

James The Sommelier - Wines From Lesser Known Regions

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

Thailand

Good old Thailand. For some, a spiritual place with the unearthly power of showing people transcendence. A place with such magical beauty that it forces people from around the world to take stock of their lives under the peaceful way of Buddhist life. To others, the country that encapsulates exotic hedonism. A place that is fast becoming known as the party capital of the world with full-moon, half-moon, blue-moon, black-moon... in fact any type of moon party you can imagine decked with all the licentious trimmings; frilly, flowery, bobbly and shiney.

Not, then, the image of a country where the impression of Old World or New World wine would take stock. Its presence might resemble a stuttering King George VI attempting to deflate a Muay Thai wielding bar fight; asking for trouble and bound to get hurt.

But, how would a Thai wine fair? I'm talking about wine actually grown in Thailand including local and foreign grapes alike. Well, it would probably fair a damn sight better than a wet Englishman. Judging by those sinewy, expressionless people you see walking around a Muay Thai ring, whose only constant appearance implies 'if you don't do what I want... right now... I'm going to rip your head off,' everyone would be drinking it. Like its fighters, a Thai wine would be respected and resolutely supported.

Without the danger of sounding too suggestive in the matter, *it is happening*. Thailand is growing its own wines and investing a lot of time and research in the process. Like the country as a whole, it is being done differently but brilliantly, with those amazing people adding their own unique twist to the process. One example is the Siam Winery, located in Samut Sakorn in the Chao Praya Delta, Gulf of Thailand, which grow their wines on 'floating' vineyards (see picture). Siam Winery's Monsoon Valley uses the vintage corresponding to Lord Buddha, who was born 543 years before Christ. Novelties like this have made the Monsoon Valley very popular in Thailand but also raised interest from abroad. Certainly, quantity is not a problem and the whole world could import from Thailand because they have two yearly harvests! Awesome, you just have to love the Thais.



Picture: Floating vineyards, Siam

Ok, so the quality is definitely not the best. Siam Winery's Monsoon Valley is not a wine you would drink outside of Thailand. But the point is that they are making wine! Wine is also being turned into a quasi-European sub-culture as food pairing is now becoming fashionable. The key to pairing wine with Thai food is to identify what ingredient is most prominent; coconut milk, chilies, lemongrass, garlic, turmeric, or tamarind. White wines are considered the favourite, as wines with residual sugar, Reislings or Muscats, will tame chilies or spicy dishes. Wines with tropical flavours such as pineapple, mango, peaches, apricots, lemongrass go very well with the dishes with exotic flavours. Another safe bet is rose wine, as its versatile nature can complement a wide range of Thai dishes.

So, they are growing wine and talking about it. Who would have known...

Tips: Stay away from tannic and oaky wines when pairing with Thai food.