

From the Vineyards of Château d'Yquem....

By Wayne Rudson

TORONTO, February 4, 2002- In his only Toronto stop, Count Alexandre de Lur Saluces hosted a tasting of his extremely rare and costly Chateau d'Yquem and Chateau de Fargues at The University Club of Toronto. Both wines come from the Sauternes, a white – wine growing region 40 miles south of Bordeaux, France. This area, along with neighbouring Barsac, produces sweet, rich and exotic white wines.

The success of a particular vintage of these wines depends almost entirely on weather, especially during the harvest period, which is usually misty, mild and humid. Foggy damp mornings are often followed by sunny, dry afternoons, encouraging the growth of botrytis or “noble rot”, a desirable mold that devours the skin of the grape causing it to die and become dehydrated. The grape becomes shriveled and up to 50% of the sugar content is consumed by the rot. Only grapes attacked by the noble rot are selected for harvest, resulting in yields that are only about ¼ of the volume of the juice prior to the attack of the rot. At Yquem, yields are so low that only 1 glass of wine per vine is produced. The result is an aromatic, sweet nectar in a super concentrated form.

Yquem itself is located in the heart of the Sauternes region. From 1785 until 1997, the estate was in the hands of Count Alexandre de Lur Saluces and his family. The estate itself has 259 acres in production. The average age of vines is 27 years and the blend is approximately 80% semillon and 20% sauvignon. Annual production is approximately 100,000 bottles. The wine is aged for 3 ½ years in new oak before bottling.



The Club's Wine Committee chaired by Tim Hughes was pleased to host Count Alexandre de Lur Saluces from Yquem.

L to R: Sean Morley, Tim Hughes, Neil Guthrie, Bryan Graham, Count Alexandre de Lur Saluces, Wayne Rudson and Darren Littlejohn

The Count explains that: “An exceptional geographic situation gives Chateau d'Yquem its' own unique microclimate within that of the Sauternais.”

The vineyard forms a single block, covering a knoll overlooked by the Chateau and its' out buildings. The soils are a geological mosaic, composed of gravels, clays and sands in varying proportions from one parcel to the next. It is exactly this variety of soils on the Yquem estate that is essential in obtaining the complexity of the wine.

According to Robert M. Parker Jr., the renowned American wine critic and writer, Chateau d'Yquem, “...*towers (both literally and figuratively) above the other estates here, producing a splendidly rich, distinctive, unique wine. In my opinion, it is Bordeaux's single greatest wine.*”

botrytis than the colossal 1983, but less power and alcohol.” The 1988 was also superb (99 out of 100). Parker states: “*A more backward styled Yquem, built along the lines of the extraordinary 1975.*” But perhaps the highlight of the vintages was the 1996, which was recently released and is currently available at the University Club. The 1996 was referred to as “fabulous” by David Lawrason in his May issue of *Wine Access Magazine*.

The Count also shared wines of his sister property, Chateau de Fargues from the years 1996, 1995, and 1990, 3 excellent years. This chateau has also been owned by the Lur Saluces family for approximately 500 years. The vineyard covers about 15 hectares and is also made to a very high standard.

At the University Club tasting, the Count shared 3 vintages of his famous Chateau d'Yquem: 1986, 1988, 1996, all superb vintages for the chateau. Parker rated the 1986 a stunning 98 out of 100: “*...another fascinating effort. With greater evidence of*

Following the tasting, the Count was treated to Chef Patrick's exotic menu of oyster martini cocktails, butternut squash soup and roast guinea fowl, all accompanied by Chateau d'Yquem. The Count feels strongly that Chateau d'Yquem, historically considered an after dinner sipper, can be matched beautifully with food, and not just the traditional foie gras. He was not wrong. The wines paired beautifully with Chef Patrick's excellent meal, served in the beautiful library of the University Club.

This tasting was referred to by Timothy Hughes, chair of the University Club's Wine Circle, as a coup because the Count made a special trip to Toronto to be at the Club for the tasting. The event was a quick sellout and not likely to be repeated in the near future. The University Club is fortunate to have some 1996 Chateau d'Yquem in its own wine cellar. A wine that will age graciously for decades to come, it may be enjoyed both in the dining room and, as always, after a delicious dinner in the lounge, surrounded by the beautiful art of the University Club of Toronto. □



Wine Chairman, Tim Hughes, sips the nectar of the Gods, as the Count examines the bouquet of his product

Scenes from Wine Circle Events this past Spring

