

Cognoscenti

Because life is short

WINE PAGE

WINE COLLECTOR PROFILE:

ROBERT VIFIAN

One of the France's foremost wine collectors and experts, **Robert Vifian** has a superb 12,000 bottle collection that he began assembling soon after arriving in France from Vietnam in 1968. At a time when choice bottles could be purchased at a fraction of today's cost, Mr. Vifian scouted all of Paris, ferreting out precious bottles one by one from the back rooms of small wine shops. "I was always trying to find the diamonds," he remembers. These days the collection is nearly too large to fit into his cellar, and he drinks whatever suits his mood.



Robert Vifian in his garden

Mr. Vifian's acquisitive acumen extends to the wines he's stock into the cellars of his family's **Tan Dinh** restaurant in Paris' stylish 7th arrondissement. The restaurant is as renowned for its pioneering Vietnamese "nouvelle cuisine" as it is for a wine card that specializes in great Pomerols.

Cognoscenti Magazine editors recently met Mr. Vifian and his wife Isabelle, first at his sprawling, art-filled Paris home and then at Tan Dinh itself. Mr. Vifian generously shared his opinions on wines old and new, and later hosted an exceptional tasting event attended by several France's finest collectors.

Mr. Vifian's wine curiosity is huge. Here is a collector who actually *enjoys* tasting bad wines, because he believes that cultivating the ability to recognize the flaws in a wine is as important to a taster's critical repertoire as the ability to applaud its strengths. Tasting

"bad" wines helps sharpen one's sense of discrimination, he argues.

Mr. Vifian views recent wine industry trends with some bemusement. Of California wines, he says, "When you taste them young, they're impressive, they deserve the praise but still the prices cannot be justified. Most California chardonnays have little finesse or elegance. They hit hard but lack charm." In contrast, "Bordeaux and Burgundy have always been my two passions."

Many modern wine drinkers are "incapable of tasting old wines. They want instant gratification. The palate becomes used to younger wines. Younger wines are less acidic. Older wines are paler in color and slightly more acid, and present different aromas that gain complexity."

"People don't want to be surprised. They're much less adventurous. They like to read in advance, build a small myth before the experience." In contrast, Mr. Vifian retains a steadfastly intrepid and endlessly curious attitude. "I cannot see a wine without wanting to taste it. Burgundy is my soft spot. I see the bottle, I say 'pour the wine,' because the important thing is to be surprised, and you get more surprise, more amazement with Burgundy. The important thing with wine is to be surprised and amazed."

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs, Senior Contributing Editor to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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