

When Evening Falls

WITTMANN'S ORGANIC WINE DINNER
@ CONRAD KOH SAMUI

BY JOHN K. LINDGREN

Of all the high-end wine dinners I've attended outside of Bangkok in recent times, one winemaker dinner that will be remembered is Wittmann's Organic Wine Dinner at Jahn Restaurant, Conrad Koh Samui.

This über luxurious, terrace resort and spa, which is nestled on top of the steep and secluded Hillcrest Road on the western tip of the tropical, evergreen Samui Island, boasts of a panoramic vista and spectacular sunsets over the Andaman Sea and Surat Thani archipelago. On the steep hill there are 80 free-standing pool villas, a spa, a lounge, a terrace bar and grill, and a fine dining restaurant. The restaurant is called Jahn, and the wine supplier is named Jan: Mr Jan Ganser, who, with his partner Khun Benjawan Wisootsat, own Thailand's leading boutique wine importer and distributor: FIN, which represents their quirky tagline: "fabulous is needed".

The company has established themselves during the last decade as the foremost supplier of premium, handcrafted boutique wines and has hosted many exceptional FIN wine tastings and wine dinners. Case in point: the recent Conrad Koh Samui Wittmann's Organic Wine Dinner. It featured the winemakers Günter and Elisabeth Wittmann, who flew in from the rolling hills of Rheinhessen, the largest of 13 German wine regions. The Wittmann family winery dates back over four centuries and since 1990 the family have cultivated their land according to strict ecological guidelines. In 2004, biodynamic wine production was implemented. The winery is a member of the Association of German Prädikat Wine Estates, which guarantees top-quality produce.

At the terrace outside, the Wittmann's, Khun Jan, Conrad Koh Samui's Chef de Cuisine Mr Konrad Inghelram and General Manager Justin Phillips meet and greet the guests, which includes Samui Island VIPs, Bangkokians, in-house guests and several bosses from the leading 5-star resorts on the island.

Inside the restaurant, it's like a painting. There are floor-to-ceiling glass panels, a wooden concave hexagonal ceiling and three large, Thai mut mee motif pillars. "Wow! What a setting for a wine dinner," says one female guest, as the delicious melange of hors d'oeuvre arrive, accompanied by a Wittmann, 2008 riesling sekt brut (dry sparkling wine). This is poured from an elegant champagne-style bottle. It's a 100 per

cent German riesling, with an elegant fruitiness and a crisp sparkle.

First course: foie gras au torchon ("in a towel"). A whole lobe of foie gras is molded, wrapped in a towel and slow-cooked in a double boiler. This awfully French (and terribly delicious), almost sinful liver of the goose is rich, buttery and delicate. It's accompanied on the plate by jackfruit, macadamia nut and kaffir lime cream. French 'fatty liver' served with a bone dry white German 2011 Gutriesling QbA. Green gold in the glass, honey suckle lime, slate and minerals on the nose. On the palate: citrus notes. Long finish. This is a superbly structured wine.

Now our Chef and his team present us a Samui seafood creation for the second course: a Samui mackerel salad. There's Jujube, pickled radishes, ginger, lemongrass and local leaves, mackerel and ginger. This is guaranteed to lower your cholesterol and is loaded with omega-2. The wine? None other than an

pear flavours and hints of mineral and sea salt. The Wittmann riesling is fabulously matched with Chef Inghelram's green curry of red snapper-king scallops in a sea urchin emulsion.

The fifth course: massaman of beef, potatoes, pearl onions and peanuts. This is my all-time favourite Thai dish. It's a southern Muslim curry. In 2011 CNN Travel ranked massaman as number eight in an article titled World's 50 most delicious foods. "It's spicy, coconutty and its combination of flavors has more personality than a Thai election," the article reads. I have to concur. Here FIN and Wittmann bring out an iconic red wine, the Spatburgunder Rotwein trocken "S", to match the king of curries. This is a truly organic limited edition wine, harvested by hand from the Wittmann vineyards. Spatburgunder is also known as the German pinot noir. It has a rich body, fine tannins and flavours of dark berry fruit.

And now for the grand finale, the sixth course: passion fruit and honey soufflé milk ice cream. The last wine is a dessert wine, the 2007 Westhofener Morstein riesling auslese, with aromas of wild plum, vanilla and honey jumping out of the glass. It's been awarded 94 Wine Spectator points! This is a heavenly dessert and wine pairing. I am not a big dessert guy, but I love this soufflé creation.

This magnificent organic wine journey has come to an end. Big smiles and big hand for Wittmann organic wines, FIN boutique wines and Jahn, Conrad Koh Samui.

Note: FIN boutique wines, including the Wittmann collection, are not available in retail – only in Thailand's leading hotels, luxury resorts and top restaurants.

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indigenous Wittmann 2010 grüner silvaner trocken (dry), which has fresh, green apple and herb notes.

Third course: organic apple field and local squid, Thai spices and apple sorbet, accompanied by a 2011 Gutswein Scheurebe (pronounced "shoy ray beh") QbA trocken. This has a strong, 13 per cent alcohol content and is named after its breeder, Georg Scheu. It's Wittmann's alternative to sauvignon blanc. On the palate there's apple, currant and grapefruit. It has a vigorous acidity and excellent mineral tone. Now we are past the halfway point. It's dark outside, with the only light coming from the small local fishing boats. Inside, the mood is lively. Günter Wittmann presents the next wine, a riesling, Germany's emblematic varietal. This is a serious white wine, with 92 Wine Spectator points. This is a pure and focused drop, with crunchy green apple and Asian