



The 2003 Gruner Veltliner Beerenzaesee from Austria's Loimer.



A big red from Thailand's Chateau des Brumes.



Sauvignon blanc Estribor 2005 from Chile's Odfjell.

Wine of four continents

Africa, America, Asia, Europe — all that was missing was wine from Antarctica at one of Bangkok's memorable wine dinners

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The decoration of the table, with its black cloth against which silver and stoneware gleamed, could not have been simpler: three large, white black each in the form of a "W," the initials of World Wide Wine. Or equally, as Bergsjöen Wassonart of fin, an exclusive wine importing company, explained, "women with wine," as among the guests at this seventh Wine Boutique dinner at the Reflexions, Plaza Athènes, were women involved with wine.

Nothing extraordinary about women involved in wine, but it was a treat to welcome to Bangkok Judi Callan of Frankland Estate, Western Australia, Ingrid Bein of Luca and Ingrid Bein, Stellenbosch, South Africa, and from Wang Niem Keow, Pattana Pan-ampong who's teamed with French vigneron Jacques Racou to make the wines of Qual des Brumes in Khao Yai.

The six-course transcultural menu prepared by Reflexions chef Martin Faust was preceded by a crisp, adventurous white wine whose flavours and origins were expressions of North meets South. Sauvignon blanc Estribor 2005 brings Scandinavia into conjunction with South America as it is a product of Chile's Curico Valley from the vineyards of Norwegian-born Laurence Odfjell.

Laurence's father, Norwegian shipping magnate Dan Odell, was a man of the sea who discovered the delights of this corner of South America and determined to found a vineyard there. Laurence designed and built a state of the art winery and plans to be producing 100,000 cases of wine by the end of next year. But Odfjell Vineyards is still, and will always be a very personal, quality-driven boutique winery.

This is the aim of all the winemakers represented at the table, and it is fin's policy to see that only these exclusive, low-production high class wines find the high-end outlets where they will be appreciated.

The first aperitif, the wine was from Galicia in northwestern Spain near the wild Atlantic coast. Rias Baixas has become renowned as an excellent white wine producing area. Its albarino grape variety is known as the "Spanish riesling," for its clean mineral flavours, but it also recalls vignifier for its concentrated aromas of peach and apricot.

At the family-owned winery Bodega Pago de Barrantes, another woman about wine, Pilar Izquierdo, made the 2005 Rias Baixas of 100 percent albarino. It was served with a small pyramid of white tomato mousse with a beautifully smoky smoked salmon, a segment of Maine lobster, and white asparagus. The blend of coolness and intensity in the wine nicely underlined all four ingredients and made a beaming start to the meal.

From Spain, the picture changed to the Frankland River region of Western Australia, where Judi Callan and Barrie Smith founded Frankland Estate in 1988.

"We're very much a family business," she explained. "Our daughter's boss of the white wine, Barrie's boss of red, and our son talks to the bank manager." The company's marketing activities are Judi's concern and she was in Bangkok as the ideal stopover between Australia and Europe.

Frankland Estates wines have travelled a long way along



The evening was dedicated to women involved with wine.

the organic route. "It's about thinking more deeply of what in the soil and what will be on the table," said Judi. "We make wines that reflect the nature of their environment rather than the hand of the winemaker."

The estate's Isolation Ridge Chardonnay is a single vineyard wine, with the grapes hand-picked and carefully sorted for quality. The wine is fermented in oak barriques and stored on the lees to bring out its silky mouthfeel and long lasting flavour. The 2005 had the gentle power to match richly flavoured seared langoustine in chard leaves with mushroom veloute and black truffle.

More richness followed with breast of guinea fowl and foie gras, and a resplendent South African merlot was ideal company for it. 2004 Merlot, Luca and Ingrid Bein, Stellenbosch.

"We just have the smallest estate on the Cape, just 2.2

hectars (about 14 na in area," said Ingrid. She and her husband were both veterinarians in Switzerland who were drawn South Africa, studied oenology and viticulture at Stellenbosch and planted merlot in a perfect terroir.

All their wines with merlots, and are quickly sold out at home, but we had some of the 2004 with the galtona food and foie gras and were impressed as much by its lean sophistication as the ripe intensity of its fruit flavours. "But just wait till you taste the 2005!" said Ingrid.

While presenting first class and rare wines, fin like to extend the experience with some enjoyable, meaningful decoration. As every wine is an integral part of this WNW wine dinner, its background — the hillside vineyards, the winery buildings, the people, the grapes and the vinification process — were all shown on screens in video or as slide presentations while the shadow-like figure of a winelady moved in and out of the pictures.

Two luscious big reds followed with herb crusted saddle of lamb and Kenya beans in a bordelaise reduction. The first was the wonderfully intense, complex and humorous 2001 Ottra's Retreat from Frankland's Estate. It is recognised as one of Australia's best reds and Robert Parker gave it 91 — but it's still an odd name.

"We named it after Harold Olden, the Californian wine professor who first identified Western Australia as a promising area for wine production in the 1950s," Judi Callan explained. "It also gets called 'the Bordeaux of the Bush,' because we learned a lot about winemaking in Bordeaux and wanted to make a Bordeaux-style blend." This is certainly it: mainly cabernet franc and merlot but with small proportions of the other Bordeaux red grape varieties, petit verdot and malbec and cabernet sauvignon.

The second big red was from Asia, and it is a star of Thailand's wine industry, La Pout, Chateau des Brumes. It is a blend made popular in Australia, shiraz and cabernet sauvignon, and the rich, ripe aromas leap out of the glass at you. Ripe berry fruit, spice and tobacco, soft tannins, long, dry finish — it is one good reason why Thai wine is now being taken seriously around the world.

Finally, it was back to Europe, to Austria and its signature white grape variety, the green and gold gruner veltliner, which brings to mind Vienna and the waltzes of Johann Strauss. At his winery in Karpat, Fred Loimer makes different variations on the gruner veltliner theme. His 2003 Beerenzaesee is made in years when the grapes are affected with noble rot. There are very few of them, and they develop a concentrated, honeyed, raitiny richness and sweetness balanced by clean acidity.

We blissfully sipped this final glass of the evening with mille-feuilles of passion fruit mousse, while the winelady danced waltzed across the Austrian Alps with Loimer's famous black wine in the foreground. It felt like the finale of an old-fashioned film of travel to exotic parts. All it needed was the voice of the narrator: "And so we say farewell to four continents and their wonderful wines!" and to another of Bangkok's measurable wine dinners.