MSs cluster in the New Forest

15 Nov 2010 by Jancis Robinson

Last weekend London was a magnet for wine professionals. Not only was there one of Decanter's most ambitious wine events, including a tasting of all five first growths with representatives from each Château, it was also the scene of the latest round of Master Sommelier exams, which take place only in the US and the UK. At least one candidate flew in from as far away as Australia.

Fourteen nail-biting candidates were examined and, to qualify for the initials, had to pass Practical, Theory and Tasting exams. Only three of them managed this rare feat and two of the three work at the same establishment, Gérard and Nina Basset's TerraVina in the New Forest, Hampshire, making it the only place in the world to be able to boast three in-house Master Sommeliers.

Laura Rhys, UK Sommelier of the Year in 2009 and pictured here, became only the second British woman ever to qualify as a Master Sommelier since the creation of the Court of Master Sommeliers back in 1969. Laurent Richet, also of TerraVina, managed, most unusually, to pass all three parts of the exam at the first attempt. He has therefore been awarded the Laurent Perrier Grand Siècle Cup. Laura and Laurent are obviously very talented, but they also had the great advantage of having been coached by the current World's Best Sommelier Gérard Basset.

All credit then to Nicolas Clerc of Pont de la Tour in London who also managed to qualify for the initials MS last weekend.