

## **Rule of Matching**

*Eric Goettelman, a wine expert and sommelier of Bernard Loiseau Gourmet, speaks about great Burgundy wines, fools and tannins in water*

by MARIA VOROBYEVA

### ***Which of the rare wines kept in the Bernard Loiseau cellars thrills you most?***

Without any doubts, it's Romanee-Conti, a precious wine and a dream of collectors. That wine roots back as far as the 15th century. To taste it one needs both specific knowledge, relevant emotions, and proper susceptibility. Certainly, this is the best embodiment of Pinot Noir, wine with an incredibly deep and delicate taste. To describe it, one can compare soil with human skin, and vine shoot with blood vessel. Royal blood runs in Romanee-Conti.

### ***Do you speak so metaphorically about all your wines?***

They deserve it. La Tache, wine produced in the same winery as Romanee-Conti, merits other metaphors, as it is different. It is a symbol of power and masculine magnetism. La Tache compensates for a feminine-refined taste of Romanee-Conti. I would call La Tache a dominus of our wines. And Richebourg is one of the most magic wines. With powerful, rich and strong character, Richebourg also possesses rare density for Burgundy wines.

### ***Do you mean legendary wines sold at auctions for fabulous prices like the greatest pieces of art?***

Yes, I mean rear pearls, grand cru wines. Only one percent of the wines produced in Burgundy are grand cru. Red wines include Clos Vougeot, Clos de Tart, Bonnes-Mares, Musigny... For white wines, I would mention Montrachet, about which Alexander Dumas said, "One should drink that wine on his knees with hat off"; Batard-Montrachet with richer and deeper taste; noble and stylish Chevalier-Montrachet; and, last but not least, Corton-Charlemagne, an emperor wine, as the first owner of the Corton hill vineyard was none other than Charlemagne...

### ***As a professional, with what can you compare tasting such pearls?***

Great Burgundy wines are the ultimate level of perfection in winemaking. Now doubt, they will always be a privilege of the powers that be. Even I, a wine expert, am not sure that a human life is enough to understand and disclose their enigma. But I know for sure, that if you have never tasted grand cru, it is as if you have missed your happiness and lifelong sweetheart.

### ***Which wine tasting do you most remember?***

You will be surprised. It happened after wine tasting with my colleagues in a French region. It had been raining all week long, and we were exhausted. During the trip we had sampled over 300 wines, and on the final day one of the wineries presented us with a box of 6 bottles of basic though rather good cuvee. And at noon, like by magic, the sun began shining. Immediately, we decided to make picnic somewhere near water. When we set down on a riverside, one of my colleagues proposed to try wine from that box. We opened one bottle, then another bottle followed by another one... Do you think, we drank from glasses? No. We had plastic cups! That picnic has been one of the best wine tastings in my life. By that time I had a 20-year professional experience in the area, and I had been honoured to taste great wines in much more exquisite environment.

Indeed, it seems that good company and mood matter more than wine. Imagine that you find yourself at grand dinner; a bottle of a precious wine is served; however, you are surrounded by fools only. Such dinner is not worth sixpence. By contrast, good match with persons you are talking to, propitious mood and something elusively beautiful, then the most simple, event improvised meals would be remembered forever. I value such improvisations. If you have a chance at least once to combine all these three elements of happiness, the dearest people gathered in good place with a bottle of grand Burgundy wine... It is not wine that is most valuable but the rare moments of cordiality and unity.

While the whole world tends to Paris and Cote d'-Azur, an ultimate dream for the French people is Saulieu, a Burgundy town with its legendary gastronomic hotel Bernard Loiseau. As a magnet, that place attracts not only gourmets, but also professional gastronomists, as its staff have not changed for years. Eric Goettelman, a wine expert and sommelier of Bernard Loiseau, has worked here for 12 years now. Everything that accompanies the meals – wines and water – is under his supervision. Monsieur Goettelman believes that at the table everything is equally important.

ALEXANDER DUMAS SAID THAT ONE SHOULD DRINK MONTRACHET ON HIS KNEES WITH HAT OFF

***To enjoy such wines people should know how to drink them properly, shouldn't they?***

That's correct. One should know how to drink not only wine, but also water at the table. I realized that once I had been proposed to make a speech about water as indispensable element of gastronomy. The subject was unusual. I did not think that someone can speak about such simple and understandable product. Then I wonder, indeed, why we don't pay attention to water. Is it only because we have plenty of water? Then I realized that it is kind of professional assessment for me, since I had to know not only wine but all beverages served at the table and effecting our taste buds. So, I agreed to make a speech in front of large audience of two thousand people. The audience even applauded me. After that, my attitude to water became professional. Water that is served at the table should match wine by taste, quality and composition. Thanks to my 'experiments' with water, I agreed to become a Vittel brand ambassador.

***Does it mean that water can also be tasted by professionals?***

At the beginning, it was strange to hear that. For every human, water is as natural as air. But try to pay relevant attention to it, try to 'listen to' its taste. I am speaking about good still mineral water, such as Vittel, that certainly reveals its specific character, and its special mineralisation. I would say that water, like wine, possesses its terroir, a combination of geographical factors and characteristics that define its specific features. Like grapes, real mineral water absorbs solar energy and soil power; it grows and enriches itself with minerals. Different water is produced in different ways; one water-bearing stratum is located very deep, while another stratum is near the surface. Water that has flown through clay layers features rich and volume taste, while water filtered through several layers of sand, is delicate and soft, and calcium gives it a touch of bitterness. Life history of good water is full of events. Before bottling, water sometimes covers 20-30 years. Such water can't but earns respect. While tasting water I often speak using wine terms, such as coating ability and acidity. Sometimes, I even feel an urge to mention about tannins, though they are not present in water.

***Are there any specific rules of serving water?***

First of all, water temperature should not be below 10-15°C. The maximum balance is obtained then, since cold conceals taste. Alternatively, warm water may seem excessively intense and even obtrusive. Similarly, you will hardly feel its taste. Also, water makes a miraculous effect on perception of dishes. Water with rich taste goes well with original food having strong specific taste, for example, with cheeses. Cooler water should be served at the beginning of meals, to drink it with refreshments and salads, while little warmer water is best for meat and cheese. And, of course, glasses: they should be rather narrow to preserve the character of water as long as possible and, if you like, its aroma.