



Benjawan Wisootsat

Food and wine connoisseur

Known for a refined palate that enables her to perfectly pair fine cuisine and wine, managing director of FIN (Fabulous Is Needed) Benjawan Wisootsat needs little introduction in Bangkok's fine dining circles. In 2003, she and partner Jan Ganser founded FIN, a company that specialises in organising very exclusive dinners and gourmet excursions, while also importing handcrafted boutique wines from around the world.

I've always loved travelling and food, so dining experiences rank high on my itinerary when I'm on a trip abroad. I would often aim for something original and authentic, like visiting a market to try out the local food. It enlightens me on the lifestyle, culture and soul of the people – and all the other elements that make up their cuisine. One of my most memorable experiences was in Roussillon, France for a family get-together of winemaker Marie-Pierre Boris of Domaine de Blanes, Languedoc-Roussillon. Her family has owned a house there for many generations, right in the middle of a beautiful forest, and she invited me to a lunch picnic.

We had to drive miles up to a hill, from where it was a short walk to a serene picnic spot. At a large wooden table in the shadow of big old trees, members of the family were preparing the food. Two things really stood out: fresh *escargot* (snails) and these metre-long sausages. While the men were making

a fire from the wood of old grape trees, the women were seasoning the *escargot* with either garlic and herb butter, or herbs with pork fat.

The *escargot* we normally eat at restaurants are already dead, removed from their shells and cooked, and then put back into the shell before being served with special snail tongs and forks. To taste these freshly grilled *escargot*, with the herb seasoning and lightly flavoured from the smoke of the old grape trees, was simply sensational. They ordered thousands of *escargot* for the picnic, and I think I must have eaten at least a hundred on my own.

The sausage we had is called 'Chipolata Aux Herbes', and I was told they had ordered 200 metres for this occasion. It was also grilled like the snails, with the smoke lending a wonderful flavour to it. Another thing I will never forget is the wine. We started off with Marie-Pierre's organic Muscat Sec, which was perfect for the outdoors, and then switched to her red Le Clot Vin de Pays d'Oc – a great companion for the grilled sausage.

The picturesque setting, hospitable people, the food, the wine – everything was just perfect. It's a memory that I will treasure forever. Just prior to that I was in Marseilles where I stayed at Le Petit Nice of Chef Gerard Passedat (three Michelin stars!) and enjoyed his ten-course tasting menu. But that's another story ...