

SUNDAY TALK

Touché!

Celebrating two years of wine dinners with three culinary musketeers

■ *Hal Lipper*
Special to The Nation

GUESTS ATTENDING the latest Wine Boutique dinner had to check their swords at the door. However, Thailand's national fencing team arrived at the Plaza Athenee with foils bared and duelled around 27 gourmets attending the "Culinary Musketeers with French Etiquette" dinner.

The feast featured only French food and wines. Its trio of culinary musketeers was the Plaza Athenee's general manager Georges Baurin, Reflexions' new manager Thomas Deledalle and its chef Thibault Chiumenti. Deledalle and Chiumenti recently arrived from Daniel, one of the finest French restaurants in New York.

"Every region of France has unique and wonderful wines. Yet before tonight, we've never hosted a Wine Boutique dinner with exclusively French wines," said Jan Ganser, who with Benjawan Wisootsat hosts quarterly Wine Boutique repasts at the Plaza Athenee. Ganser and Benjawan also select 14 to 16 boutique wines that run for a limited time on the hotel's special wine-tasting menu.

This eighth Wine Boutique dinner marked two years of superb, small-production wines paired with fine food. In the past, there has been a progressive dinner called "Culinary Crossroads in Asia," with guests moving from one Plaza Athenee restaurant to another and a "Rhythm of Wine" dinner with each course matched with wine and music.

The goal this time was to introduce Deledalle and Chiumenti to guests and explore the various regions of France through seven courses and eight limited-production wines.

Delicate tarte flambees from Alsace, oysters with white asparagus and caviar, and foie gras terrine with fruit chutney were served as aperitifs with a Champagne Blancs de Blancs from Jacques Diebolt of Cramant. "We had to fight for one year to get this champagne," Ganser noted. Only 7,000 cases are produced annually; 90 per cent is consumed in France.

The remainder of the meal was served upstairs at a room-sized orchid-and-candle-strewn table overlooking Reflexions.

Legions of waiters served a delectable combination of tomato carpaccio with black olive, anchovy and shallot tapenade and scallops carpaccio marinated with lemon-mint oil and dotted with a basil pesto and citrus-oil dressing



JAN GANSER, left, with Michael Kordys, the president of BMW and his wife Martina.



Axel Lutz



FROM LEFT: Apinee Thammano, Revadee Thammano, Aran Thammano, Krungkrai Patarakomol and Chatchai Parasuk.

heightened with tiny specks of vanilla beans. The appetiser was complimented by a fruity, floral and dry 2005 Tavel Rose AOC from Chateau d'Aqueria in southern Rhone.

Seared langoustines were arranged in a swirl over a red onion and yellow and green mango Riviera and graced with beet vinaigrette. Ganser chose a 2001 Pouilly-Fuisse "Clos Varambon" from Chateau des Rontets in Maconnais in Burgundy. This is a wonderfully complex wine with a flowery nose and wisps of butterscotch and vanilla made by a husband and wife, former architects, working a vineyard that has been in the family since 1850.

Chiumenti followed with one of his signature dishes, a rustic yet refined roasted snow fish piquet with chorizo bits and Piperade, a combination of pepper, onion and tomato that is popular in southwest France. The snow fish was presented with baby artichokes grimolata topped with pine nuts, cheese, olive oil and rosemary.

Ganser chose a pair of reds for



BENJAWAN WISOOTSAT, left, and Jan Ganser.

this dish: a lush, supple 2001 Santenay "La Comme" 1er Cru from Rene Lequin in Burgundy and a full-bodied 2002 Nuits St. Georges AOC from Lechenaut in Burgundy that is rich with berries, spices and cassis.

About this point, as a champagne granitee was served, the fencers bounded up the stairs and began parrying around the dining room. If the granitee didn't clear the palate the bout did.

It was perhaps fitting that the next course was a meat dish: grilled rack of lamb and lamb tenderloin

with a luscious herb crust flavoured with thyme, basil and parsley. Thibault and Deledalle chose this dish to complement the 2003 Roc des Agnes, a Vieilles Vignes, Cotes-du-Roussillon Villages AOC from Roussillon that Ganser had chosen.

Robuchon, Comte and goat cheese were served with a full-bodied 2003 Chateaufort-du-Pape from Chateau Mont-Redon, a vineyard originally planted by the Romans in Rhone.

The evening was finished with a map of France drawn in cocoa and a selection of desserts from its regions: a savoury chocolate square with salty butter from Brittany, a lavender-flavoured chocolate mille-feuille from Provence; hot Mon Cherie from Alsace; and a prune-and-apple chocolate tartelette from Basque.

Ganser chose a 2001 Chateau Charmail Cru Bourgeois from Charmail in Haut Medoc to compliment the chocolate. Rich with cocoa, cassis and anise, it proved the perfect foil and a fine finish for the evening.

FROM LEFT:
Patrick Schaub,
hotel
manager of
Plaza
Athenee
Bangkok;
Gerry Asker,
Mrs and Mr
Dale Hart,
and Gerry
Asker.



FROM LEFT:
Thomas
Deledalle, outlet
manager of The
Reflexions;
Georges Baurin,
general manager
of Plaza Athenee
Bangkok and
Chef Thibault
Chiumenti, Chef
de Cuisine of The
Reflexions.