

# MYANMAR WINE IS MADE IN AYTHAYA, NEAR TAUNGGYI

by Bert Morsbach

"Aythaya Wine is no longer a novelty" that is how an article by the Myanmar Times started about "Wine in Myanmar" .

The author also mentioned that it took the pioneers 12 years between the import of the first vine plants and a situation which can now be summarized: " Myanmar is part of the family of wine-producing countries of the world".

Being one of those pioneers I am glad to have this opportunity to write about those 12 years. In hindsight I can say they were the most exciting and professionally rewarding years of my life. May others judge the quality of our wines, I dare to predict that Myanmar Wines will soon get high marks and international recognition. We know today that its White Sauvignon Blanc "Late Harvest" is an outstanding specialty of Myanmar's 1<sup>st</sup> Vineyard Co.Ltd. The secret is the altitude. The village Aythaya, near Taunggyi, is located 1,200 above sea level.

"New Zealand is the leader in terms of Sauvignon Blanc, outside Europe, and that has to do with climate, which is more important than the soil. For Sauvignon Blanc the best thing is a strong temperature difference: hot days and cold nights. That is what we also have here in Shan State, where the vineyard is located at about 1200 meters."

Before writing about the challenges during the early years, let me explain why wines from this region of the world are called "New Latitude Wines":

Wine is made from grapes which usually grow between 25 and 50 degrees North and South of the equator, in so-called temperate climates.

In these regions the Old Wine Countries from the Mediterranean Sea (North of 25 degrees) up to Germany (South of 50 degrees) launched the glorious history of wines in the world, summarized as "Old Wine Countries". That was more than 2,000 years ago. Later, starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, followed the "New Wine Countries", such as South Africa, Australia-New Zealand, the USA and Chile.

The "New Latitude" wine countries arrived on the scene only about 20 years ago although numerous attempts had been made before which all failed for the same reason: The rainy season of the Tropics with its deadly pressure from fungus diseases destroyed the plants. That had finally changed when

we learned how to control these micro-organisms. Myanmar has, after Thailand, the longest experience in this critical part of viticulture.

Another challenge is the shorter daily light exposure the vine plants are getting in the tropics. That leads to low yields and thus renders costs prohibitively high. In the "Old" and "New" wine countries daylight lasts until 9 o'clock in the evening. In our latitudes its dark after seven. In a nutshell: we had also to learn how to keep the grapes "enlightened".

Today, we are glad that we, the German pioneers had tried that experiment of growing wine in Myanmar. We also are proud to have been instrumental to create a second wine company in the country, the Red Mountain Co. also devoted to produce quality wines.

At Myanmar Vineyard we are confident that Myanmar Wines will become an integral part of the Myanmar Kitchen and Table. Or, as the Myanmar Times in the article wrote:

" Adding further lustre to Aythaya Wines is the Sunset Winegarden Restaurant, a swimming Pool at the company's picturesque vineyard, located in the Shan hills about 30 minutes drive from the stunning Inle Lake".

