

Fin adds to the smiles

SURPRISING THINGS happen when people start fiddling with Mother Nature's basic ingredients, particularly when the conjurers are *Fin* (fabulous is needed) owners Jan Ganser and Benjawan Wisootsat.

Teaming up with the Plaza Athenee hotel in a unique marketing arrangement for eclectic wines and artistic luxury living themes, *Fin* orchestrates wine dinners and rotates its section of the wine list quarterly. The plan assures listings of critically acclaimed wines not otherwise available in retail or supermarket outlets.

"Our regular customers love the programme because it regularly offers them something new at very competitive prices," says food and beverage manager Patrick Schaub.

Last week's team concept was the fourth-edition wine dinner structured around the elements of water, wood, earth, metal and fire. Benjawan's freewheeling style utilised prize-winning local fashion designer Yawalak Anekjindarat and her svelte models to articulate how these basics of nature relate to wine and food.

Special guest Fred Loimer, the epitome of a true boutique winemaker, presented a few of his internationally acclaimed Austrian wines to support the event. From his scant 20,000-case annual production, he has won global acclaim for turning otherwise basic grape varietals into works of finesse and complexity.

Paired with chef Martin Faist's Maine lobster over caviar crème and roasted pepper vinaigrette, Loimer's '02 Langenloiser Steinmassl Riesling trocken launched the dinner in style with its perfectly integrated mineral and stone-fruit flavours.

A second wine with the same course, '03 Spiegel gruner veltliner trocken, underlined the depth of Loimer's winemaking skill. Gruner veltliner, generally a bland table wine, is Austria's most prolific grape constituting some 60 per cent of the country's total production. Yielding flavours of fresh apples with crisp acidity, Loimer makes this a pleasure for summer afternoon sipping or with a panoply of fresh fish dishes.

Double-barrelled treats like this are the exclusive purview of wine dinners like Plaza Athenee's, which offer incredible value for money.

Loimer is nothing if not an adventurer in winemaking and viticulture, planting one of the most demanding of all grapes in a region where it is rarely seen.

"My own love of pinot noir led me to plant a small vineyard 12 years ago, which is just now coming into its own," he said as he poured his '03 "Dechant" pinot to accompany chef Faist's rich Bresse pigeon.

With flavours of raspberry and a touch of leather, it showed excellent varietal character while smoothly complementing the texture and taste of the pigeon.

Here's one for your wine dictionary. Bolstering his pioneering spirit, Loimer blends Zweigelt, a local hybrid, with pinot noir to yield a delightfully meaty flavourful red that is worth a second try.

To get one of only 40 bottles of Dechant available in Thailand, or any of Loimer's other wines call *Fin* at (02) 653 0154.

Better yet dine at Plaza Athenee and order from the Wine Boutique list. Reservations at (02) 650 8800.

Great food and rare wines - part of what makes Thailand the Land of Smiles.



BOTTLES & BANQUETS

By JC Eversole



A GREAT TEAM: Fred Loimer, owner-winemaker of Loimer wines, and Benjawan Wisootsat.