Masochism squared

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If you managed to climb Everest, what would you do on the summit? Prize for most supportive Master of Wine must surely go to Jean Michel Valette MW who not only managed to get to the roof of the world on 30 May but actually carried up and unfurled an MW flag there - and persuade someone to take a picture of it, as witness this photographic record (look at that superalpine light!).

This was particularly appropriate as he managed to climb just one day after the precise 50th anniversary of the first Everest climb in 1953, which was also the year in which the Institute of Masters of Wine was established.

I often say doing the MW is a bit like climbing Everest - extremely painful but most rewarding when it's done. I can't imagine putting yourself through both of these trials - Jean-Michel Valette must have a very strong masochistic streak. To read more of the dangers and frustrations of this amazing adventure, see www.alpineascents.com

Only a distant relative of various Bordelais Valettes, he recently retired as CEO of Franciscan in the Napa Valley and is currently consulting to a wide range of international wine companies. Watch this space for his appointment to a new global player in the increasingly unprofitable playground that is the world's wine business. It all looked rather attractive when there was a shortage of good quality grapes...