

FEATURE by Apple Mandy

# The man who speaks with vegetables

## Three-time Michelin star winner Alain Passard explains why abandoning meat for a greener world made his name

In most local restaurants, the menu tends to highlight meat and fish. Think of Wagyu beef or sea bass, these dishes are pleasing to the palates if cooked properly. Vegetables, on the other hand, are delicate rations that often seem an oversight and come in limited options. They are used as a side-dish or an accompaniment to the mains, and often they produce monotonous flavors.

Not so, says chef Alain Passard, the French owner of the three-star Michelin restaurant L'Arpege in Paris, which serves organic vegetables across his menu in exponentially endless creations. In fact, in September 2001, he courageously removed red meat from his menu and turned his efforts purely to vegetables. A year later, he opened his first biodynamic garden, which is now five acres of land run by 10 full-time gardeners.

Indeed, Passard's exceptional gastronomic delights which marry with the finest culinary techniques have earned him his third Michelin star in 11 years.

As striking as this "green" approach is, Passard is proud of his vegetable knowledge, probably because he knows it distinguishes him among other Michelin-star chefs. Luckily for us, in last month's Wine & Gourmet Asia held at Macau, we sampled his latest creation, beetroot in cacao and Banyuls vinegar sauce. Its sheer elegance and brilliant flavors were stunning. Afterwards, we had a little chat:

**So Alain, what were your expectations on Macau's dining scene?**

I am a complete virgin towards Macau so I had no expectations whatsoever. On the contrary, I was coming here with feelings of interest, intrigue and passion.

**If given the chance to incorporate your style into Macanese cuisine, what would it be?**

It would be bringing the process of vegetable gastronomy into the fine dining scene. There should be an ingenious balance be-

tween my concept and the local people's taste.

**Interesting. But what did you discover about your own style of cooking after removing red meat from your menu?**

Well, I discovered things that had been uncharted before. In a sense, nobody had concentrated or worked purely on vegetables in the past. In fact, there were no limits to what could be done. I discovered a world of flavors that people haven't thought of, such as combining leeks and apples, or onions and pears.

**But when meat was removed from your menu, did your diners not feel their choices had been narrowed down?**

No. Meat and fish are not seasonal products. For example, you buy beef and cook it in repeated flavors. Vegetables, on the other hand, come seasonal so I can surprise my guests a lot more than just serving meat and fish.

**What was your inspiration for the recipes at this year's W&G Asia gala dinner?**

Unfortunately, because of time constraints, I didn't have time to go to the market to hand-select the products. So we have not created dishes for the event. On the contrary, we prefer to work on the classics of my restaurant so as to offer quality to the guests. All the ingredients used on the night were from Japan and France.

**Do you think great Chinese chefs will emerge in the future?**

It's already happened! Chinese cuisine and Chinese chefs have an extremely strong presence in the culinary world. The Chinese have mastered the art of cooking a long time ago, including the art of fire and the art of seasoning. I have a great respect for them. Chinese cuisine is one of the great cuisines of the world.

**Let's be frank: do you have any plans to move into China with a new restaurant?**

Well (*laughs*), there are projects being planned in Shanghai!

**Speaking of Shanghai, do you think local tastes are ready for the likes of Laris and Jean Georges, or is it just the appreciation of being seen in such a fine restaurant?**



I know little about Chinese people, but I think they are ready for such cuisine because they are curious on seeking new experiences. The French and Chinese are similar in this matter because they are both thirsty for discovery. In my region, people thirst for Chinese culture so they are making efforts to come to China. At the same time, I feel the Chinese are eager to know more about gourmet food so they go to these high-level restaurants to experience a gastronomic treat.

**How would you describe your cooking?**

It is very difficult to talk about one's whole view of art.

The best person to answer that question would be the diner who experiences what I do. When you are passionate, you don't think about what others think of you. You are focusing on your own abilities. The fact that I work solely on my vegetables and grow them in my garden is what makes me different from others. ■

*Special thanks to Chris Salans, owner of The Mozaic in Bali, for his efforts with this interview.*

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**ASC FINE WINE**

**Torbreck Impression**  
As the sun sets over 360° Bar, Restaurant & Lounge, ASC fine wines presented Torbreck from Barossa Valley in Australia to a highly versatile audience. Mr. David Powell, owner and winemaker of this legendary winery founded in 1994, shared his passion for wine at this unique venue located on the top floor of Shangri-La Hotel, Shenzhen on 14 November 2007. The stunning backdrop of the Shenzhen skyline and Hong Kong Border viewed from 360° Bar, Restaurant & Lounge made the selection of Asian & Western Tapas, created by their expatriate Chef de Cuisine Kelvin Yeap, match the wines perfectly, excel in taste and created endless talking points. Rex Lam, 360° Manager, also recommends Torbreck wines with their recently upgraded a la carte menu, which focuses on Imported Prime Steaks, known as The Perfect Cut. Starting at RMB 88 these meat cuts correspond to the variety of Torbreck wines, whilst aiming to suit Asian as well as Western taste buds. Privately owned and operated, Torbreck follows the philosophy, direction and passionate beliefs of Founder Winemaker, Mr. David Powell. Torbreck wines are both expressions of the Barossa's oldest and finest vines, and the Rhone oriented philosophy that has captivated him.

**Torbreck Run Rig**  
Named after the system whereby Highland Clan use to distribute land to their clansmen over a disperse series of holding, this flagship wine from Torbreck emphasis not on any one farm but a commune element as a whole. Shiraz from old dry grown vineyards is blended with viognier, completing the strength and complexity of these individual parcels of fruits, while giving the resulting wine a further dimension. This wine has been given a high score of 99 points for 3 consecutive years by Robert Parker.

**Torbreck Woodcutter's Shiraz**  
Woodcutter Shiraz was named as a remembrance of the time David Powell spent as a lumberjack in the Torbreck forest in the Scottish Highland. Consistently being praise for being succulent and rich, it has a complexity and richness that is rarely found in this price range.

**Torbreck The Bothie**  
On a highland trail the place to stop and rest when weary is know as the Bothie. A sweet wine at Torbreck was always going to be something different. Made from Muscat Blanc, this sweeter style wine exhibit lifted fruit aromatic characteristic of its origin. In late 2004 Robert Parker awarded Torbreck 99/100+ for an unprecedented three wines, and scores of 90 or above for a further 5 wines. Dave Powell, unquestionably one of the world's finest wine producers, has an uncanny ability to discover old vine Barossa vineyards, and then secure long term contracts for their fruit. The Wine Advocate Issue #161 (October 2005) Robert Parker

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