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See page 8 for details.

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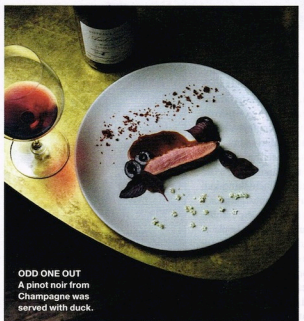
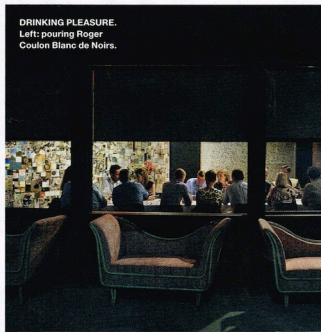
TEXT MIKE BENNIE

Connecting the Dots

Trait-d'Union Champagne came to Australia to explore how the land is as important to Indigenous Australian artists as it is to those who craft fine wine.



DRINKING PLEASURE.
Left: pouring Roger Coulon Blanc de Noirs.



ODD ONE OUT
A pinot noir from Champagne was served with duck.



ART TOUR
Members of Trait-d'Union with Franchesca Cubillo.



"I imagine the terrors of Champagne and I see many dots that create a fuller picture."

THE TRAIT-D'UNION is made up of six Champagne grower-producers who are all friends, pioneers and avid 'terrorists'. They represent Champagne Jacquesson, Champagne Larmandier-Bernier, Champagne Roger Coulon, Jérôme Prévost, Champagne Egly-Orliet and Champagne Jacques Selosse.

In February this year, the Trait-d'Union participated in a series of events in Australia. The theme was 'Dots and Bubbles' and explored the link between European and Indigenous Australian culture, reflected in both Champagne and Aboriginal art.

"This is not only about the connections between the people in the Trait-d'Union but the link this group has to Champagne," explained Bibendum wine importer proprietor and Trait-d'Union Australia facilitator Rob Walters. "The Champagne producers are connected to their land and they came to Australia to explore the link between the land and Indigenous Australian artworks."

The Trait-d'Union celebration began in Canberra on February 21 with a tasting event hosted by the National Gallery of Australia. A tour through the permanent collection of Aboriginal art was hosted by Franchesca Cubillo, the senior curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, alongside Matilda and Antoinette House, members of the local Aboriginal community.

Standing among the installation of the hollow log coffins from Central Arnhem Land, the significance of the land and how it is expressed in Indigenous art was explained to the Trait-d'Union Champagne producers.

"Terroir is a mosaic," explained cult Champagne producer, Anselme Selosse. "A mosaic is a patchy pattern, but it builds into a whole picture. I imagine the terrors of Champagne, the producers that form these terrors, and I also see dots that create a fuller picture."

"The message of the Trait-d'Union is one that joins earth, place and time. I see this strongly represented in the art of Aboriginal cultures in Australia," he said.

The scene was set for the Trait-d'Union's Australia tour, and it was time for dinner at Canberra's landmark Hotel Hotel in the hip NewActon precinct, which boasts some of the most unique and spectacular design work seen in any hotel in Australia.

Monster restaurant sits at the beating heart of Hotel Hotel, and at its helm is chef Sean McConnell (brother of chefs Andrew McConnell and Matt McConnell). The restaurant's newly finished private dining room hosted the Trait-d'Union's inaugural Australia dinner. Seated among the guests were all the Trait-d'Union members and some of this country's most notable wine importers.

Wine and beverage manager Michael Gray collaborated with McConnell on the menu. Gray works across the entire NewActon complex where his deft touch with local, organic, unusual and rare wines shines alongside McConnell's food vision. Trait-d'Union producers were invited to suggest matches for their Champagne, with most nominating seafood. Gray's mettle was tested to find further inspiration to bridge the broad spectrum of the six-course meal, but he managed with aplomb. The wine was spectacular and the matches all sublime, but the focus for me was the outstanding Champagnes. Here are my tasting notes for the six wines served that evening:

First up was the 2008 Champagne Larmandier-Bernier Terre de Vertus Blanc de Blancs. The zero dosage, blisteringly fresh, yet powerful, chardonnay comes from a single vineyard in the Côte de Blancs.

The pinot meunier-dominant 2012 Champagne Jérôme Prévost La Closerie Les Beguignes Extra Brut was sourced from Prévost's tiny domaine. This Champagne, with its inherent zing and hints of minerality, drank very well.

Eric Coulon spoke about his family estate named after his father Roger Coulon. The wines are generally lower in bubbles due to less pressure being captured during the two fermentations of the wine, and are

notably vinous in the glass. Sourced from the family vineyard in Virgny, 2006 Champagne Roger Coulon Blanc de Noirs Millésime was made in a warmer year and showed ample texture and gentle honey, finishing with savoury-biscuit saltiness and a kiss of cidery tang.

Following Coulon was Anselme Selosse's NV Champagne Jacques Selosse Les Carrelles Le Mesnil-sur-Oger Grand Cru Extra Brut, a remarkable wine as it is almost a complete departure from Champagne's classic, fresh, brisk styles. Instead it shows the kind of depth of flavour and personality expected from fine, mature Burgundy. It has honeyed, buttery, toast complexity to the fore and carries an almost relentless, energised flavour. It does not have many of the polished buffers found in more classically styled Champagne, but it is utterly delicious.

Next was a rarely seen red table wine from Champagne. The 2006 Egly-Orliet Coteaux Champenois Ambonnay Rouge Cuvée des Grands Côtés is crafted from pinot noir grapes, sees some time in oak barrel, and is made to the tune of approximately 2000 bottles a year. The tightly wound, peppery, spicy red showed beautifully well.

Finishing the meal was the crisp, slender, tightly wound and gently patrician sweet NV Champagne Jacquesson Cuvée No. 738 Grand Vin Extra Brut. "We make the connection again here between dots and bubbles," said Jacquesson vigneron and proprietor Jean-Hervé Chiquet. "We see the many dots, the mosaic of over 50 vineyards blended with their many parcels, and we make a complete picture with this wine."

This was a remarkable occasion bringing together the grand personalities of Champagne and their wines.