

XTRAVAGANCE

THAI FOOD'S NEWEST PALS

Salomon wines from Austria and Australia bravely buddy up to complex flavours



FROM LEFT, Benjawan and Jan Ganser, Jahn chef Joe Diaz, Gertrud and Bertold Salomon and Conrad Samui manager Justin Phillips.

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THE NATION

The debate over whether Thai food is suited to wine came close to being put to rest at the recent Salomon Wine Dinner organised by Benjawan Wisootsat and Jan Ganser of the wine-importing firm Fabulous Is Needed (Fin).

The problem with finding wine to complement Thai cuisine is that so many of our dishes feature the full range of flavours – spicy, salty, sour and sweet.

Fin found a solution for its banquet at the new Conrad Samui's restaurant Jahn: Exactly the right whites from "superstar" Austrian winery Salomon Undhof, and it even had Bertold and Gertrude Salomon on hand for the occasion.

The Salomon family has been making wine since the late 18th century, earning a reputation for their dry whites in particular. Meanwhile they also make fruity reds in Australia.

Spanish-American chef Joe Diaz – who has worked at no fewer than five Michelin-star restaurants – created the five-course dinner.

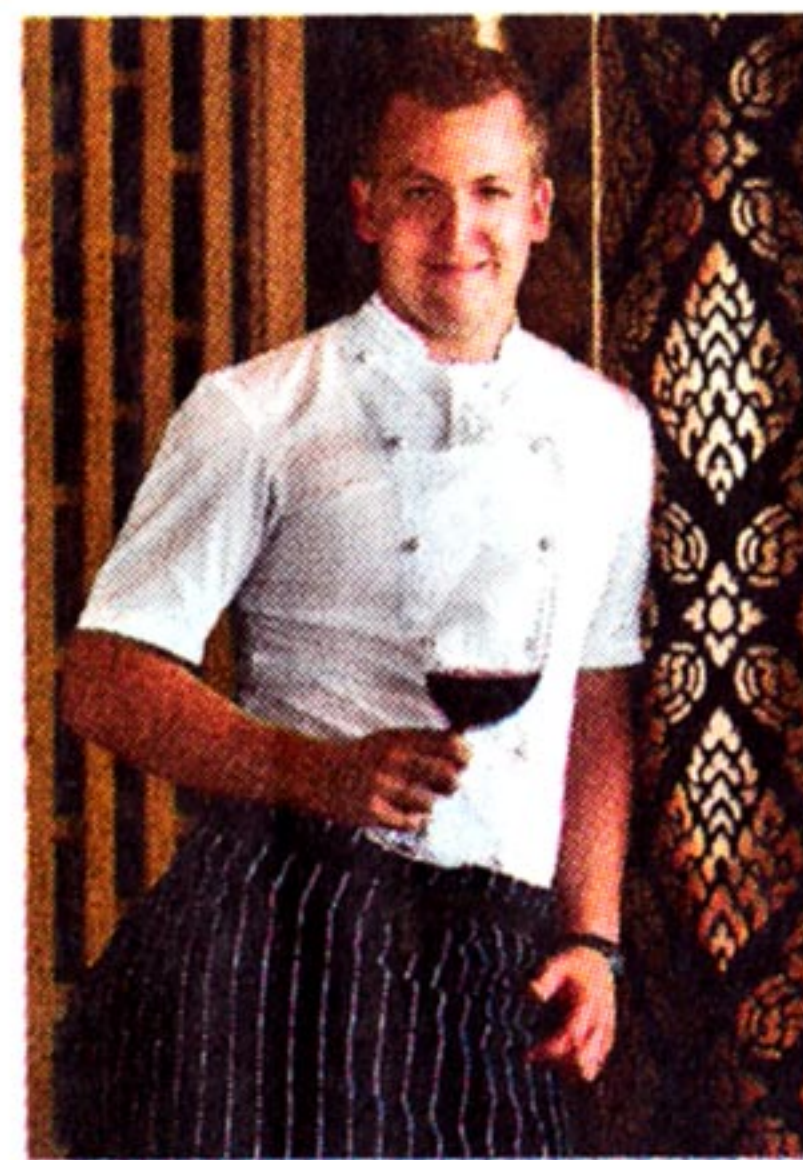
He took some liberties in Westernising Thai recipes to please *farang* palates, and by my standards the spicing seemed mild, but his dishes came close and I enjoyed everything a lot, simply because they were matched with fine wine.

The aperitif was the very fresh 2009 Ultra Brut Rosé Sekt, reportedly one of Austria's best sparklers. I was into my fourth glass when Gertrude began telling me about the New Zealand white wine they're developing. I had a few more while Bert explained that Austrian Riesling is much drier and less sweet than the German version.

Bert is proud of his Riesling and his



David Ashworth, Roland Svensson and Jan Ganser



Chef Joe Diaz



Petit Tomato Salad



Massaman Wagyu Beef



Coconut Creme Brulee

Gruner Veltliner – a virtual national treasure for Austria. What about their Australian Riesling?

"It has a more tropical-fruit charac-

tang and the white pepper in its long finish.

Next came Petit Tomato Salad with red chillies, coriander, puff pastry, lemongrass and tomato sorbet, partnered with 2010 Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, the white they're developing with native cultivator Christopher Andrew. Its fruity character is ideal for seafood and was a great complement to the tropical flavours of the salad.

With *Tom Yam Talay* – seared scallop, *tom yam* jelly and seafood broth – we had 2010 Grüner Veltliner Wieden & Berg DAC from Austria. The seafood soup was clear and gently spicy. The wine is extra fresh thanks to its "juiciness" and hints of pepper and struck a perfect balance.

Finding a wine to go with Massaman wagyu beef must have been tricky, but 2007 Fleurieu Peninsula Syrah Viognier from Australia was a good choice.

The tannins of the wine – which is 95 per cent syrah and the rest Viognier – went well with the meat and its spicy yellow jus and made the dish lighter and less fatty. It would have been a mistake to pair the beef with a white.

I could be accused of enjoying the last course too much. The Coconut Crème Brulee came with 2006 Riesling Undhof Auslese, also from Kremstal. It's easy to revel in the freshness and sweetness of this light dessert wine. You soak up the scent of pineapple and other tropical fruit.

The whites ruled the night and Rieslings stole the show, obviously. But that's because it was Thai food that night, and you know it's not a good idea to overpower the intensity of dishes already blessed with strong aromas and flavours.

It's clear that the dry whites, with their freshness, juiciness and fruitiness, are exactly what you need to enjoy the Thai food at Jahn.