

WORLD GOURMET SUMMIT

**AWARDS
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2010**



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Paul Jaboulet Aîné & Château La Lagune

By Shireen Sheikh

September 2009. Prior to my visit, I had waited several weeks before I was given a call and informed of the flight details. I was also introduced to Marina Ann Mendez, who was the Asian communication manager and Caroline Frey, who was the oenologist and winemaker. The day had come and I reached the airport on 20 September 2009 at eight in the evening all suited up and excited about visiting both Paul Jaboulet Aîné and Château La Lagune wineries. In all my working experience as a server in the restaurant in previous years, books had been the only source of information. Now, this was the one true opportunity for me to see and understand what I had read and learnt about wines in all those years!

Wining & Dining At Château La Lagune

I arrived at the château at 3.20pm and was welcomed by Mendez and Emmanuel the butler who offered to carry our belongings. We were taken on a short tour and Mendez showed us the back view of the château and the vast land that was covered with vines carrying Cabernet Sauvignon. It was harvest time, how exciting! We hurried towards the vines, on the fine gravel which was the topsoil and Mendez encouraged us to pluck the grapes and taste them. The feeling was almost surreal. I told Mendez about our careers and passion for wines, and was surprised to find out that Mendez was a Singaporean and that she had been a successful real estate agent. It has been three years now that she has since picked up French and worked in the château. We were then introduced to Korean editor Jung Joo Lee and designer Min Ju Kim, from *Noblesse*, a Korean wine magazine, who would be touring with us. Shortly after, we met Caroline Frey. Youthful and very striking in person, Frey was a horse riding enthusiast who devoted herself to studying oenology in Bordeaux. She graduated her first year at the Faculty of Oenology in August 2003 and has been in charge of oenology and winemaking at Château La Lagune since 2004. Frey also took us on a tour of Château La Lagune's private wine cellar. The oldest vintage I caught sight of was a 1912 Château La Lagune. We then proceeded to dinner where Chef Florian, the resident chef, had prepared a fine spread of food for us. Most of the ingredients, herbs and vegetables had been grown in the château's very own garden! 'Wining and dining' had definitely taken a whole new perspective.

The next morning, we were given a short introduction to the history and facts of Château La Lagune. Built in 1715, it is now one of the most illustrious estates in Bordeaux. The Frey family, originally from Champagne, had taken over Château La Lagune in 2000. It is an 80 hectare vineyard including 60 hectare in a single block. Under the helm of Frey and Patrick Moulin, the vineyard manager, the team is made up of approximately 28 full time staff and 150 others assisting with the yearly harvest. Château La Lagune blends three grape varieties. This permits complexity and equilibrium in the wine and is also made for aging potential. The main grape variety is Cabernet Sauvignon; the structure and backbone of the wine, exhibiting aromas of blackcurrant. Then there is Merlot, which brings a fleshy roundness and flavours of cherry and plum. Finally, Petit Verdot is the grape variety that adds subtle spice aromas and acidity which gives it the potential for aging. Our first tasting session was made of 2006 Mademoiselle L, 2004 Moulin La Lagune and 2007, 2003 Château La Lagune and the acclaimed 2005. During the rest of my stay I had tasted several vintages and my most impressionable vintage was the 2004 Château La Lagune, made of beautifully balanced fruit and refined tannins which had an elegant finish. The most extensive and memorable experience was definitely having the opportunity to work hands-on in the vineyard.



A trip to the wineries of Paul Jaboulet Aîné and Château La Lagune opens the author (pictured left) to many priceless lessons and experiences. Finally an opportunity to meet Caroline Frey (pictured) to see and understand what she has read and learnt from books!

We were introduced to Jerome and showed the sorting tables. It was obvious that Frey paid meticulous attention to the sorting tables where only the best grapes were selected. Carts of freshly picked grape bunches were hauled onto the first sorting table where six people mended the table where dirt, leaves, bad grapes were removed. The bunches then rolled into the "de-stemmer" and the stemless grapes rolled onto the next conveyor belt where another six people were stationed to ensure that only the good grapes were used. I assisted with this for the next two days and was also shown the ropes of doing the "pump over", an important daily process of alcohol fermentation as this extracts the tannins and aromas. I was also given the opportunity to stir in the cultured packets of yeast into the mixture of warm water and wine to start the fermentation process. I was told that 2009 was going to be an excellent vintage due to the climate and weather conditions and I am glad to have had a hand in it!

A Visit To The Little Chapel At Hermitage La Chapelle

24 September 2009, my next trip was to Rhône Valley in Lyon and I was set to visit the Paul Jaboulet Aîné winery. Upon my arrival at Rhône, my new Korean friends, Mendez and I met up with Jean Luc Chapel who brought us on a quick tour of Crozes Hermitage. The landscape was so steep that grapes had to be brought down from the slopes on small sledges. The Rhône is generally divided into two sub-regions with distinct viticulture traditions, the Northern Rhône and the Southern Rhône. The northern sub-region (where I was at) produces red wines from the Syrah grape, sometimes blended with white wine grapes, namely Viognier (Condrieu). The other two main whites are Marsanne, Roussane or a blend of both. On Rhone's hilly terrain, divided by the great Rhône River, the sun goes down early and quickly. However, from the highest elevations, where many of the vineyards are located, the sun shines longer and these high altitudes can create long, cool growing seasons for these vines, perfect for the Syrah grape where it produces wines of delicacy, power and complexity. By nightfall, we were brought to The Vineum in Tain L' Hermitage which was a huge cave used to cellar some of Paul Jaboulet Aîné wines. There we met up with Christophe Brunet and where a nice meal was prepared for us by a famous local chef. My first wine of the evening was 2006 Le Petit Jaboulet Viognier, light, refreshing acidity with hints of pear and honey, a great welcome introduction to the Rhône. We proceeded on to taste several wines and one of my favourites was the 2005 Domaine de Thalabert but I was exhilarated to be able to taste a 1997 Hermitage La Chapelle. It was luscious and silky in the mouth with ripe blackberry aromas and a hint of spice, great texture and a long finish, definitely a night for me to remember!

One of my missions here was to uncover the great mystery that surrounds Paul Jaboulet's Hermitage La Chapelle. And on day two, we were introduced to Sebastien Baillon, the vineyard manager who took us on a short historical trip the vineyards. The name of Hermitage La Chapelle is linked to the little chapel of Saint-Christophe overlooking the terraced vineyards along the Rhône. Maison Paul Jaboulet Aîné has been the sole owner since 1919. We were taken to the hilltop of this little chapel which had an excellent overview of the landscape and terrain of the great Rhône. The diversity of terroirs on these lands gives the wine an identity of its own, thanks to the blending of grapes from different plots. one hundred percent Syrah, these vines are aged between 40 to 60 years old, with goblet pruning on stakes, very different from the vines in Bordeaux wineries.

In the later part of the afternoon, we were brought to the winery and met up with Frey. She spends nine hours travelling to and from Bordeaux. When I saw her, it was as though I had not left Bordeaux. I was also introduced to Jacques Desvernois who assisted Frey with the winemaking. There I had another short apprenticeship and worked together with some of the interns. For the first time, I did "stirring of the lees". I was also taught to do the "pump-over" which involves spraying the free run must into the top of the vat and over the grape berries where it forms a cap. This was done to circulate fermenting juice of the red wine from the bottom of the tank over the skin cap that forms during fermentation to ensure optimal extraction and prevent bacterial spoilage. It was six in the evening, dinner after a hard day's work. This was to be my last night in Lyon. It seemed that the days had flown by so quickly. My hosts had been so hospitable and they did not let me go home empty-handed. My gifts were a bottle of 2004 Château La Lagune and a cookbook from the cuisine of Bordeaux and a 2005 Paul Jaboulet Aîné Domaine De Roure from Frey. The experience has given me a deeper understanding of making and appreciating fine wines, and also brought me new friends and taught me a lot about the process of winemaking. Above all, it was one of the best gifts that I could have received! SS



The author (pictured left) joins the sorting table, where grapes that don't meet the exacting standards of the winery are removed.