



Aubert de Villaine & Jean Vincent Ridon

Tasting the legend Romanée Conti

Jean Vincent Ridon

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When legends become realities: Tasting Romanée Conti with Aubert de Villaine.

Some wine tastings make dates in history. You have the famous Tasting of Paris on the 24th of May 1976, Robert Parker's 50th birthday on the 23rd of July 1997 where only 1947 grand cru were served, and the Mosaic restaurant's Romanée Conti tasting on the 12th of January 2016 in Pretoria.

Aubert de Villaine, the winemaker and manager of Domaine de la Romanée Conti started his tour of South Africa with a tasting never before seen in South Africa. A total of 12 of the best vintages of the Domaine de la Romanée Conti were opened in for a very limited number of wine lovers.

For many Romanée Conti is just a name, the holy grail of wine, and one of the rarest bottling on earth. Besides producing the most sought after Romanée Conti, the estate is bottling the most prestigious grand cru of Burgundy, including La Tache, Richebourg, Echezeaux or the precious Montrachet. These vineyards have been famous since the end of the Roman times, but it is only over the last decades that these wines turned from cult wines into social status for rich collectors. As an example, the very few bottles bottles of the Romanée Conti 2009 can be found in some exclusive wine shops of the world for an average of 220 000 rands per bottle... Yes the price of a brand new medium size car!

Aubert de Villaine, one of the most respected wine men in the world, decided that his wines should not end up being museum artefacts that people contemplate being armoured windows, but rather regain their deserved status of refined pleasures to be shared among wine fans. All the Domaine's wines being reserved and presold years in advance, they often end up in vault cellars and are used as investment vessels. Mr de Villaine is adamant of the fact that he makes wines to be drunk, this is the purpose of his art, so he toured South Africa to make sure that the bottles are open and enjoyed. Great Domaines, the official importer of DRC in South Africa, had to convince Mr de Villaine that we are a country of real wine lovers, not wine speculators. It was probably not easy to convince the venerable wine man to fly on the other side of the world to share his passion with his local fans.

Sommelier Germain Lehodey, and Chef Chantelle Dartnall of Mosaic, organised the most precious possible welcome to the DRC (Domaine de la Romanée Conti) wines, with a tasting, and a food pairing diner to follow. Not only they are the most sought after wines in the world, but Mr de Villaine brought in his suitcase the best vintages of the last 15 years. Beside the ultra-rare Romanée Conti 2009 with only 6465 bottles produced, the Mosaic Tasting brought the chardonnay based Montrachet 2009 twice as rare as the Conti, but also the most unavailable of all, the Batard-Montrachet, which yields only one barrel a year and is reserved from private use at the estate. It was a fabulous surprise to all present that a few bottles of the highly praised vintage 2000 were available, which is one of the best vintages of the last 20 years. It made the gift even more precious.

The afternoon tasting gave a unique opportunity to compare all the 2009 vintages after a glass of Champagne Salon 1995.

- Corton 2009 – The new acquisition of the Domaine, the Corton is the only red grand cru of Cote de Beaune, and always considered as a sleeper needing decades to open themselves in the bottles. The 2009 shows the classic earthy, almost iron, texture of Corton but a surprising upfront blackberry and youngberry nose. Powerful and long, one of the best Corton I ever tasted. Usually Corton wines need at least 20 years of bottle age, and this 2009 was simply delicious already. Such a surprise.

- Echezeaux 2009 – A dark garnet colour with a discreet nose and a delicious full mouth of wild strawberry on the palate. Very silky, almost shy compared to the other grand cru, but displaying a lot of restrained elegance.

- Grands Echezeaux 2009– Les Grands Echezeaux displaying an almost evolved colour due to its very shallow soil compared to the more clayish Echezeaux, tannins are very integrated and the wine is fresher with a harder finish. A keeper that will need time in the cellar to open.

- Romanée Saint Vivant 2009 – This wine is perfumy! La Romanée saint vivant is a woman, and a



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Tasting the Legend Romanée Conti

fascinating one. Multiple layers of laces, hiding a delicate body and hints of cassis and violet. The lingering palate with a coarser texture is here to remind you the power of the wine if you were misled by its elegance.

- Richebourg 2009—Even more perfumed than the Saint Vivant, but with a massive structure. On the nose rose petals, Turkish delight, violet, musky and meaty... Still a feminine wine, with lean muscles and slender texture. The finish is incredibly long.

- La Tache 2009 – I was expecting a massive wine at the colour, but the nose is so closed and shy compared to the Richebourg. Dried bark, powdery perfume, rice powder, tobacco leaf, pencil shaving, graphite, but an impressive texture that will open with time. If you have a wine to purchase for 30 years of cellaring, this is La Tache.

- Romanée Conti 2009—The King of Pinot, and the Pinot for the Kings. The silence in the tasting room was tangible, like if everybody refrained from commenting to avoid the noise to influence any subtleties of the wine. This is a wine with multiple layers, the complexity put into a bottle. Not an impressive body compared to La Tache or Richebourg, but a symphony of perfumes, delicate, fading and coming back. Red fruits, black fruits, spices, flowers... a tense mouth coating supported by an integrated acidity and a superb tannic lingering finish. The persistence on the palate last minutes with roses, wild strawberries and Spanish Jabugo ham... The legend is deeply rooted in quality!

- Montrachet 2009 – The tradition was followed as in the true Burgundian spirit the white wines were tasted after the reds. And not just any white, but the most expensive white in the world. As much as the Romanée Conti displayed a lot of restraint in its power, the Montrachet DRC 2009 is pure refined power!

But the feast did not end up there as Mr de Villaine brought samples of his most exceptional mature wines that Chantel Dartnall paired with her recent creations.

- Batard Montrachet 2000 – The most mature wine of the evening, dense, tight with spices on the nose, cardamom, popcorn, aniseed, lemon dried zest. A massive palate showing the warmth of the 2000 vintage leaves a long lingering aftertaste, a perfect food wine matching the rock lobster with hibiscus infusion. ... only 300 bottles were made.

- VosneRomanée 2006 1er Cru. It is so unexpected to find a premier cru among this lineage of grand cru only but the Domaine decides to harvest all the grand cru younger vines and downgrades them to Premier Cru because they are not as perfect as one should have. It means that this bottle contains a percentage of Romanée Conti grapes, along with some La Tache or Richebourg.

- Romanée Saint Vivant 2003. The 2003 vintage was the warmest vintage since 1893 and 1976, and the wine shows the ultra-ripeness of the tannins, even if the colour displays lighter intensity due to the solar year. A wine still closed, but with a massive tannic structure, almost unbelievable for a Romanée Saint Vivant, supposedly the most feminine of the grand cru.

- La Tache 2005. A perfect wine on a perfect vintage. Garnet colour, with a smoky spicy nose showing a lot of freshness. Supple on the palate, and textured, pure velvet. A wine to keep for more than 30 years, a grand classic!
Tastings like this happen once in a lifetime if you are the chosen one. Needless to say that for many wine lovers these wines will remain an untouchable legend. Mr Aubert de Villaine at the age of 76 knows that it is his responsibility to make his wines enjoyed by more than just a handful of billionaires.

We are grateful that he chose South Africa to make the wines from DRC unforgettable.

For more info on Domaine de la Romanée Conti, click [HERE](#).

For more on Mosaic Restaurant, click [HERE](#)

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