

Cognoscenti

Because life is short

WINE PAGE

WINE TASTING EVENT

TAN DINH RESTAURANT, PARIS, FRANCE

On a recent Saturday afternoon in Paris, several of France's most passionate wine collectors gathered at **Tan Dinh** restaurant to join visiting **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors for lunch—and a tasting of an exceptional selection of vintage wines.

At table was Eric Beaumard, silver medal winner of the world's best sommelier championship in 1998 and restaurant manager of Le Cinq (at the Four Seasons George V), which was recently awarded a third Michelin star. Eric's charming wife, Marie-France—who shows considerable tasting acumen of her own—was in attendance as well. So was art gallery owner and Old Masters expert, René Millet, with around 5,000 bottles in his collection, and business executive Jean Michel Runacher, whose 4,000 bottle collection is focused mostly on burgundies.

Robert Vifian challenged the tasting skills of our table by serving us pairs of peer-grouped wines to match each lunch course—blind. “The best school is the blind tasting school,” said Eric Baumard. “Blind tasting forces us to face our preconceptions and teaches us humility. A critic's view can influence one's taste. It's unfortunate—but true.” He went on to remind us that nobody's perfect, and everyone has sharper and less sharp days at tasting.

After flutes of buttery *Jacques Selousse* Brut champagne, we began with two 1995 white burgundies. The *Louis Jadot* Corton-Vergennes was golden yellow, with smoke and a bit of delicious funk in the nose. Eric Beaumard found it “slightly disappointing, it's a bit fuzzy, lacks

focus.” Alongside this white Burgundy was Robert Vifian's own bottling of *Marquis de Jouennes d'Herville*, Château de Chamirey, Mercurey Blanc 1995; this was an easier, more flattering wine, “plus mou” (more “flabby”) for Eric Beaumard. Jean-Michel Runacher preferred the Chamirey, finding it “smokier.”



Eric Beaumard (left), and Robert Vifian: two of France's foremost wine experts.



As good as the wines were the dishes presented to us at the restaurant. Robert Vifian offers one of the most comprehensive selections of Pomerols at his and his brother Freddy's Tan Dinh restaurant. He selects 99% of the wines for Tan Dinh and develops the recipes there. Vietnamese cooking is slightly sweet, and this is why the Vifian brothers like to match Pomerols, which are often sweeter than other appellations, and with lower acidity.

After a fine plate of steamed rolls, we went on to crispy triangles with sweet-and-sour hints.

Here came a spectacular pairing of 1989 right-bank Bordeaux reds, served with beef in a lovely sweet soy sauce. The *Château Troplong-Mondot* was elegant, silkier, fully mature and beginning to drop its fruit. The mystery wine—later revealed to be an unfiltered *Château de Carles* (Fronsac)—seemed even lusher than the *Troplong-Mondot*, plump, well-integrated and with plenty of life yet. In a delightful surprise, the proprietor of Chateau de Carles, Stephane Droulers, who was in the restaurant at the time, appeared at table to share his thoughts on the vintage.

The final red served at table was a very good 1998 *Ghislaine Barthod* Chambolle-Musigny 1er Cru "Les Cras." Its densely aromatic nose showed outstanding complexity, along with plenty of spice on the palate. For Jean-Michel Runacher, "This wine proves the superiority of Burgundy over Bordeaux. We had two Bordeaux from a good vintage (1989) and yet the Burgundy from a relatively poor vintage (1998) is superior."

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs and Nicole Medvecky-Riggs, Contributing Editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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*Wine Tasting lunch at Tan Dinh:
From left to right, Marie-France Beaumard, Eric Beaumard, Robert Vifian, Isabelle Vifian (seated), Catherine Polnecq, Rene Millet, Nicole Medvecky-Riggs (Cognoscenti Magazine).*

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