



Following on from the first instalment on Paul Jaboulet La Chapelle Hermitage in our last edition of the Asian Wine Journal, it is quite possible that I am becoming obsessed with La Chapelle and perhaps suffering from autosuggestion – “the dwelling upon an idea, thought, or concept, thereby inducing some change in the mental or bodily functions” – in this case my brain (messages of excitement and enthusiasm) and a revelation to my palate.

My deprivation and craving to try the legendary 1990 was more than satisfied on a recent trip to France, in Bordeaux of all places! Well, at least that's where the story begins. Participating in the 2007 en Primeur tastings, I was a guest of the Frey family, consummate hosts and my lodgings at the impeccably renovated Château La Lagune. Indeed, an auspicious circumstance if not nostalgic, recollecting my early days as a sommelier, Château La Lagune being amongst the first Bordeaux wines I cut my teeth on.

Dinner in the congenial ambiance of Château's converted cellar open-plan kitchen one evening was patronised by a number of revered Master of Wines and accomplished wine writers from around the world (obviously I was the exception), beginning with exquisite Champagne Billecart-Salmon Cuvee Elizabeth Salmon, quintessential Rose. After an impressive 2004 Château La Lagune, demonstrative of the properties renaissance, we were served the next red blind, always an interesting albeit masochistic exercise amongst presumably superior palates. I was flanked by two heavyweight Master of Wines whom both immediately announced in agreement that without question, the wine was a dignified Grand Cru Classe Bordeaux and of considerable age, probably 1985 or 1986 and were exclusively debating the intricacies and differentials of the two vintages.

When it came my turn to comment, I was feeling extremely uncomfortable at the prospect of disagreeing with these expert deductions however, recalling the golden rule of blind tasting, 'always stick with your first impressions', and despite the David and Goliath proportions of what I was about to do, declared I believe they were in entirely the wrong region. I opined the wine had too much spice and sweetness and that its sweaty leathery characters and extraordinary complexity of mushrooms, autumn forest and oriental spices clearly

put it in the Rhone Valley. With some trepidation, I surmised that it was an Hermitage, most likely Jaboulet La Chapelle Hermitage, probably from the early nineties, although feeling a little like the character Richard Pratt in Roald Dahl's ingenious misdirection short story, "Taste" (1951), as my conclusion was hardly oracular given the Château proprietor also owns Paul Jaboulet.

When our host revealed the wine was indeed 1991 Jaboulet La Chapelle Hermitage, there was an awkward moment of silence and a simultaneous reaching for the glass with vigorous inhaling and draining of its contents necessitating a second bottle to be promptly liberated from the cellar. Our MWs immediately declared the second bottle was "much more Rhone like"! Admittedly the wine looked fresher at first however, more so because it was colder than the first bottle but quickly warmed up and breathed out to be identical to the first. Enough said.

Is there a point here other than my braggartism? Absolutely; if two seriously acute palates and Masters of Wines no less, unequivocally consider an off-vintage or cooler year of an Hermitage from a producer considered to be underachieving at the time, comparable to a dignified Grand Cru Classe Bordeaux, I think we should taking much more notice, if not empowered to reassess our impression of Hermitage, moreover rush out to buy a bottle of this wine! A quick look at www.winesearcher.com brings up Fine & Rare Wines www.frw.co.uk having a few bottles at a paltry 101 pounds Stirling, significantly less expensive I would suggest than the Bordeaux equivalent our MWs were pontificating about.

Incidentally, and to be consistent in quoting the same critics from the my first instalment, Robert Parker rated the 1991 La Chapelle 90 points and Jancis Robinson 17 points, with both their tastings notes very positive. "Jacques Jaboulet stated that in 1991, the weather was fine until harvest, when it turned damp and gloomy. The saturated dark ruby/purple-colored 1991 La Chapelle is just beginning to reveal secondary nuances. Aromas of Asian spices, soy, grilled steak, pepper, and blackberries are beginning to emerge. Ripe and dense, with tart acidity (a cool vintage characteristic), it is a medium to full-bodied, concentrated, impressively-endowed La Chapelle with surprising

length and intensity. It looks to be slightly better than I originally suggested. Anticipated maturity: 2004-2020 – 90 Points". Robert Parker; "Hermitage, La Chapelle 1991 Paul Jaboulet Aîné 17 Drink 2003-18 Healthy but very shaded briary crimson. Some real Hermitage perfume. Then sweet fruit on the front palate – truly a hint of majesty. Dusty, dry, very fine tannins. Briary, this wine still has a way to go but has real fruit intensity – though it could do with a little more. Quite fresh. Medium length." Jancis Robinson

My note on the wine: extraordinary perfume of sweaty saddle and worn leather, a melange of Asian spices – Indian cardamom seed, mixed spice box, anise, building to an intense spiciness with liquorice notes; alluring cedar forest, morels and dried woods, ducks guts and pan-fried liver smells, the iron-flint-gunpowder fingerprint of the terroir gives way to a tangible dried mushroom character and the toffee sweetness of a wine at its meridian. Subtly sweet, caramelised palate, tawny port flavours, so light and ethereal yet incredibly powerful and voluminous in its flavour presence and explosion of spices dominated by star anise and clove. Becomes very gamey and savoury, Chinese roast duck juices (when the duck is just cut open and the cooking juices and garlic, clove aromas fill the senses); so much like a great Burgundy, with its sweetness yet oscillating tangy tartness and piercingly sour raspberry, redcurrant berry-fruit. Although drinking absolutely perfectly still has fine tannins and harmonious acidity that suggests will hold for some time yet – an incredible wine, demonstrative of the magnificence of Hermitage. Whilst I detest publishing scores on wines, to be consistent with the aforementioned reviews, I rate this wine 200 out of 100!

The following morning, and I am talking way before the sparrows started singing, I flew down to the Rhone Valley emerging from Lyon airport to a bracing 6 degrees Celsius, although already a wonderfully sunny day. I am scheduled for a comprehensive tasting at the Jaboulet cellars with export manager Christophe Brunet, who had previously been with Miguel Torres and knows the Asia market intimately. Moreover, Brunet was one of the world's leading sommeliers in his previous career and there is no facet of wine, food, wine-food pairing, the workings of restaurants and every minutiae of the Rhone Valley (or any wine region for that matter) that this dynamic, passionate and amiable individual has.

After a most enlightening tasting, particularly the white wines, in the impressive Jaboulet maturation cellars, a cavernous ancient Roman limestone quarry ingeniously adapted to barrel cellaring and receiving visitors, I was whisked off to lunch by Brunet and joined by Nicholas Jaboulet (the late and legendary Gerald Jaboulet was Nicholas's uncle) at the Les Cedres restaurant. This two star Michelin establishment serves exquisite regionally focused haute-cuisine with the most impeccable and highly-polished service I have ever encountered. However, and much to my elation, the dining experience was somewhat overwhelmed by the bottle of 1990 La Chapelle that arrived at the table, pristinely cellared by the restaurant and expertly decanted and served by our dutiful sommelier.

This is unquestionably one of the most profound wines I have ever tasted and an experience that will be everlasting in my memory.

My note reds: Old leather and antique timbers, dark soy and oriental spices, concentrated black cherry, dried figs and prunes with a Christmas cake richness, oscillating to tangy dried tomato and savoury notes of old balsamic and fireside charcoals. Breathes out becoming incredibly intense and port-like (in a good way) with sweet

molasses, dried liquorice and tar, the sweetness of perfume Grand Cru Burgundy-like (and I am thinking La Tache) amongst ducks gut, pan fried liver and smokey bacon fat. Harmonising these hedonistic sensations is a wonderful freshness of pine forest, pine needle and menthol, like Barolo on steroids. Incredibly unctuous and chewy palate, although strikingly fresh and lively, intense spicy black pepper warmth, then a saturation of black cherry and blood plum, with layers of rich sweet berry fruit, dark chocolate and liquorice, a big black tarry, meaty, leathery mouthful of wine; a wave of tannins cut through the unctuousness bringing with it accentuated minerality – iron, wet granite and gunflint with an earthy farewell of black truffle, cedar-forest floor and pine mushroom. A tour de force, the wine continually growing and evolving over the hour and shows no signs of stopping, can only assume it will continue to age for many decades.

This is the antithesis of 1991, although which wine is better is really a question of personal preference of style but clearly the profoundness of the 1990, moreover that it is still evolving, convinces me will become the equivalent to the 1961. Will it achieve the same stratospheric price of the 1961? This will depend largely upon the rarity factor, and one has to consider most of the 1961 has been consumed and is indeed a very rare beast, whereas there is still ample 1990 available on the secondary market. Time will tell.

Considering the trio of good Northern Rhone vintages, 1989, 1990, 1991, although 1991 was a more favourable Cote Rotie year, and drawing on comments from Neil Martin's Wine Journal "La Chapelle '80 to 90' – the Sequel!", on Robert Parker's website, www.robortparker.com. Comparing the 1989 to 1990 Martin opines "...I prefer the 1989 to the 1990... 1989 is more demure, it has superior delineation and freshness... it was the 1989 that has greater finesse and poise. Moreover whilst time in glass allowed the 1989 to reveal its complexity and nuances, the 1990 just sat there waiting for applause." Analysing the price, Fine & Rare list the 1989 La Chapelle at 2414 pounds Stirling (HK\$37,241) per case, a third of the price of 1990, and whilst perhaps not the wine for investment and super longevity, an exceptionally good buy if you actually want to drink the wine.

I would also like to mention we had a most impressive Paul Jaboulet Chevalier de Sterimberg Blanc white after the 1990 La Chapelle however, much to my frustration I cannot find my tasting note and will hopefully report on this in due course.

Following our indulgent lunch I spent the afternoon with Brunet walking through the Hermitage vineyards, making our way around the precarious terraces and climbing up to the La Chapelle vineyard and tiny Chapel of Saint-Christophe, with its breathtaking views overlooking the terraced vineyards along the Rhône. Even today, with the tranquillity and timeless arid terrain, one can easily relate to the serenity and isolation sought by Gaspard de Sterimberg, the valiant and injured knight who returned from the Albigensian crusade in 1234. Seeking his recluse in these hills, and building the tiny Chapel, he saw out his remaining days as a hermit, hence the name of the Hermitage appellation.

They have been making wine in the Rhone Valley since 600BC, with Hermitage seen as the spiritual home of Syrah, the first plantings thought to have been around the 10th Century. Enduring the centuries, the Jaboulet family became the sole owners of the La Chapelle vineyard in 1919. However, one cannot help but feel even more enthusiastic about the whole extensive Jaboulet range under the new ownership of the Frey's and there are already marked improvements across the range, as reflected in my tasting notes. I also tasted the La Chapelle Blanc 2006, last made in 1961, at Vinexpo Hong Kong, which is made in miniscule quantities.

Notes from Tastings at the Paul Jaboulet Cellars: White Wines

2007 Paul Jaboulet Parallele 45 Cotes du Rhone Blanc

50% Grenache blanc ; 20% Marsanne ; 20% Viognier ; 10% Bourboulenc – average age of vines 25 years – vinified in stainless steel tank – matured 2 to 3 months, 50% in oak casks. This steadfast wine takes its name from the 45th North parallel which runs two kilometres from the Jaboulet cellars and has been made since the mid 50s.

Fresh and alluring bouquet of honeydew melon and ripe pears amongst lavender fields, and anise with subtle almond skin – rich and oily flavoured palate entry with cashew nuts, plenty of ripe pear and peaches fruit, excellent mouth feel – soft and inviting but with good acidity, green olive and artichoke savouriness and hint of bitter almond, seriously good drink, would be perfect for outdoor compotation, also with lighter Indian cuisine.

2006 Paul Jaboulet Crozes Hermitage Blanc "Les Jalets"

100% Marsanne – average age of vines 25 years – vinified in stainless steel tank and casks for 30% of the blend. Malolactic fermentation is carried out in tank and barrel with stirring of the lees.

Sherbet like perfume with Turkish delight dust with icing sugar, rich nutty peanut oil characters, sweet vanillin and crème caramel amongst apricot and peach fruit, Indian spices – turmeric, virgin olive oil – much tighter on palate with pear and golden delicious apple, softly textured with a rich mid palate, some green olive and raw almond on the tailing and touch of chalky phenolic. Delicious wine, would give white Burgundy in lower appellations a run for their money, greatly underappreciated style and region for white wine, or red for that matter.

2005 Paul Jaboulet Crozes Hermitage Domaine Mule Blanche - Blanc

Small estate with 3 hectares white, the wine generally equal quantities of Roussanne and Marsanne planted on a glacial-fluvial plain with clay-chalk soil – vines 40 to 60 years – the bunches pressed whole then vinified and matured in wood. Mule Blanche takes its name from when mules were used in the vineyards, in the days before mechanisation, as they were harder than draughthorses.

Very rich and exotic nose, white truffle oil, ripe pear and apricot, baked banana, marmalade characters, anise and dried Provence herbs and an air of a hot Mediterranean day with baked earth and straw, dried flowers. Opulent palate, creamy and white burgundy-like, nutty and rich, has the texture of olive oil with syrupy peach and apricot succulence, some buttery-toasty oak and lees nuances, very complex, fine phenolic adds to its substance, excellent length with nutty,

bitternut almond skin and a fresh citrus acidity tailing enhancing an attractive interplay between ripe flavours and tanginess with some warming anise, clove spice. A class act and white wine of great character and complexity, would pair nicely with roasted chicken, rich seafood dishes and sweeter yellow curries.

2004 Paul Jaboulet Hermitage Chevalier de Sterimberg Blanc

65% Marsanne, 35% Roussanne grown in clay-chalk and sandy, pebble soils on steep slopes of Hermitage. 35 year old vines – vinified and matured in oak, malolactic fermentation in oak with regular lees stirring over 10 to 12 month ageing process. Named after the gallant knight Gaspard de Stérimberg, after being injured during the Albigensian crusade of 1224, found is recluse on the hills overlooking the Rhone River, building the tiny chapel of Saint-Christophe, atop of what is now known as La Chapelle vineyard.

Expressive minerality, cold granite and silex, wet chalky aroma, like steeping into a damp and stone cold cellar, yet chased away by a wave of hedonistic and exotic sensations, golden syrup and seductive caramel-nougat, vanilla custard, cone honey, ripe mango and intense apricot fruit, then oscillating to spicy aromas – Indian spice cupboard with, turmeric- yellow curry, fennel seed, anise – intriguing rich, nutty and salty Oloroso Sherry characters amongst dry summer fields – wallflower.

Unctuous Sauternes like glycerine texture, caramel and custard, loaded with peach and apricot conserve, yet exponentially more vivacious

than the bouquet suggests with impressive acidity and structure, accentuated minerality with a core of wet granite, rich peachy mid-palate yet wrapped in whitlof lettuce leaf bitterness, peppery virgin olive oil flavours amongst toasty, nutty old Oloroso sherry characters, long tailing of nougat richness yet with cleansing a refreshingly persistent acidity. A phenomenal, idiosyncratic white wine that would make for a marvellous aperitif leaving the second half of the bottle (that's if it's not all immediately consumed) with cheese. I would also suggest with the acidity and structure, the product of a cooler year, this wine has, it will age for 20 plus years. I am putting a couple of case in my cellar!

2006 Paul Jaboulet Hermitage La Chapelle Blanc

100 percent Marsanne from Jaboulet's 'terroir des Rocoules' estate – 45 to 50 year old vines. Last made 1961, Jaboulet appropriately reviving this cuvee. (sampled at Vinexpo Hong Kong). Exotic and captivating bouquet of ripe pears, custard and apples, Turkish delight amongst grilled nuts, toasted almond, olive oil and white truffle oil scents, hay barn-dried flowers character, Indian spices – cumin, fennel



seed, aniseed, much in the same vein as Chevalier de Sterimberg but this is a much tighter, more nervy bouquet with and mandarin citrus background. Rich and viscous palate entry, explosion of succulent grapefruit and mandarin, tangy marmalade, becoming more savoury towards middle palate and apply and picking up warming spicy, aniseed, fresh ginger intensity with a twist of almond skin bitterness, salty-parmesan cheese and surge of citrusy, bite of fresh lemon acidity that lingers forever. A split personality wine; so rich and exotic on the nose and front palate, then tight, savoury and crispy-lemon on the back, clearly it will age for decades and should ideally be left for a good ten years to realise its potential.

2006 Paul Jaboulet Parallele 45 Cotes du Rhone Blanc

60% Grenache, 40% Syrah grown in shingle with clay, stony "argillaceous limestone" soil-pebbles - average age of vines 25 years, vinified and matured in stainless steel temperature controlled tanks - no oak used - stable mate to the Blanc with well-proven consistent quality-price rapport.

Sweet red berry fruit and spicy peppery notes, baked earth and Garrigue characters (a melange of earthy rusticity and resinous rosemary, lavender, wild thyme lending a distinctive air of Provence. Lovely, crunchy juicy berry fruit, the high syrah content showing through in darker, deeper fruit, lively acidity lends a freshness to the wine with lingering green olive, black tea, savoury-meaty earthiness. Superb drink - chill down a few degrees more than usual for consummate all-rounder to hand-to-hand combat with Southeast Asian communal style dining -with multi-flavoured dishes coming to the table all at once.

Red Wines

2006 Paul Jaboulet Crozes Hermitage "Les Jalets"

100 percent Syrah - 6 ha vineyard, grown on a stony plain of glacial origin, "jalets" is the old French word for the pebbles, the vineyard similar to Châteauneuf du Pape with its carpet of rounded stones. Vinified and matured in stainless steel - no oak.

Deep black pepper, oriental spice and soy with sweet blackberry perfume, blood rose petal, tamarillo (tree tomato to some), lavender and Garrigue, similar vein to Parallele 45, but more expressive in minerality-gravelly. Crunchy palate entry with sweet blueberry, blackberry fruit, turning more tart mid palate - very elegant almost in a Pinot Noir way - has savoury complexity, subtle spice and white pepper, with a menthol-pine forest tailing and hint of liquorice.

2005 Paul Jaboulet Crozes - Hermitage "Domaine de Thalabert"

100 percent Syrah, grown 40 ha estate is on a pebbly plain of ancient glacial origin, the small round pebbles storing heat during the day and release it at night, providing optimum maturity. Vines 40 to 60 years - highly selective berry sorting and batch selection after vinification -aged in oak for 12 months in the ancient limestone cellars.

Domaine de Thalabert has belonged to Paul Jaboulet Aîné since 1834. It is the proverbial 'sleeper' Jaboulet's extensive portfolio, grossly underrated-underpriced and has the capability of ageing for over a decade, even two in structured years.

Markedly more fragrant in the line-up, concentrated aroma blueberry and sharp raspberry yet overwhelmed by wet granite and slate odours - distinctive terroir; savoury, meaty palate entry, tart red berry fruit, beautifully elegant, some chewy black oolong tea tannins, backed earth, perfect cut of fresh acidity with added menthol-anise -pine needle freshness, tangy tamarillo, raspberry, persimmon tailing and powdery tannins. Still very primary, would be best left to age for at least five years. Brilliant wine though, has poise and elegance way above the Crozes-Hermitage status.

2004 Paul Jaboulet La Petite Chapelle

100 percent Syrah - 40 to 60 years situated on the Hermitage hill within the very diverse terroirs of les Bessards, les Greffieux, le Méal and les Rocoules. Grapes are brought down from the slopes of l'Hermitage on small sledges, the parcels vinified and kept separate up until selection and blending, then matured in oak for 15 to 18 months. Initiated with the 2001 vintage, the philosophy of a second cuvee or declassification is logical (in the same vein as the Bordelaise) although there has been some criticism that this cuvee does not offer enough to warrant the La Chapelle name. I disagree with Robert Parkers specific comments on the 2004; in my opinion this wine offers the Hermitage finesse, elegance and distinctiveness only more approachable than La Chapelle itself. Very seductive nose, quantum leap up in aromatics, salami and hung air-dried meats, clove and black pepper spice, black plum and blackberry amongst fireside charcoals and sweet liquorice. Palate has much more weight and richness in the line-up, slippery and seamless, deep plummy - red berry compote, touch of caramel sweetness, Chinese lacquered roast duck flavours, spicy warmth of clove and anise is checked by cold granite minerality, chewy fine tannins firm the back palate, impressive acidity carries tart red berry fruit on seemingly forever - very classy wine with a vibrancy and cut that suggests at least 10 years away from its prime.

Paul Jaboulet Aine wines are available throughout Asia, the importers in each country detailed below. Christophe Brunet can be contacted at c.brunet@jaboulet.com and Paul Jaboulet has an excellent website: www.jaboulet.com

Singapore: Hock Tong Bee Tel. +65 (6732) 0555 Email: clinton@pacific.net.sg

They have a good range of La Chapelle vintages, price are retail per bottle 2000 - S\$220, 2001 - S\$250, 2003 - \$330, 2004 -S\$288, 1990 ex-Domaine S\$1585 (which is pretty much market price, but a relative bargain)

Hong Kong: Links Concept Company, Tel: +852 2802 2818 Email: patricio@linksconcept.com.hk

They have stock several back vintages of La Chapelle but more current are the outstanding 2003 (HK\$1325 per bottle retail) and praiseworthy 2004 (HK\$1150 per bottle retail), both exceptionally well priced, a reflection of the zero tax on wine in Hong Kong.

Mainland China: Summergate International, based in Shanghai, Tel: +86 (21) 6329 4433 Email: ian.ford@summergate.com

Taiwan: Creation Wine & Spirits, Tel. +886 (2) 2718 2669 Email: lucy@creation.com.tw

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