสียงในไม่ช้า และจะเป็นความ
ภาคภูมิใจของคนไทยทั้งประเทศ

Domaine



CABERNET-SAUVIGNON
2001

SAINT-LO

ถูกแล้วครับ ผมมีโอกาสชิมไวน์ไทยจากเขาค้อ ยี่ห้อ
โดเมน แซงต์-โล รุ่นกาแบร์เนต ไชวีนญอง ๒๐๐๑ แล้ว ในราคา
ขวดละประมาณ ๓๖๐ บาท ยอมรับว่าเป็นเมรียที่มีเนื้อเข้มข้น
เกินราคาไวน์ หอมกลิ่นแบล็กเบอร์รี่ และผลไม้กันอย่างจำ
ใจยิ่ง รสคกคล้ายไวน์กลประทับใจเหมือนไวน์ฝรั่งเศสราคาแพง

มักมีคนบอกว่า อะไรที่เป็นรุ่น ๑ จะยอดเยี่ยมเสมอ
ดังนั้น ก็ต้องติดตามกันต่อไปว่า โคกอินทรีรุ่นใหม่ๆ ไม่
ว่าจะผลิตจากองุ่น Cabernet Sauvignon องุ่น Merlot
องุ่น Syrah หรือองุ่น Mouvedre จะยังใกล้เคียงไวน์
แดง Domaine Saint-Lo รุ่น Cabernet Sauvignon ปี

PEAK OF ACHIEVEMENT



M. Pathom and Mme.
Marlene Vongsuravattana
at Peak Eagle,
Khao Yoi.



Chateau Saint-Lo is unusual as Bordeaux vineyards go, since it is Thai-owned. Its current owners improved on the vineyards they had purchased so that it is now accorded the designation St-Emilion grand *cru classee*.

Domaine Saint-Lo has the same owners, and it, too is unusual, since it is not in Bordeaux or even in France, but in Thailand, on the hillsides of Petchabun Province.

While the Chateau has an established reputation and exports its fine St Emilion wine to Europe, North America and Southeast Asia, the Domaine is a newcomer whose first vintage is now being released in Thailand.

Already a highly successful exporter of Cognac and Armagnac, Pathom Vongsuravattana was looking for a vineyard that he could call his own when Chateau de Saint-Lo came on the market in 1990. "It had once been a *grand cru*, but since the owners' death it had fallen into disrepair and lost the title," he said. "My first goal was to win it back." This he did, after three years hard work. It was a Thai success story in a rare field, but he was also dreaming of another goal further along the road: Coming back to Thailand and producing a wine here that would have an international reputation. "I had the honour of an audience with His Majesty the King," he told us. "Knowing that I made wine in Bordeaux, His Majesty asked why I wasn't making wine in Thailand. That spurred on our efforts to find suitable vineyard land here."

He was joined in the task by his son, Raphael who visited something like 50 sites in Thailand, carrying out soil and temperature tests. It was always the belief that Thailand is too hot and for making good wine, but it's hot in the South of France, in Italy, Spain and Australia where excellent wines are made.

More worrying problems are humidity and mildew, as well as the diseases brought by pests which are still uncharted waters here in Thailand. What Raphael and his father were seeking was a well-drained hillside where the rain would not stagnate in the wet season. It did not have to be especially fertile land, since vines do better when they have to struggle to find the water and nutrients they need.

In the end, they found their ideal property by a coincidental meeting with Virachai Techavichit. He was another Thai who had settled in France and returned to Thailand with ambitions directed towards raising the international reputation of his country. A former Vice President of the CP, Chairman of the MRTA, Prime Minister's Adviser and founder of the International School of Regents, Virachai had bought 300 acres of land in the "little Switzerland" mountain region of

He called it Peak Eagle because of the shape of the mountain that overlooked it. When he took Pathom and Raphael on a visit there, they immediately liked the look of it. Would it deliver the right results to rigorous topographical, geological and climatic analysis, though? When the samples were analysed they were greeted with a resounding Yes.

A suitable mix of land formation, soil type, climate and exposure to sun are essential to the production of good wine, and together these are known as the *terroir*. Good treatment in the vineyard and the winery are also necessary, but the number one factor is the grape. Not the grape you fancy most, but the one that will be at home in the *terroir* and give its best.

As luck, or, rather good judgement had it, the grape chosen for the Peak Eagle vineyards is the one that everybody loves: the classic Cabernet Sauvignon. It was a decision supported by research from the oenology labs of Bordeaux and Montpellier Universities, whose data will help the region's agricultural as well as viticultural development. Other vines planted at Peak Eagle will be Mourvedre and Syrah.

"To get the level of concentration of flavour we need, we had to severely restrict the yield," said Raphael. "That means a big 'green harvest' every year when the grapes are ripening." The 'green harvest' occurs when the grapes on the vine are thinned to concentrate the nutrients to give maximum strength. "At Chateau Saint-Lo we also need to keep to low yields," said Raphael. "But here, we're down to about eight grapes on a bunch! Some varieties can produce 40, 50 or 60 thousand litres of wine per hectare of vines. For us, it's 15 thousand per hectare."

Putting quality before quantity is always costly, of course, but it is the only way to make a wine destined not only for local consumption but as a Thai export. "We're thinking in terms of 50 per cent being exported," said Mr Pathom. "And in time, as we plant more and produce more, we'll be looking at 75 per cent."



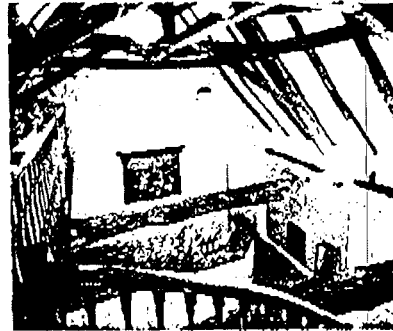


The process which led up to the release of Domaine Saint-Lo's first vintage took seven years altogether, with half of that period devoted to finding the location. Staff training has been a priority from the word go, and it is here that the advantage of being men of two cultures has been especially important to Vongsavatanapere et fils.

As a Thai company concerned with local development, they understand that the local people have their own ways and traditions, and wine and viticulture were new to them. They had to integrate the rigorous and sometimes mystifying demands that producing good wine imposes and train the local people in the viticulture techniques which are different to the agricultural methods they were accustomed to. They are people of the land who are close to the environment they live in, and now they understand the complexities of vine cultivation, care and efficiency.

The wine made by Chateau Saint-Lo's winemaker after the first harvest was subjected to thorough analysis and discussion. The first vintage is never released, and neither is the second, that's the law in France. The wine is not considered ready until the vines have had a minimum of three years to grow and produce fruit. However, the second vintage was undeniably good, and was a pattern for the third, the 2001, that a party of *Journos* who expound of wine and food in Bangkok publications were invited to taste.

I think we had all gone prepared to be positive. After all, here was a Made in Thailand project developed with care and skill and designed to impress the world, so we were all ready to wish it well.

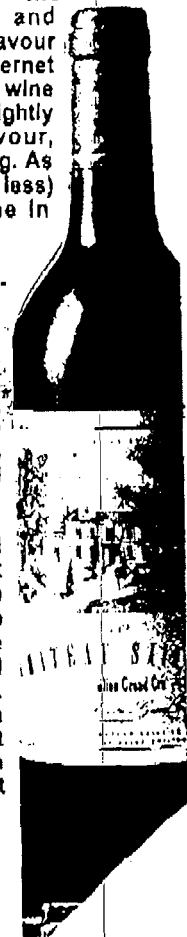


We were not, however, prepared for the kind of quality before us. First the colour, 'the robe' as wine persons call it. It was a deep, rich red; nothing thin or half-hearted here. "We could only get colour like that with Cabernet Sauvignon," said Raphael. To be honest, there was not a lot on the nose, but on the palate it was splendid - confident and assertive with 12.5 per cent alcohol by volume with well balanced fruit and acidity.

It did not have the characteristic aroma and taste of blackcurrant flavour we associate with Cabernet Sauvignon, but, a new wine from Thai soil, it had a slightly jammy, red fruit flavour, intense and long-lasting. As the French say (more or less) "There's a lot of wine in there!"

Initially, Domaine Saint-Lo from the Peak Eagle Winery in Khao Yoi will be distributed in Thailand by Big C at a low to medium price. Look out for the tasteful, white label with pale blue and gold lettering.

Many wine lovers will probably drink first out of curiosity, but it's a safe bet that they'll be back for more, for the satisfaction it gives and for its excellent value. And with perhaps a little glow of pride at this new Thai addition to one of life's most civilised pleasures.



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Gavroche

Le magazine des pays du sourire - Thaïlande / Laos / Cambodge -

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ENQUÊTE
L'AFFAIRE TANGUY



FINALEMENT UN BON VIN DE CHEZ NOUS

Produit dans la province de Petchabun, le Château Saint-Lô est incontestablement le meilleur vin rouge thaïlandais.

1954 Pour la France c'est la fin de la guerre d'Indochine et le début de celle d'Algérie. C'est aussi l'année de l'arrivée à Bordeaux d'un jeune étudiant thaïlandais, Pathom Vongsuravatana. Il a le palais vierge mais ouvert à toutes les bonnes choses. C'est ainsi qu'il découvre le vin. Il décroche également un doctorat en économie à l'université de Bordeaux, tombe amoureux d'une jolie française, Martine, et décide de s'installer dans l'Hexagone. Pour affiner son palais, il suit les cours du meilleur œnologue du moment, Emile Peynaud. Le sort en est jeté, la vie de Pathom sera placée sous le signe du goût.

Il fonde une compagnie d'exportation de Cognac et d'Armagnac à destination du Japon. Les affaires sont bonnes, les Japonais sont reconnaissants qu'on leur vende enfin ces précieux breuvages à des prix honnêtes.

Pathom franchit alors le pas décisif: il achète un vignoble. Et pas n'importe lequel. Il devient propriétaire du Château Saint-Lô. Une superbe propriété dans le Saint-Emilion. Elle date du XVI^{ème} siècle. Mais si le château est un monument classé par l'Unesco, la vigne a été tristement négligée. Avec son équipe, Pathom redresse tout cela. Le Château retrouve son rang de Grand Cru. Il fait tant et si bien que ce vin franco-thaïlandais est autorisé à se parer des armoiries qui célèbrent la 50^{ème} année de règne de Sa Majesté Bhumiphol, puis son 72^{ème} anniversaire. A chaque fois le vin est à la mesure de l'évènement.

Un cru très prometteur

Pathom n'est pas homme à se reposer sur ses lauriers. Il n'a jamais oublié sa Thaïlande natale. Il est nommé Consul Honoraire de Thaïlande à Bordeaux. Et

surtout en 1997, après de longues recherches, il découvre à Petchabun, dans cette région de Khao Kor, autrefois bastion de la guérilla communiste, une terre qui lui paraît propice aux raisins nobles, comme le Cabernet Sauvignon



Raphaël dans les vignes du domaine de Saint-Lô

ou le Syrah. Avec la complicité du Dr. Vichai Techavichit, francophone et propriétaire du terrain, il lance la Peak Eagle Vignobles Réunis winery. Auparavant des équipes de spécialistes du sol, de la vigne et du climat étaient venues de France pour scruter les lieux. Il y a quelques semaines, le Dr Pathom, son épouse et son fils Raphaël, historien de talent désormais voué aux pieds de vignes plutôt qu'aux archives, sont venus à Bangkok présenter les premières bouteilles de Cabernet Sauvignon de Petchabun. Le résultat dépasse toutes les espérances. Voici incontestablement le meilleur vin rouge thaïlandais. Voici tout simplement un fort bon vin. Ce Domaine de Saint-Lô 2001, tirant ses 12.5%, bien que jeune encore, et n'ayant peut-être pas encore digéré tout son tannin, est plein de saveur, de ces fruits rouges discrets, à la française, avec déjà un joli velouté prêt à s'épanouir. Vieilli en cuve d'acier inoxydable, ce vin annonce une seconde cuvée pas encore commercialisée, vieillie, elle, en fûts de chêne.

On trouve le Domaine de Saint-Lô dans les Big C, pour environ 350 bahts. Un

prix fort honnête quand on sait que les accises du pays ne font guère de distinction entre vins importés et produits locaux. Taxez, taxez, il en restera toujours quelque chose...

GAVROCHE
MARS 2002

Beverage Feature

Thai wines in the market/By David Swartentruber

Thai wines? I can hear the jaws dropping and the gasps.

Yes, Thai wines are now in the market and one can expect to see more of them in future years as the quality of the wine improves and production increases.

Before I discuss several of the Thai wine brands that are now available I'd like to deal with some marketing issues that arise when introducing wines from new regions or countries.

First, wine is different from beer or liquor drinkers in that there is little brand allegiance. One has the "Heineken drinker" or the "Chivas drinker" but one would be hard pressed to find a wine drinker that professed loyalty to only one brand.

In the world of wine with its thousands of brands there is always a sense of discovery. There is always a "hot" new wine that is discovered by a wine writer or a previously unknown wine that receives a high rating from a wine magazine thanks to a new winemaker that has been employed by the winery.

Remember when California and Australian wines were disdained, it wasn't that long ago. Now Australian red wines outsell French red wines in the London market and there is a good auction market for rare California wines.

Even in Europe there are "new" wine regions. France's oldest vineyard, the Languedoc region, is undergoing a transformation with old vineyards being replanted and the importation of new winemaking technology. You can taste the difference.

Like every other field, wine changes. In today's wine market wine snobbery is out, wine discovery is in.

Consumer curiosity and a sense of discovery are the keys to marketing new wines and that can play into your introduction of Thai wine in your outlets.

I am quite sure that visitors to Thailand will be surprised and delighted to try Thai wine and is the case with introducing new wines, a by-the-glass program is absolutely essential for success.

The wines below are all well



Raphael Vongsuravatana and an associate check some grapes at Domaine St-Lo.

made and their quality is what I term "international" and they all are exported to other countries.

Siam Winery utilizing French consultant Laurent Metege Topping produces the Chatemps brand which consists of a red and white. The winery has a good amount of quite attractive promotional literature which emphasizes that grapes used in the production of the wine come from Thailand's "floating vineyards."

The winery suggests that their wines are made to pair well with Thai cuisine and one can expect that these wines would find wide acceptance at the restaurant level.

Chateau de Loei is the brainchild of Thai hotel and construction magnate Chaiyudh Karnasuta and the winery bears the namesake of the town in which the vineyards and winery are located.

Quite frankly, previous vintages of Chateau de Loei have received mixed reviews in the market, however, I strongly recommend you taste the 2001 vintages of the two wines produced, Syrah and Chenin Blanc.

Thanks to the hiring of a new Australian winemaker the wines are showing remarkably well. The Syrah

has good varietal character with a smooth and elegant character and as such is what I would term a good dinner wine. Many Syrah wines I find to have excessive alcohol and tannin and therefore, are unsuitable for dining. Wines of this type often need to be aged longer before uncorking.

The Chenin Blanc, has fruit and fragrance as opposed to the earlier vintages of this wine which were often described as "sour" by some of my wine drinking companions.

Chateau de Loei can be reached at 042-891-405.

Our last winery is also the newest. Approximately 1000 meters above Petchabun in the old communist stronghold of Khao Kor is the vineyard of Domaine Saint-Lo.

The winery is a partnership between Pathom Vongsuravatana and Virachai Techavichit. Khun Pathom also owns the St. Emilion Grand Cru, Chateau Saint-Lo.

Following the purchase of the

chateau in 1990, Pathom wanted to develop a winery in Thailand. He met up with Virachai and the vineyard-winery project blossomed.

Pathom's son, Raphael, carries major responsibility in running the operation and his team has come up with a winner in the 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon.

This Cabernet is smooth and well-balanced and once again, an excellent mealtime companion. Raphael has confided in me that when he serves the wine to his Bordelaise friends they are shocked when it is revealed the wine came from Thailand.

The marketing arm of the winery is called Peak Eagle Marketing and it can be reached at: 02-690-3372.

One can't go wrong in promot-



Chaiyudh Karnasuta, owner of Chateau de Loei

ing these Thai wines in Thailand suggest a "Thai Wine Night" motion with a set menu and price on Thai wines by the bottle.

Your reward will be smiles from your guests and baht in the cash register.

David Swartentruber has 30 years experience in the business from vineyard, production and marketing to of course. He may be reached at blkgape3@yahoo.com

**THAILAND HOSPITALITY
MARS 2002**

The vineyard at Chateau de Loei.

