Basset - world's best at last

16 Apr 2010 by Jancis Robinson

Yesterday's final of the 13th World's Best Sommelier competition in Santiago de Chile was won, at the sixth attempt, by Gérard Basset representing the UK.

French-born Basset is one of the wine world's marathon men. With great determination and an enormous amount of work, he has managed the rare feat of passing both Master Sommelier and Master of Wine exams. He was already the only person alive to have achieved both of these titles and a Wine MBA from Bordeaux University.

He has been competing in sommelier competitions at international level for years. This was the sixth time he had participated in the World's Best Sommelier competition, the fourth time he reached the final. And, at last, he has triumphed.

Very, very well done, Gérard! And thank you for choosing to drape the Union Jack rather than a Tricouleur around your winning shoulders. I first met him when he was working at Chewton Glen in Hampshire. He went on to found the Hotel du Vin chain with Robin Hutson. Now that Hotel du Vin has been sold to the owners of Malmaison, Basset has opened his own hotel, TerraVina in the New Forest, with his wife Nina. You can read Nick's review here. TerraVina's own sommelier, Laura Rhys, won UK Sommelier of the Year last year. I'm sure Gérard helped with the coaching...

This was the first time this competition had been held in Chile. The Chileans were determined that the week-long event should go ahaed, despite the recent earthquake. A total of 51 candidates from all over the world congregated in Santiago for the finals. A record number of women, four, were among the 12 who made it through to the last round.

In the end, Gérard triumphed over Paolo Basso of Switzerland, who took second place, and David Biraud of France, who came third. Other winners included Iulia Gosea, of Romania, who won the Acqua Panna & San Pellegrino water competition, and Véronique Rivest of Canada, who takes home the Peter Lehmann Shiraz award.

With characteristic humility, Basset said on winning, 'I've been preparing six hours a day for the last year and a half. But it's not just me. My wife and co-workers and my whole team has been helping me prepare for this!' He insisted that Nina and their young son join him on stage to collect the award, commenting, 'The real winner here today is my wife.'