A Tranquil Moment with Didier Depond

LUNCHING WITH THE PRESIDENT OF CHAMPAGNE HOUSES SALON AND DELAMOTTE

by Deborah Parker Wong

In a rare tête-à-tête, The SOMM Journal joined Didier Depond, President of the Champagne houses Salon and Delamotte, for an effervescent lunch featuring their current releases at San Francisco’s Piperade.

We began with the superbly chalky 2008 Delamotte, which hails from just six Grand Cru villages. The 100 percent Blanc de Blanc brims with texture and ripe golden-apple notes, and after observing the intensity of fruit on the mid-palate, I queried Depond on the risk climate change poses to the houses’ iconic style. He was quite circumspect in his response: “The culture of the vineyards in Champagne relies on balance, and we will balance them with this shift.” Despite more extreme weather events like the freak hailstorms earlier this year, warming temperatures in this marginal growing region may in fact work to the advantage of Champagne producers.

Addressing the elephant in the room, we discussed the hotly debated expansion of the Champagne AOP area by an additional 5 percent. “Historically, these approved areas were under vine,” Depond said. “And, despite what you’ve read, there is only minor dissent among the members of the CIVC [Le Comité Interprofessionnel du vin de Champagne]. I’m really very pleased.” The additional area gives the AOP some breathing room, as demand and supply previously ran neck and neck. Depond and I then tasted the 2007 Salon: The wine exudes liquid minerals at first taste, showing notes of fresh dough and caramelized salted butter—described by Depond as “caramel au beurre salé”—with a thread of delicate white peach. There’s a singular sensation in the mouth that leaves lemon and lime zest clinging to the lips, lengthening an innervated finish. “The wine was decanted and held at temperature,” said Depond, who advocates for letting Salon catch its breath for up to two hours before service. Caught off guard, I questioned his decision to forgo most of the bubbles, but he persisted and pointed out that I described the wine as “innervated” despite it being almost tranquil in the glass. “It was a very high compliment indeed when [Domaine de la Romanée-Conti co-director] Aubert de Villaine observed that we had made a very fine Burgundy,” he added.

Well-known as a man of his word, Depond says the 2008 Salon—a relatively small vintage produced only in magnum—will release in late 2019 after both of his highly allocated brands made their way to the fine-dining scene in Malaysia earlier this year. Available through Vineyard Brands.