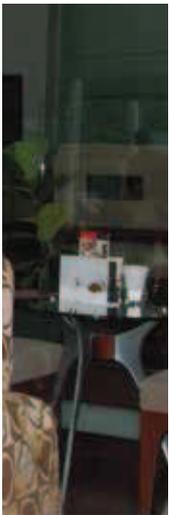


Where Lava Flows

JEN SHEK VOON TAKES A VOLCANO-SIDE TREK WITH LETIZIA PATANÈ OF PASSOPISCIARO.



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So what of the 2004 Dom Pérignon vintage? Chaperon said that he shares Geoffroy's comments that the "2004 Dom Pérignon vintage is both all-embracing and intriguing. It never fully reveals itself; it reveals and hides at the same time". I inquired about working with his marketing team, which has done such fantastic night lighting effects at the cloister of the Abbey of Hautvillers. He told me that when you work with equally creative people, the resulting tension enables you to try and be creative in coming out with a common vocabulary in communicating the qualities of the Dom Pérignon champagnes – and they each have their own vocabulary. Chaperon said, "Behind the words are ideas, and if you manage to put them to music in the right way, you can realize the goal you have imagined and desired." I posed a question to Chaperon with regard to the media hype given by his marketing team for choosing Istanbul as the location for the launch of the 2002 Dom Pérignon Rosé vintage because it is at the crossroad of Europe and Asia, and hinted during our interview that the next launch should be here in Singapore at the heart of Asia. Ah, but then we do not yet have the legacy with Dom Pérignon Rosé, like in 1971, when the Shah of Iran ordered several bottles of the inaugural 1959 vintage for the 2,500 year celebration of the Persian Empire. JSV

When I was planning a trip to Catania to visit Andrea Franchetti's vineyards of Passopisciaro on the slopes of Mount Etna, I wrote to him, and his personal assistant Barbara Santilli put me in touch with Letizia Patanè (pictured), the winery's international guest relations officer. Patanè said that they would welcome my visit. When Hilton Singapore's sommelier Stéphanie Rigourd informed me that Patanè would be conducting a wine class on Sicilian wines on 13 May 2013, I signed up to meet her before my trip. This was a useful introduction. One gets to the winery by driving up the hilly and winding road that leads from the village of Passopisciaro (which means 'the way of the fisherman' in the local Sicilian dialect, although it has also been translated as 'after the path in which the lava flows'). As you reach the winery, you will see several white-coloured statues of guardian angels in the vineyards looking at Mount Etna with their right arms raised, presumably to ask the good Lord to halt the path of the lava if ever an eruption were to occur. I met up with Patanè again for a visit to the vineyards and tasting room of the winery on 19 June 2013, and I gathered some more exhilarating insights after she took me on a driving tour of the various vineyards. The vines (which included the local Nerello Mascalese and other grape varieties) were developed by Andrea Franchetti following his retirement after years of travelling worldwide. His travels included a stint in New York, and a journey from Rome to Val D'Orcia, and then Sicily; a move which may have been motivated by his Sicilian wife. The tour took us to five vineyards; two lower level ones, just below Passopisciaro – Chiappemacine and Porcaria (where Nerello Mascalese is grown) – and three mid-level ones, north of Passopisciaro – Montedolce (Chardonnay), Guardiola (Chardonnay, Cesanese D' Affile, and Petit Verdot), and Sciaranouva (Nerello Mascalese). A sixth vineyard, Rampante (Nerello Mascalese), is the highest vineyard on Mount Etna. I have noted the characteristics of each of the vineyards, as narrated to me by Patanè. Chiappemacine – a smaller domain at 550 meters where the lava soil lays on the last outreach and the weathered, thinner top lava layer shares the vines' roots with the limestone bed below. Porcaria – an old one hectare domain at 650 meters where, as you walk on the soil, the frail lava sheet splinters under your feet. Guardiola – this contrada (a name given to the different sections of Mount Etna), an old domain between 800 meters and 1,000 meters up, has been lovingly restored with vines that were almost lost to Etna's 1947 eruption. Sciaranouva – the second highest vineyard at 850 meters elevation has relatively new lava that has turned into thick gravel. Rampante – this vineyard has the sandy characteristics that the lava has acquired, from which the grapes produced are much sought after. The tour was followed by a tasting, which included all the single vineyard Contrada wines. The 2010 Franchetti, made out of 50 percent Cesanese and 50 percent Petit Verdot grapes growing at one thousand meters on the north side on Mount Etna, most impressed me with its fulsome finish, brimming with ripe red fruit flavour. JSV