

The magnificent 12

As an introduction to the big event, an eve-of-World Cup celebration dinner with wines from each national team's country was right on target

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With 12 qualifying countries represented at the table, 12 wines served with the six-course banquet, and the 12 ambassadors and their spouses as guests of honour, "Fifa World Cup 2010 — the Table Reunited" was a Plaza Athenee Bangkok wine boutique collaboration with Fin (Fabulous Is Needed) wine distributor.

One fact was quickly established: if you want a fabulous dinner party, a good tip is to invite some ambassadors. The 12 — insufficient space, I'm afraid, to name them all — were very good company, and called on to make a short, World Cup-related speech they revealed a good line in self-deprecating humour. Thus Pascal Furth, Economic and Commercial counsellor for Thailand at the French Embassy, said: "We lost to China in order to fool people that we didn't stand a chance in the World Cup."

Ambassador Christine Schraner Burgener of Switzerland was one of the few who confessed knowing little about football.

"The team are all men, that's all I know," she said.

"But this Swiss pinot noir we're drinking is very persistent on the palate, so maybe that means we shall stay 'til the final."

Two of the diplomatic guests had changed into their teams' football shirts, ambassadors Felipe Frydman of Argentina, and Dr Hanns Schumacher of the three-time cup winners Germany. Tasting the riesling from Mosel served with terrine of foie gras, caramel chocolate and hibiscus flower, he commented: "This riesling is like the German game: crisp, fresh and pleasing to the senses. It's our youngest team ever, and I guess you could say we're a high-rated outsider."

The big screen obliged with black and white film of Germany's first victory in 1954.

The historic clips were interesting and sometimes quite moving as one remembered times past.



From left are ambassadors Felipe Frydman of Argentina, Douglas Gibson of South Africa, and Dr Hanns Schumacher of Germany.

Scallops followed the foie gras terrine, with black truffle and endive wrapped in ham, a splendid trio of flavours. The featured match was Greece versus Argentina and the wines were Urban Uco Torrontes from Argentina and a dry, organic Greek wine, Areti Assertyko from Mount Pangeon.

The host nation South Africa was represented by Ambassador Douglas Gibson. The South African wine was a Stellenbosch Merlot from Ingrid & Luca Bein, and for Mexico there was a Tannat & Merlot Pisano from Rio de la Plata,

Uruguay. They were served with pan-fried pig's trotter with hazelnut crust and goat cheese with green asparagus and bacon emulsion — and this brought us to half time with melon caviar concealed in stylish ice carvings.

The notional whistle blew for the second half and the servers made their entrance bearing pan-fried seabass with potato crust, baby butter spinach and carrot coulis to be served with Odfjell Merlot Armador from Chile and Classic Pinot Noir from Jurg Saxer in Thurgau, Switzerland.

From left are Christopher Zimmer, Lufthansa's general manager - Passenger Sales Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Burma; Wayne Buckingham, Starwood regional vice president for Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia; Jan Ganser, MD of Fin; Benjawan Wisootsat and Rubert Konjin.



Ambassador Michelangelo Pipan of Italy.



Emmanuel Markianos, Economic and Commercial Affairs counsellor of the Embassy of Greece.

The June 29 Spain versus Portugal match was celebrated with Telmo Rodriguez 'G' Dehessa Gago from Toro, Spain and Tres Bagos from Douro, Portugal, both delivering a variety of complex fruit flavours. They linked up brilliantly with veal tenderloin stuffed with morel mushrooms, Kenya beans and fava bean coulis.

And this took us to dessert and the World Champions of 2006, Italy. Richly operatic Rigoletto 'Santa Cristina' from Veneto was a winning dessert wine and on the plate was a dark chocolate sphere with caramelised almond, lime ice cream and berry fruit.

Italian Ambassador Michelangelo Pipan observed that we were still two days away from the 2010 championship — "So we can say we're still world champions for a couple of days!"

"Football, food and wine are all best enjoyed with friends," he said. "This year, whether we win or lose, let us do so with grace."

Coming at the end of a football, food and wine evening in friendly, convivial surroundings, his words were right on target.