

THE OKURA PRESTIGE BANGKOK

Biodynamic Wine Dinner with Johan Reyneke

BY JOHN K LINDGREN

His business card is like none I've seen. It is thick and rough with an earthy texture and reads: Johan Reyneke VINE HUGGER.

On the reverse side: "I believe that if we're good to the earth, the earth will be good to us, which is why my business card is printed on paper embedded with seeds. Plant it and you'll soon have some homegrown herbs to enjoy with an exceptional bottle of Reyneke. This way, you're also helping to make wines that are kinder to our planet, and your palate". The lower side of the card provides the instructions: "To plant: place this paper 1mm underneath a patch of weed-free soil in a half sun area and keep moist. Reyneke Organic".

Johan Reyneke is the guest of honour at the wine dinner. He is a South African winemaker who created his label, Reyneke, in 1998. Reyneke is one of the few South African winemakers whose produce is made according to biodynamic principles, and within the industry he is considered a groundbreaker.

The dinner takes place in Elements restaurant in The Okura Prestige Bangkok. As the city's newest and most high-tech eco-friendly hotel, The Okura Prestige Bangkok is the perfect place to host the contemporary dishes and organic wines that Elements has to offer. At the exclusive dinner guests sample eight amazing dishes and biodynamic wines. In addition to the guest of honour, also in attendance are the talented Jan Ganser and Khun Benjawan Wisootsat from Fin (fabulous is needed), the local boutique wine distributor responsible for sourcing the event's beverages. The Okura Prestige Bangkok's General Manager Samir R Wildeman can be spotted floating around the room chatting to guests, and in the kitchen, working hard, is Elements' Chef de Cuisine Cyril Cocconi.

The event kicks off with an aperitif on the high-cantilevered deck overlooking a dramatic nocturnal Bangkok city skyline. We sip Cremant de Limoux by Bernard Delmas, Languedoc-Roussillon, France. The fine bubbles produce a heady grape aroma and have a fabulously nutty flavour. After downing this first glass we saunter back to the table for the first course.

Drum roll... Chef Cyril Cocconi and his team impress us from the get-go! We are presented with a Maine lobster salad that is dripping in pistachio oil and is accompanied by fine greens and a delicious mango crisp. The entrée is paired with a 2010 Westhofener riesling trocken by Wittmann from Rheinhessen, Germany. The dry drop goes beautifully with the delectable lobster and mango. This wine is worth all the 92 points awarded by Wine Spectator magazine.

The second culinary creation arrives: a Gravlax (as the Swedes spell it), a classically Nordic dish that consists of raw, red salmon cured in salt, dill and sugar. Accompanying the Gravlax is a delightful glass of 2010 Fred Loimer terrassen riesling DAC, grown on the terraces of the Kamptal slopes in Austria. Winemaker Fred Loimer knows his rieslings and the Gravlax is a match made in heaven. Bravo! Now we're onto the third course: a flan of marinated chanterelle with shaved Joselito. This fusion cuisine is washed down with a 2009 bone dry sauvignon blanc from Stellenbosch, South Africa - by our visiting winemaker Johan Reyneke himself.

"This is a 100% organic sauvignon blanc grown according to the biodynamic principles of specially formulated herbal, mineral and organic preparations to enhance the soil, boost plant and increase fertility," Reyneke informs me. In the glass there is passion fruit, green apple and vanilla. This is a classic South African white. Thumbs up!

The fourth creation from Chef Cocconi arrives: a fumet of artichokes and aromatic prawns with cepes foam paired with a 2008 Nicolas Joly Clos de la Coulee de Serrant, a distinct, well-structured drop that is a perfect match for the prawns. Now we are more than halfway through the wine dinner. The fifth course consists of a slow-cooked duck breast with toasted almonds. It comes with a 2007 pinot noir (pee-nooh ahh") Galets Oligocene Elevage from Domaine Bott-Geyl, Alsace, France. You

can't go wrong with duck and pinot noir. The sixth preparation is Kurobuta pork - aka the Berkshire pig - the world's best pork. It is served with a soy polenta with fontina and carrots. What majestic wine will match this glorious dish? Aha! It is a powerful 2006 M2 de Matallana, Ribera del Duero DO by Telmo Rodriguez. The wine has a smoky, oak-spiced aroma of cherry cola and licorice. Wow.

Now it's time for the seventh course: the Wagyu beef. The Rolls-Royce of beefs is prepared with a compressed celeriac and apple cheek hachee in a potato box topped with truffle foam. It is matched with a 2008 Cornerstone by Reyneke from Stellenbosch, South Africa. This unique drop consists of a glorious blend of 50% organic cabernet sauvignon, 40% organic syrah (shiraz) and 10% organic merlot. Black cherry flavours on the nose. Polished tannins. Matured in French barriques. This is a beautiful marriage made in heaven with a long and pleasant aftertaste.

The grand finale! The eighth course is creatively named "imaginary landscapes". It consists of pacotised ice cream garnished with hazelnuts. "Pacotising" is to freeze and simultaneously break down ice crystals to create a smooth texture. The wine accompanying the oh-so-smooth ice cream is a sweet 2008 Mr Mountain Wine from the steep shale slopes of Malaga. This concoction is made from 100% moscatel grapes and is another Telmo Rodriguez Spanish wine. It tastes of apricots, honey and nutmeg. Lovely!

All invited smile and give standing ovations to our hosts. This has been a wine dinner to remember.

