

## BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Dr Bertold Salomon's vineyards in Austria and Australia bridge the gap between the old world and new with finesse.



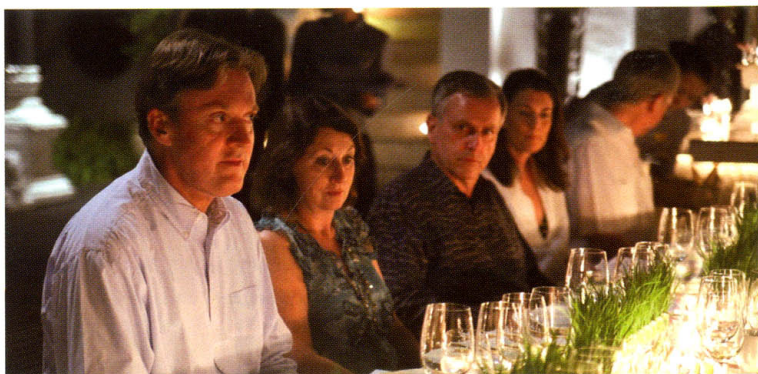
Wine has never been able to bridge the divide between the Old World and the New World. The old still sneers at the new, the new full of angst is still taking potshots at the old. All this despite the fact that the chasm is brimming with corks and empties from both sides of the divide. Enough of New World has been chugged down to realise that excellent wines are coming out of there, but habits die hard. Avid wine drinker I know refuses to look beyond France because, "I get what I want from there. And they are the best. So why bother with other wines." New World wines? Forget about it. Wine is about personal preference for sure but I thought the attitude very limiting.

Interestingly some winemakers are bridging the divide in the best possible way. At a wine dinner at The Oriental Dhara Dhevi in Chiang Mai I met one of them: Dr Bertold Salomon and his wife Gertrud. The 'Wine Explorer' dinner organized by Take-Fin on the Rice Terrace was the perfect

stage for the Salomon wines. Wines that bridge the gap between the old world and new.

Before I go into the wines we tried from both sides of the divide a bit about the Salomon Estate.

Founded in 1792 Salomon Undhof (Austria) is a wine estate with a long history. The Salomon family from the Wachau produces white wines from the best terraced 'Urgestein' sites along the Danube River in Stein and Krems. Today, the winery is run by Bert and Gertrud Salomon. The Estate is most famous for its Rieslings that thrives on the topsites of Kögl and Pfaffenberg. The Grüner





Veltliner von Stein comes from the steep terraced hills behind the old town of Stein. The best 'loess' soils provide the Lindberg and Wachtberg Grüner Veltliner. All the grapes are harvested traditionally by hand.

The wines from this vineyard are elegant to say the least. The finesse and perfect mineral balance reflect the micro climate of this river valley. But for Bert and Gertrud history was not enough and the New World beckoned. Soon the cosmopolitan wine growers complemented their Austrian white wines with a range of big reds which they produce at Salomon Estate in South Australia. Founded in 1995, Salomon Estate is established around Finnis River near Adelaide.

The wine growing area along Finnis River extends along the southern region of the Fleurieu Peninsula, about 20 kms southeast of McLaren Vale. From here come elegant Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot. All aged between nine and eighteen months in small oak barrels.

These are fruit driven reds: big, full-flavoured with fantastic richness and well-integrated oak. Drink them young or cellar them with confidence.

These Salomon wines are on the wine list of the best restaurants around Thailand. So next time you are in the mood for something special and something different, uncork a bottle from the Salomon stable.

**Grüner Veltliner Wachtberg QbA 2005, Salomon Undhof, Krems, Austria.** Long finish, delicate with defined minerality. On the tongue it is green. The grape Grüner Veltliner is the most important variety grown in Austria and the wine has a peppery spice, fruity, usually dry. The quality spectrum of the Grüner Veltliner is sweeping, extending from light, effervescent wines that are best drunk young to wines that are rich in extracts and alcohol and thus age well.

**2005 Gelber Traminer Noble Reserve QbA, Salomon Undhof, Krems, Austria.** Sweet but dry with a spicy finish. Quite a paradox but very alluring. On the palate it is oily-rich, a touch bitter-sweet, but bright. Perfect with goose liver that we tried it with. Would also work with cream cheese. Goat cheese too. It has a high alcohol content of 15 percent but is interestingly an easy drinking wine. There are three varieties of Traminer in Austria: the predominant



Roter Traminer, the especially spicy Gewürztraminer and the almost extinct Gelber Traminer. The grape is low in acidity and ripens reliably, and thus produces interesting sweet wines.

**2005 Riesling Undhof Kögl QbA, Salomon Undhof, Krems, Austria.** The Kögl single vineyard in Krems on the Danube is steeped in tradition. This wine-growing region called Kremstal, has been making fragrant and elegant white wines for centuries. The vineyards of Salomon Undhof are situated in the westerly Kremstal, where soil over bedrock is dominant. This riesling does have nice fruit with a touch of green. A dry riesling, it is citrus on the nose: lime and tangerine. On the tongue it is spicy and citric with a dry finish. Creamy texture with lots of nuances. And this wine was sealed with a glass stopper. Quite intriguing.

**2005 Grüner Veltliner Lindberg Reserve QbA, Salomon Undhof, Krems, Austria.** Very intense. Focused fruit: peach and apricot. Powerful and well-structured vibrant finish. Dr Bertold assures it cellars well.

**2003 Norwood Shiraz Cabernet Merlot, Salomon Estate, South Aus-**

**tralia.** A classic full-bodied red blend in the style which South Australia has become famous. The Cabernet Sauvignon brings blackberry and strength to the palate while the Shiraz adds plummy fruit and spiciness. Merlot adds to the good finish. Vibrant fruit flavours with good oak.

**2003 Finnis River Cabernet Merlot, Salomon Estate, South Australia.** A complex wine with depth and blackberry notes that add to that hints of chocolate and vanilla. Very firm, medium-bodied and well-balanced wine that can be enjoyed on its own.

**2001 Finnis River 'Alttus' Shiraz, Salomon Estate, South Australia.** "But the real surprise of the night was the newcomer, the Alttus from Salomon's vineyards between Adelaide and the sea. It was stunning, combining the concentration of the Grange with the seductive appeal of a top north Rhône."

As always Benjawan Witsiott and Jan Ganser (the duo behind Takefin) ensured the wine experience was more than special. The food (thanks to Chef), the setting, the company all meticulously planned was the perfect setting for Salomon wines. ■