

XTRAVAGANCE



LUCA CURRADO tends to his bountiful harvest in Barolo.

PIEDMONT'S NOBLEST WINES

Vietti's Luca Currado showcases his fine Barolo, Barbaresco and Barbera wines

PARANI CHITRAKORN
SPECIAL TO THE NATION

It was really frustrating to make the change from one generation to another," says oenologist and winemaker Luca Currado, 36, during last Saturday's Vietti Wine Dinner at Le Normandie, The Mandarin Oriental organised by Fin.

Yearning to make his mark at the Vietti family winery in the Barolo region of northwest Italy, Luca left Piedmont in his early 20s and to gain experience at various vineyards in California and then in Bordeaux. At 25, he returned home to prove himself to his father and to revalidate the soil of his vineyards by making better wines. He produced the 1992 vintage, his first, in some of the most difficult weather conditions the vineyards had faced yet still managed to make good wine.

Piedmont lies in a remote amphitheatre created by the Alps. It is home to two of Italy's most powerful red wines, Barolo and Barbaresco, made from the nebbiolo grape, as well as to the aromatic truffle.

Barolo and Barbaresco are considered the kings of Italian reds. One reason for this is their quality. Equally important is the fact that nebbiolo is one of the world's most site-specific grape varieties and, in terms of winemaking, one of the most difficult to master. As the kings of wine, Barolo and Barbaresco are also expensive



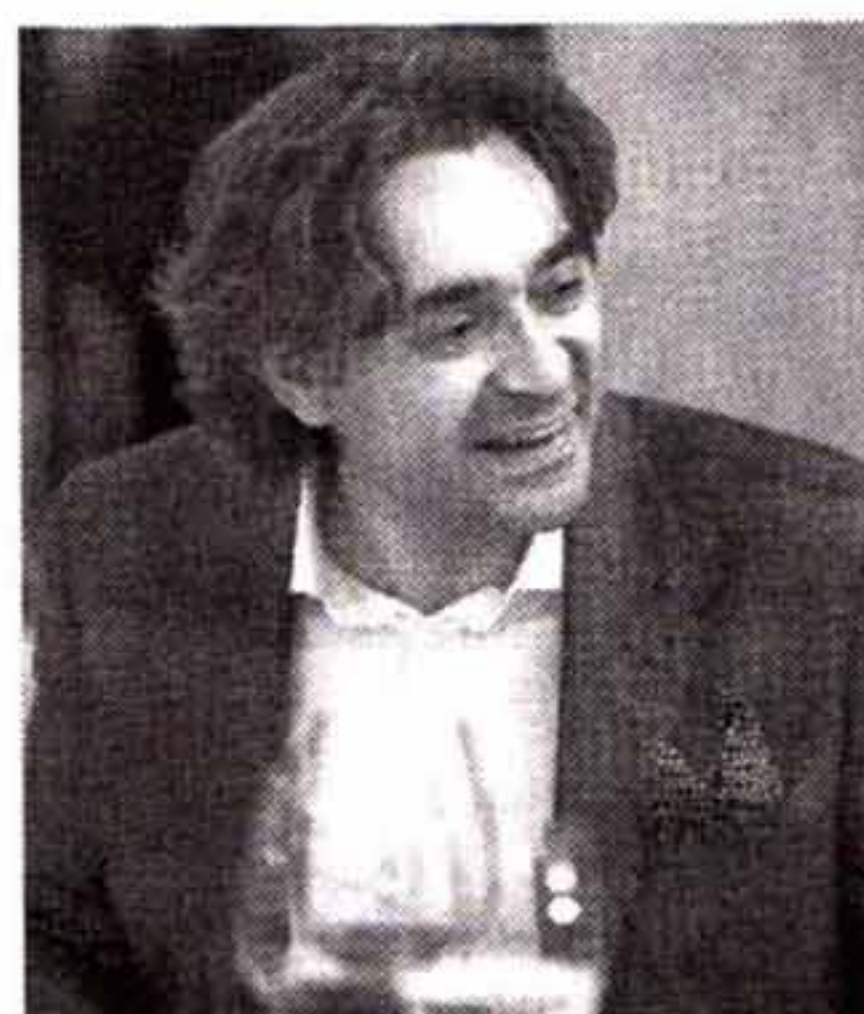
Wine labels



HOT AND COLD foie gras on wild red berries agar with green parsley brioche, lemongrass emulsion, young greens and blossom.

and not what the Piedmontese drink with dinner every night. That honour goes to the queen of Piedmont, Barbera, a vibrant, sometimes rustic wine, oozing with a wealth of fruit flavours. Like Dolcetto, a juicy wine made from the black wine grape of the same wine, it's a wine for food.

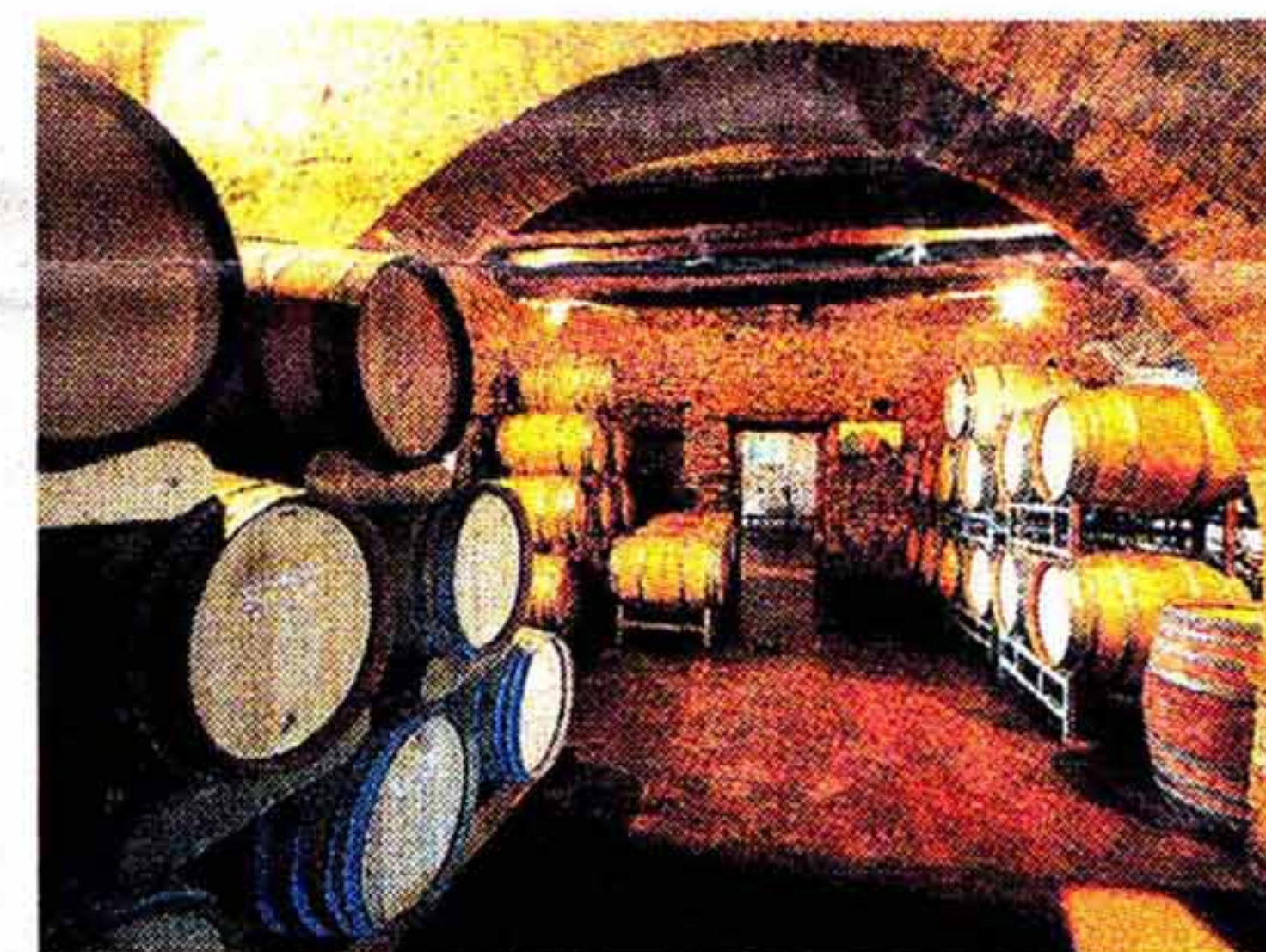
"A winemaker is like a chef. You must have the best ingredients that don't need much cooking. Our wines don't need to put on any make-up," says Luca, adding that the wine matures in neutral Slavonian oak



LUCA CURRADO Vietti held court at the Vietti Wine Dinner at Le Normandie.



GATHERED AT the Oriental's Le Normandie restaurant were, seated, from left, Sonu Shivdasani, Jan Ganser, Elena Currado, Luca Currado, Benjawan Wisootsat, writer Parani Chitrakorn, Baurin and Nantika Phiangphor, and standing, Patrick Schaub, Oliver Schnatz, Simon Zaglmann, Robert Maurer Loeffler, Victor Redondo, Bernhard Bohnenberger, Marc Begassat, Jean-Philippe Joye, Shane Giles, Georges Baurin and Eric Hallin.



THE Vietti wine cellar.

casks and barriques, which are favoured over new French barriques as they give off cacao and vanilla aromas.

It's a philosophy that confirmed in the vineyards. Vietti makes some of the cleanest, most terroir-driven wines in Piedmont. The estate owns about 80 acres of vineyards spread over nearly all the key appellations, including Barolo, Barbaresco, Barbera d'Asti and Barbera d'Alba. Luca's top wines are his single-vineyard Barolos, among them Brunate, Rocche, Lazzarito, Villero and Castiglione.

His parents, the late Alfredo and Luciana, were both art lovers in 1970 started to support a number of local artists through their wine labels. One winter evening, the couple was enjoying dinner with a group of artists at their home when

it was suggested that they "dress their artwork in the winery" with "an art-work on the label". For that night, the Vietti labels took on a new form, which continues to this day. A collection of artist labels from 1990 series was recently shown at the Museum of Modern Art of New York.

Saturday's wine dinner started at the Bamboo bar with an aperitif of Vietti Dolcetto d'Alba DOC Tre Vigne 2007, an easy to drink fruit forward red. Guests then moved to Le Normandie for the dinner, beginning the meal with a first course of hot and cold foie gras with wild red berries agar agar, green parsley brioche, lemongrass emulsion, young greens and blossom paired with Vietti Barbera d'Asti DOC Tre Vigne 2007. Next up was braised beef agnolotti on crushed black and pink pepper scented beef carpaccio served with Nebbiolo DOCG Perbacco 2007. The two main courses – steamed Atlantic sea bass and slow cooked loin of lamb – were paired with Barbaresco DOCG Masseria 2006 and Barolo DOCG Castiglione 2005 respectively, while the dessert of Valrhona chocolate soup was matched with Barolo DOCG Lazzarito 1998.

It was an extraordinary dinner perfectly complemented by the kings and the queen of Italian reds and proof that wine does indeed need food. As Luca so rightly says, "Wine without emotion is just like drinking expensive coca-cola."

PHOTOS COURTESY/FIN