It is one of the world’s most important wine salons and the figures confirm it:
2,350 exhibitors from 42 countries, visitors from 150 nations, over 120 events.
And now the Hong Kong edition in May 2016

The curtain falls on Vinexpo, the Bordeaux wine fair, after five intense days. More than one hundred and twenty appointments including tasting sessions and conferences, besides the possibility to taste two thousand three hundred and fifty exhibitors from forty-two countries. The professionals who flocked to this important biennial event in Bordeaux came from more than one hundred and fifty countries in the world. The majority of foreign visitors (which account for thirty-six percent of the total) came from China, followed by the United States, Spain, Italy, England and Germany. This year, for the first time ever in the history of the French wine exhibition founded in 1981, a president of the Republic opened the event. “Vinexpo – stated François Hollande – is one of the world’s most important wine fairs and I am here because this is the consecration of a sector which gives work to more than five hundred thousand people in France and is worth more than ten billion euro of trade surplus”. Hollande was accompanied by the lord major of Bordeaux Alain Juppe who announced the imminent opening in 2016 of the cultural wine museum, the “Cité des Civilisations du Vin”. At Vinexpo the atmosphere is relaxed, an apparent calm, there are no crowds and frenzy typical of other fairs. All those who matter are here, “the planet of wine – states Christophe Chateau, director for external relations of the Conseil Interprofessionnel du Vin de Bordeaux (CIVB), in unison with its president Bernard Farges. - meets here, this is the place to be. We have taken part in all eighteen editions and have seen steady growth”. “I have gathered many opinions from the exhibitors - confides Herve Grandage, president of the Bordeaux and Bordeaux Supérieur appellation - and they are all very content: there are less people present but there is more business. The majority has assured me that it is the best Vinexpo it has ever taken part in”. The fact that for the first year the tramway reaches the exhibition site, connecting the city centre in less than twenty minutes, has improved the traffic flow, avoiding long traffic jams both inbound and outbound. For Guillaume Deglise, CEO of Vinexpo, “ours is more than a wine fair, it is a unique event. France, the world’s biggest wine producer in 2014, occupied 63% of the net exhibition space to promote the products of its seventeen production regions. Historic exhibitors, Italy (second in the number of exhibitors after France) and Spain, with France, account for 50% of world production. The near future will be the organisation of Vinexpo in Hong Kong, in May 2016, which will be followed, in November, by Vinexpo Tokyo, where we will make our return after two years. In 2017, the Bordeaux edition will last four days and not five.

Beside the entrance to Vinexpo. This year, for the first time, the event was opened by a President of the Republic: “It is one of the most important wine salons in the world”, said François Hollande. In 2016, apart from the Hong Kong edition in May, there will also be one in Tokyo in November, and the 2017 edition in Bordeaux will last four days instead of five.
The morning gets off to a start with the Pomerol tasting session for the 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010 and 2009 vintages (the last two considerably superior, overall). Few appellation enjoy the high level of prestige of Pomerol, on the right bank of the Garonne. The area around Pomerol was first used for vine growing in the first century B.C., but its wines, now exclusively reds, did not achieve international success until the 1960s. The iron-rich clay soils of Pomerol welcome their king, the Merlot grape (which is cultivated with yields which are among the lowest of Bordeaux). At the tasting sessions, from among some of the fifty producers present, we appreciated Château Cestan 2010, intense, full-bodied with a long life, a stunner; Château Rognet 2011, full-flavoured and weighty; Château Brane-Skeel 2011, well-rounded and mouth-filling; Château Guinon 2013, still too young, but promising in its classic aristocratic style.

Change of scenery for the next appointment, with the Georgian wines. Comfortably seated in one of the rooms fitted out for the event, the Master of Wine Lisa Granik introduces the five-wine tasting session. Georgia is one of the places where the vine is domesticated, perhaps the oldest, the history dates to eight thousand years ago. This is witnessed by the presence of fifty-five producers, all members of the Grands Crus Classés of 1855, dedicated to the international press, in Château Margaux. A memorable event, welcomed in grand style by the hostess Corinne Mentzelopoulos and by the president of the Board of Grand Cru Classé, Philippe Casteja (thanks also to the diligent Sylvain Beuret, press relations officer of C.G.C.C.).

Monday 15 June, rain and calm

We start our day with the Burgundy region and imposing tasting session arranged by the winey Albert Bichot, with twelve wines, two are Grand Cru and six are Premier Cru. It seems four independent wineries, each with its own cellar, in strategic points of Burgundy: Château Long-Dè-
Consequently, at each desk, on one side you taste the wine of the American company and, on the other, that of the company outside the USA. In the evening, in the centre of Bordeaux, in Palais de la Bourse, we start with the interview with Christophe Chateau, director for external relations of the Interprofessional Committee of Bordeaux Wines and with the president of CIVB Bernard Farges. They confirm the healthy status of the amount sold, with 720 million bottles, on 113,000 hectares, for a value of 3.74 billion euro. 58% of the volumes is sold in France, export, which accounts for 42%, is divided between Europe (45%), Asia (33%) and USA (11%). Following figures and discussions, a glass of Champagne would go down a treat, so we move on to meet Hubert de Billy, director of Pol Roger for a chat and a good (well, actually more than one) flute of Champagne. But the time has come to take off for the next appointment: a master class on Port, Douro and cheese.

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Port is produced exclusively with grapes from the Douro region in Portugal, one of the wine regions with the most breathtaking landscape, crossed by the Douro River, famous for the production of Port wine. The care taken with the vineyards over the centuries has allowed the survival of hundreds of autochthonous varieties, some of which go back thousands of years. Traditionally, Port is the result of an assembly of grapes from different vineyards, vinified using different techniques, and from different years, but recently the “Quinta única” method is also used or, rather, with grapes originating from one single wine estate. In recent decades the wineries have begun to vinify and market many non-fortified wines, Douro, whites, pinks or reds. Among the wines and cheeses available for tasting, we preferred the Quinta do Infante Vintage 2005, powerful and concentrated, with sweet and harmonious tannins, paired with a stilton, a heavenly match. The pungent flavour of the blue cheese is softened by the hoppy-like wine, filing away at the edges of a mature season. At the same time the suppleness of the semi-hard cheese harmonizes with the sweetness of the wine without any contrast, in a reciprocal exchange of alternating sensations.

The next appointment is with the tasting session in the room set up with five vintages (1997, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2013) by Almaviva (Cabinet Sauvignon in a higher percentage, depending on the vintages between 61 and 74%, Carmener and Cabernet Franc), a Chilean company of Puerto Ario created in 1997 and in a joint venture between Concha y Toro and Baron Philippe de Rothschild. Almaviva (name inspired by Count Almaviva, a hero in Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro), owns its vineyard, eighty-five hectares, a little less than half is uncertified organic, in the highest area of the Maipo Valley, in Puente Alto (the best terrain for Cabernet Sauvignon in Chile). The vineyard are an average of twenty-five years old.

Here above, Clos des Baies, a French red from the Saint-Émilion district made by Philippe Balland, cellar master at Château Ausone, here, moments during the tasting of Albert Bichot, a French winery, eighty-five hectares, a little less than half is certified organic, in the highest area of the Maipo Valley, in Puente Alto (the best terrain for Cabernet Sauvignon in Chile). The vineyards are an average of twenty-five years old.

Here above, from left, winemaker Stéphane Derenoncourt during a moment of the ‘La Grappe en bouteilles’ evening he organized at the Palais de la Bourse in the centre of Bordeaux. Top of page, Mersault poured in the glasses during the impressive tasting laid on by the Albert Bichot winery, founded in 1823, featuring 32 wines, including two Grands Crus and six Premiers Crus.
ty-five years old with roots that go deep into the story and claye-sandy soils. The winery is present in eighty countries around the world, but Hong Kong is its first market. Where to next? We reach Olivier Humbrecht at his stand Domaine Zind Humbrecht to taste the wines and conduct an interview. Humbrecht, who is also Master of Wine, besides being a wine expert and bio-dynamic wine producer since 1997, has very clear ideas on how to work the vineyard, even going against the general trend (for example, he is against green pruning). Forty hectares in Alsace with five Grand Cru to produce unique wines, of rare expressive complexity and incredible purity.

Reluctantly, we have to bid Olivier farewell; time is short and we have to take part in the not to be missed tasting session of the Grand Cru d'Alsace, with ten different producers, with vintages from 2013 to 2008 (excluding 2012). Organised by the wine expert Thierry Fritsch of Conseil Inter-professionnel de Vin d’Alsace (CIV A), the meeting offers the opportunity to dwell on this territory of 30,000 hectares and 4,400 producers with a very special climate. The region is protected to the west by the Vosges Mountains, which ensure a less cold climate, safe from icy winds and rain. Compared to the other zones at the same latitude, the climate of the Alsace is less cold, with a considerable temperature range that allows the grapes to ripen slowly. Since 2011 the Alsace Grand Cru AOC wines can be produced exclusively in one of the 31 towns legally recognized by the disciplinary, which represent eight percent of the total surface and four percent of the total wine produced in Alsace.

In the Grand Cru at least ten different geological formations exist (in Alsace there are about 30) which create a mosaic of different soils. The Grand Cru Kientzler is prevalently volcanic, the Spiegel marly, the Kessler sandy-clay, the Sarre marly-limestone. Fritsch says that the Grands Crus should be divided into fruit (granite and shale solid) wines, which are aromatic, elegant, of more immediate drinkability, but less age-worthy and stone wines (from marl, clay, limestone soils), where the terroir can prevaricate on the vine, which are more powerful and buttery, and need more time to express themselves fully. At the end of the incredible tasting session it is already time to move on to the tasting session in Bordeaux on the wines of Pays d'Oc, organized by Terre de Vins. The setting is plain and colourful, but we make a move and try desperately to do some wine scouting, a feat which proves to be anything but easy. At the end, a couple of names: Elixir 2013 from Domaine Condamin Bertrand, fruit-rich and stylish, a “glou glou” wine and Cuvée Lombarde 2013 from Domaine Aigues Belles, fresh and dynamic, fruit-rich, lingers on the palate.
The prestigious Cuvée of the Maison was created in 2004 to pay homage to Sir Winston Churchill ("a bottle of Champagne is too much for one and too little for two"), following his preferences for robustness, ripeness, structure. Produced only in the best vintages, the first in 1975 and the thirteenth in 2004, the Cuvée remains at ten years in the cellar at a depth of more than thirty meters. Mostly Pinot Noir (eighty percent) which ensures body and fullness, with the addition of twenty percent Chardonnay, which confers elegance and finesse. It displays dynamic effervescence in the glass, with notes of citrus fruits, of butter, of toasted bread, of raisin, of candied fruit. Complexity resolved, semi-sparkling but also of ripe fruit pulp, harmonious and inebriating dreams. Opulence and sophistication to produce excellent depth on the palate which exceeds reality to become mythical (www.polroger.com).

The ten best wines of Vinexpo

96 POLO ROGER CHATEAU WINSTON CHURCHILL 2004

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92 ZENO HUMBERT GRAND CRU CHATEAU DE TROYES 2013 RIESLING GRAND CRU

From a vineyard of five hectares, the most southerly of all the Alsace, situated on a historic cru which has been mentioned since the 13th century. Dramatically steep (on average 70%), and steeply exposed, it possesses a soil composed of volcanic rocks and sedimentary soil, in which the over forty-five-year-old vines are deeply rooted. Rocky scents, of flint, iodine, white pepper. Intense depth, all-embracing salinity. Impressive, dynamic volume. The acidity which preserves its acidity. Power and freshness, sugar rich but wisely balanced with lightness and finesse. Crystalline and pure, it enjoys a good long finish without ever being cloying (www.zindhumbert.fr).

92 DOMAINE SCHLUMBERGER KITTEL 2010 RIESLING GRAND CRU

The history of the Schlumberger family in the world of wine began in 1810 and is now in its 7th generation. Half of their vineyards are dedicated to Grand Cru (Sauvignon, Kesterly, Spiegel), and they are the largest owners of Riesling growing areas of the Alsace. The C. G. Kitterle to the north of Guebwiller is extremely sloping and is worked with horses on narrow terraces. The site is unique, with three different exposures, on sandy soil with substratum of volcanic rocks and pink sandstone. The territory can be read in the glass: rocky scents, flint, granting, exclusion of flowers, peat. Deep character, close-knit texture: intense, nervous and taut in its verticality, it progresses lively into absolute harmony. Long finish, it closes on notes of toasted hazelnut, seductive palate (www.domains-schlumberger.fr).
90 **Albert Bichot Domaine Long-Depaquit**

**Moutonne Chablis Grand Cru 2012 Monopole**

Moutonne is a parcel of 2.35 hectares, sheltered in a natural amphitheatre in the heart of the thousand year history of the vineyard in Chablis. The vineyard of Albert Bichot Domaine Long-Depaquit, with south-south east exposure, reaches elevated slopes in the central part. Between Vaudésir and Preuses, this Grand Cru of a single owner (“monopole”) is rooted in clay-limestone soils with the presence of fossils (Kimmeridgian).

The wine has rich bouquet, white peach, apricot citrus fruits, white flowers, iodine. The mineral depth reaches marine notes. Dynamic and layered, this Moutonne Chablis Grand Cru 2012 offers momentum and concentration, grape and substance. Its tannin texture is dense and rich; compact and generous, a wine of great texture but still young which needs a little time to come together completely (www.delas.com).

90 **Les Frères**

**Les Bessards 2012**

One hundred and eighty years of history, with a significant repositioning of the qualitative image thanks to the work of Fabrice Rosset (president) and Jacques Grange (wine expert). Large investments to renew the cellar, acquisition of vineyards, a process which is still ongoing. Thirty hectares of ownership in the appellation Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage and St.-Joseph, in the northern area of the Rhône Valley. The Les Bessards vineyard, of eight hectares divided between Drôme, Tain-l’Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage and Larnage, is on sandy, shale and pebbly ground. One hundred percent Syrah, fruit of a parcel selection of old vineyards, it is produced only in the best years. Austere and concentrated nose: hints of aromatic herbs, cinchona, damson, graphite and spices. On the palate the tannin texture is dense and rich; compact and generous, a wine of great texture but still young which needs a little time to come together completely (www.bourgogne-bichot.com).

90 **Clos des Baies**

**Saint-Émilion 2010**

Philippe Baillaguardet is head cellar man for the Vauthier family, of Château Ausone, one of the legends of Saint-Émilion. After years spent making wine for others, he decided to start producing wine for himself. His vineyard of half a hectare on clay-limestone ground is thirty years old. He works it using organic principles, but without certification. A wine of details and shades, where the transparency is more important than the concentration, grace more than power. The pulp-rich fruit, the finesse of the tannin texture, the vitality of the internal dynamics, the sapid vibrations, the natural juiciness of the mouth feel are all clearly exhibited. On the palate it transmits an authentic recollection of the fruit, a gustative purity of rare beauty. One of those wines to drink with joy and light-heartedness, to drink alone or with others (tel. +33.0688671668).

90 **Baron Philippe de Rothschild - Concha y Toro**

**Almaviva 2005**

Of the Chilean joint venture (with its soils, vineyards and climate) and France (with its traditions, its wine knowledge interpreted by Michel Rolland) we have already spoken about in the introductory piece. This is the vintage we preferred from among those offered at the tasting session, more expressive and complex also because it was less marked by wood. Seventy-four percent, twenty-one percent Carmenère, five percent Cabernet Franc. Rich aroma, black fruit, chocolate, tobacco, liquorice, coffee. The first impact is powerful, mouth filling. Depth and concentration, it develops dense, mature and silky tannins. Soft and caressing sensations, with a strong personality. Surprising harmony, but with a well-balanced alcoholic volume of fourteen and a half, which succeeds in giving an exquisitely elegant mouth feel (www.almavivawinery.com).