



Above, when embarking upon such a broad wine tasting, including bottles dating back to the 1950s, the crucial step is always that of uncorking the precious flagons. Early enough to allow the wine to breathe but not too much to preserve some of the initial aromas that might fade soon after the contact with oxygen. Adjoining page, a glimpse at the privileged audience on the night.

Some nights offer a genuine journey through time,
jumping from a decade to another. With the greatest
of crus, years may pass but elegance carries on.
Château Haut-Brion blanc surely stands it ground



Uncorking seventeen vintages, no less

by Marie-Emmanuelle Febvret photos by Philip Chau



Some of these are a mystery, I have never seen them before

Coming from Europe, most visitors share the same curiosity when contemplating Asia's tremendous wine hub: why all the fuss? A Tuesday night tasting dinner gathering seventeen vintages of Château Haut-Brion Blanc, going back to 1958, seems to be a fair response. The Fine Wine Experience's Linden Wilkie and Mike Wu set the bar very high for one of the last wine dinners of 2013 where they collected an impressive vertical of the first growth's dry white for a privileged crowd of fifteen guests all thrilled to unveil any mystery left regarding one of the most acclaimed whites in the wine world. Though we had the detailed list of the vintages organ-

ized in five flights paired with several rather maritime courses at the Grand Hyatt, the wines were served blind and revealed after each new flight to avoid any preliminary ideas on what it "should" taste like. "Some of these will be a first for me, others like the 1958 are a complete mystery as I never even seen a bottle before" Linden Wilkie shared, as cheerful as a child beside a Christmas tree. Needless to say that though Haut-Brion Rouge is a classic for wine enthusiasts, its white sibling produced on less than 3 hectares is a bit of a rarity. Standing right in between the focused Laville Haut-Brion and the fragrant Domaine de Chevalier, this other

treasure from the Graves is almost mythical. The evening started with 2007, 2004, 1998, 1997 and 1993. The liveliness of the two youngest is unreasonably stirring, the 2004 being a bit less exuberant than the Sauvignon-led 2007 combining stone fruits, hawthorn and honeysuckle with a mouthwatering acidity reminding of great Chablis. Strong patisserie flavours of brioche and notes of peach, with a slightly oxidative bitter almonds palate, match the intense brilliant gold of the 1993. A lovely discovery for sure! With the first course of sautéed lobster, pine nuts and kale, came some of the old fellows: 1958, 1967 and 1971. Of course there



Top, a first series of eight corks amongst which the oldest, witnessing years of bottle aging though a tight relationship with the wines. Above, a legendary line-up for one of the most acclaimed Bordeaux dry white from Pessac-Léognan. Adjoining page, Linden Wilkie and Mike Wu, organizers of this outstanding tasting dinner at the Grand Hyatt on behalf of The Fine Wine Experience.





Shy at first, the 1989 is the wow factor of the evening

was something Sauternes-ish in the golden reflection of the elder, a pungent undergrowth nose, herbal and focused, evolving in an endless smokier finish. The cooler 1967 combines herbal liqueur, autumn leaves and sharp floral notes that contrast with the ripe 1971, its mature quince compote and tarte tatin flavours. These obvious differences are incredibly helpful to grasp the impact of vintage conditions on such distinctive varieties that are Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon, planted almost equally in the vineyard though the latter wins by a few more percent. The Japanese scallops that follow ideally come with apple puree, echoing to the

2003 vibrant white fruit flavours, poached pears and mild spices. Two legends are then poured: 1990, creamy with persistent roasted pineapple aftertaste, and 1989. That is the indubitable “wow factor” of the night. Shy at first, the pristine 24-years-old endlessly develops from fresh green pepper to white flowers, superb minerality and a magnificent energy. Somehow in that wonderful series, the wine that tasted the youngest was in fact the oldest, thus pointing to its greatness. Then arrived the elegant 1982 and the saline 1983 that instantly lifts you up with its vibrant nose. Finally, tiger prawns are paired with a 1996 that exudes marzipan and mel-

on, a crisp 1966 that seems to expand with time and an intense 1962 so expressive that it reminds of something Chardonnay, timeless and unlike anything else. It is almost shocking how alive this wine is, more than fifty years after being harvested. It effortlessly joins the captivating winning trio for the night along with the 1989 and the 2007. What an extraordinary occasion to unravel Haut-Brion’s expansive aromatic palette, playing with decades and pairings, ceaselessly coming back to each of our seventeen glasses to discover more aromas and hopefully clutch some of the singularity of this fabled Bordeaux white. 🍷



Top, younger corks dating back to 1989. **1.** Marie-Emmanuelle Febvret. **2.** First glass being poured. **3.** More glasses on their way. **4.** George Tong and his wife. **5.** Bottle wrapped up to bring excitement. **6.** The Chef’s floral amuse-bouche to start the night. **7. & 8.** An endless ballet of glasses. Adjoining page, a closer glimpse at the 1958’s golden glow and surprisingly high level right after being uncorked.