

Wining and dining at

Aythaya

Vineyard in Shan State

By Vida Karabuva

Watching the sun turn the sky a multitude of pinks, violets and ambers as it set over the rolling vineyards of the Aythaya estate while I sipped a fine red produced out of this rich soil, I could not remember a moment when life seemed more perfect.

The glowing ember of the sun finally dropped behind the Shan hills an hour later but I missed it as I was too engrossed in conversation with my hosts over plates of delicious green bean salad and enchiladas prepared by the in-house chef. As the breeze whistled through the hills, rustling the vines, I polished off my meal with a smooth Italian espresso and a warming grappa produced at the winery, and retired to bed.

The winery, established in 1999 and Myanmar's first, is only a half-hour drive from Inle, making it a perfect half-day trip when you get tired of lake sights. You can also stop off on your way to the bustling city of Taunggyi from Heho or Inle – a further six miles via a picturesque mountain road from the winery – or stop on your way to or from Kakku to watch the sunset.

Either way, make sure you time your visit so you arrive ravenous, as the chef's fare is not to be missed. Poached from the Sedona Hotel in Mandalay, he cooks up fine European and Asian cuisine, as well as the traditional Shan dishes tour groups seem to demand when they come for a wine tasting. The outdoor Sunset Terrace and Restaurant at the winery can accommodate 80 people comfortably.

I intended to rise with the sun the next morning, but sleeping in was just too tempting. When I finally awoke, the sun was high in the sky. The bright light illuminated the gentle vineyard slopes, turning the vines a glowing emerald green.

I had met the co-owner of the Aythaya winery, Bert Morsbach from Germany, in December 2005 in Yangon. That night had been a powerful moment for Mr Morsbach – he was celebrating

the release of his vineyard's second run of wines.

After two discarded harvests, the winery was finally bearing fruit. The product showed remarkable maturity over the previous year's and was developing a steady following in the country. In fact, almost everyone present at the launch that night at the celebrated Yangon restaurant Le Planteur agreed that the wine might even rival that of the classic wine-growing regions of the world, by no means a small coup.

It was then that I became interested in visiting the winery and seeing for myself how this unique operation was run.

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*Discover the sense of history.
Experience world-class cuisine and legendary service.*

92, Strand Road, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: (95-1) 243 377 Fax: (95-1) 243 393
E-mail: info@thestrands.com.mm Website: www.ghmhotels.com

The red spends eight to 10 months in the tanks before it is ready to bottle, the white six to eight.

It has taken a long process – almost 10 years of blood, sweat and tears – to get to this point, with help along the way from European master viticulturalists Wolfgang Schafer and Peter Hohnen. Last year the winery produced a Shiraz and a Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as a Sauvignon Blanc, a Chenin Blanc, a “Blanc de Noir” from the first run of Muscat grapes, and a Rose, and of course the grappino (grappa). This year the Tempranillo and Dornfelder are eagerly awaited. A sweeter-tasting range of wines more

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suiting to local tastes are also produced at the winery and marketed under the Kanbowza brand name.

Mr Morsbach said that as the winery has gained prominence in the country, he has received many enquiries from people who want to follow suit, including many locals.

“This is very important to us. We see our role as know-how providers for wine-making proper and then for the export of wine. We therefore want to work with grape farmers to purchase

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