



Invited to an exclusive wine meal at the Conrad Samui, Mark Bibby Jackson discovers there is more to FIN's Jan Ganser than a love of fine wines.

Chatting over breakfast with Jan Ganser, the co-founder of FIN – Fabulous is Needed – it soon becomes clearly that this is no ordinary wine retailer. For him, wine is more a passion than a business.

"I only bring wines that I personally like and I only sell to places which I personally like", he had said the previous evening at a wine dinner FIN, which stands for, had hosted at the Conrad Samui. *"And this place I like very much."*

Gazing across the Gulf of Thailand from the resort's lofty Azure restaurant, it is easy to see why. The view alone is worth the short flight from Bangkok.

After 40 years in international marketing, Ganser decided upon retirement to follow his nose for wines. So, in 2004, together with Benjawan Wisootsat, he established FIN to bring fine wines to Thailand and organise major events.

"I do the wine and Benjawan does the events," he explains to me. *"I only do what I love."*

As we are talking, Gerhard Kracher, whose wines Ganser had showcased the evening before, walks joins us. Dressed casually as though he is about to hit the swimming pool, he exchanges pleasantries and a few jokes with his host. This seems more than a business arrangement.

"The winemakers are all friends much more than business partners, because if you are not friends with them you don't get the wines", Ganser had joked while introducing Kracher the evening before. Friends certainly, but you get the sense that there is an element of truth behind the laughter.

For Ganser only the best will do. He travels around the world seeking out the best suppliers, and sells them exclusively to five-star hotels around Thailand. "I still love travelling," he admits. When FIN is involved, quality is ensured.

Our tasting the night before had seen the Thai fusion food of the Conrad's Jahn restaurant paired with Kracher's sweet wines – a combination that at first seemed unorthodox but worked extremely well.

"Thai food goes very well with sweet wines", explained Kracher, who is the third generation in the family run wine producers. And sweet wines is something that Kracher knows about. In 2009 he was named Sweet Winemaker of the Year at the International Wine Challenge in London. Still, allowing for more savoury tastes, the master of detritus allowed a dry white pinot gris and a red to slip onto the menu, pampering to the unconverted.

"A good wine you enjoy and then forget", the Austrian had said the night before. *"A great wine is like an adventure. It's like for one or two hours you are on holiday."*

At the moment Kracher's adventure is a whistle stop tour of Thailand, Australia, Taiwan and China – the last two representing the increasing importance that the Chinese market is playing in the international wine market.

Judging by the nationality of the guests at our table – a mix of Hong Kong and mainland Chinese in addition to food and beverage managers from other resorts on the island and a couple of interloping journalists – this is a trend that is destined to continue.

The tasting at the Conrad Samui is only one of several events Ganser has arranged around Thailand, from Bangkok to Phuket. This month he will host a wine dinner and wine tasting at the Sofitel Sukhumvit.

Breakfast over, I am left to the serious task of exploring the exclusive resort's many attractions. Part of which involves taking a speedboat to a nearby islet where the resort ferries guest across to a secluded beach.

As I am waiting on the pier staring at the tropical fish, Ganser and Wisootsat approach. This time they are clad more for the beach than for fine dining. As I swim in the clear waters at the end of our short ride, Ganser walks up and down the beach.

"Paradise", he says as much to the beach as to me. *"Just paradise".* Clearly Ganser's passion is not reserved for fine wines alone.