

Wine,

By Serena Holt

a Woman & a Song

A WINE GARDEN?

ON OUR WAY UP WE HAD BEEN SNOOZING MOST OF THE TIME SO WE HAD NO IDEA WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT. IT TURNED OUT THAT THE WINE GARDEN WAS WITHIN THE AYTHAYA WINEERY THAT WE'D BEEN HEARING ABOUT FOR SOME TIME. A WINE AFICIONADO FRIEND OF OURS. A BANKER IN TOKYO, HED PREVIOUSLY SENT US A NUMBER OF EMAILS RAVING ABOUT ITS WINES.

I think the idiom is 'wine, women and song' and yes, there was a lot of wine, excellent wine, but there was only one woman, (I should hope so, as it was our 17th anniversary that day) and as for song, I cannot sing a note but my husband Gary loves to recite poetry.

And that he did, all the time that we were on the road from Yangon to Bagan and then onto to the isolated, ancient Kekku Pagodas in the Shan State.

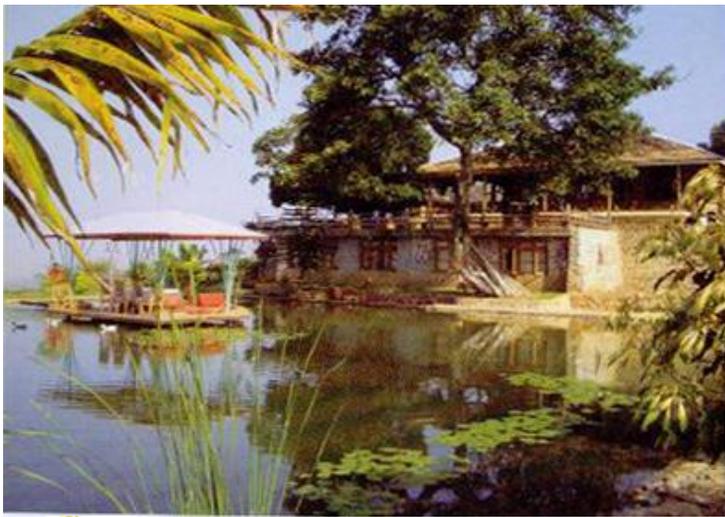
So then, where did the wine come from? For us, it came right out of the blue....the blue of the Shan hills, to be exact.

It was mid monsoon in Myanmar but the weather had been most pleasant: light rain and sunshine like a dazzling cloak of gold. The trip was our third to this beautiful country and the last one was five years ago when we had fallen in love with the people, so gentle and yet so lively, and without a moment's hesitation in making strangers feel at home.





airBagan
Oct. 28 Jan. 29



"My beloved, fill the cup that clears
Today of past regrets and future fears.."

And we did forget the past or the future and
found joy in the present.



It was near dusk as we made our way back from the ancient Kekku Pagodas towards Inle Lake and our driver asked if we wanted to stop at a wine garden.

Wine garden? On our way up we had been snoozing most of the time so we had no idea what he was talking about.

Turned out it was a vineyard of the Aythayar wines we've been hearing about for some time. A wine aficionado friend of ours, a banker in Tokyo, has sent a number of emails raving about their wines.

This trip we had left Yangon after only one busy day so we didn't have a chance

to taste the wines or learn of this lovely place until we were deposited right in front of it by our driver, bless his heart. The place looked welcoming: staff with shy smiles on their faces, a dining hall with an open terrace and a lovely pond with a small elegant pavilion on it.

We caught our breaths to see rows upon rows of vines under the gold of sunlight with blue hills in misty splendour behind them. It reminded us of the many wine-tasting holidays we'd so much enjoyed in Tuscany. If we'd known we could do it in Myanmar, we wouldn't have let five years elapse between visits.

"And wilderness is paradise enow," whispered Carl. When I turned to him with raised eyebrows he mumbled, "Omar Khayyam."

Ah! He was quoting the 11th century Persian poet who was a lover of wine, women (definitely plural in his case) and song.

From the staff we learnt that it was indeed a wilderness tamed into a vineyard. A large, bespectacled man ambled up to us, a beaming smile on his face. He introduced himself as Bert Morsbach, the managing director. Under Gary's probing Mr. Morsbach said his

first vintage was in 2004 years later he opened

His enterprise has been viticulturists from technical director, who handles the art of away at the moment growers in other parts of

He told us that the Myanmar Vineyard him and a group of friends, has a policy to from local farmers they dealing with since they as well as from their own

When I asked what wine recommend for us, he answered: "You *must* try Harvest from Sauvignon we are trying to reach benchmark for in the world of White they come from New that's the quality level we And, there's a very good will be getting there Both Gary and I said at "We're staying for Being in a more romantic declined Mr Moscbach's a wine tasting, and we the vineyard. The sun was looking like a huge ripe peach, and streaks of pink, mauve and gold were beginning to colour the sky and line the edges of a few clouds.



and that two this restaurant.

helped by master Germany and his another German wine making, was seeing local grape the country.

company, the 1st Estate founded by wine-loving use grapes bought have been began operations, harvests.

he could excitedly our 2007 Late Blanc grapes.... the new Sauvignon Blanc wines; nowadays Zealand, and want to reach. chance that we soon!" the same time, dinner." mood, we kind offer to have strolled towards

I thought of our wedding, held on a hilltop in Virginia just as the sun was setting. 17 years! "Here with a loaf of bread beneath the bough," Gary whispered into my ear as he draped his arm over my shoulders, "a flask of wine, a book of verse...and thou beside me singing in the wilderness ... and wilderness is paradise enow."

"Honey," I said to him, "we haven't had a sip of wine yet or any bread, and you know I can't sing."

"Spoilsport," he grinned at me as he drew me closer.

By the time we walked back to the pavilion on the pond, some stars were beginning to emerge with faint twinkles in the dusty purple sky. We had decided to dine there, away from others.... there were about three tables already occupied on the terrace.

The candle-lit table for two with a bowl of fresh roses, and on three sides of us the water reflecting pale stars, was a perfect, perfect setting to celebrate our anniversary.

The menu was not elaborate but excellent...it has the local dishes I liked and remembered from four years ago, and roast beef, Gary's most favourite food in the world. I had the long bean salad, lentil soup, Shan style steamed fish, and chicken curry. Gary ordered avocado cream with salmon (which he knew I would poach right off his plate) and roast beef with buttered rice. As we waited to be served we each had a glass of 2007 Blanc de Noirs, a lovely white. To go with my local fare I had a glass of 2007 Rosé and Gary had the 2007 Red. I loved the beautiful

colour and the aroma of roses in mine; it went really well with the steamed fish and the salmon with avocado of which Gary got one taste before I took it over. The vegetables were incredibly fresh and delicious.

"You *must* try a taste of this," Gary insisted, handing me his glass of red. It was fruity and velvety.

"Nice," I said,

"And ask them how to make this butter rice," he said, "I want it at home with my roast beef. No more mashed potatoes."

Our meal came to an end with a delicious platter of cheese. We thought at least THAT must come from Europe but no, it seemed the excellent brie and camembert among others were all made in the country by a Myanmar entrepreneur. What amazing discoveries we were making on this trip!

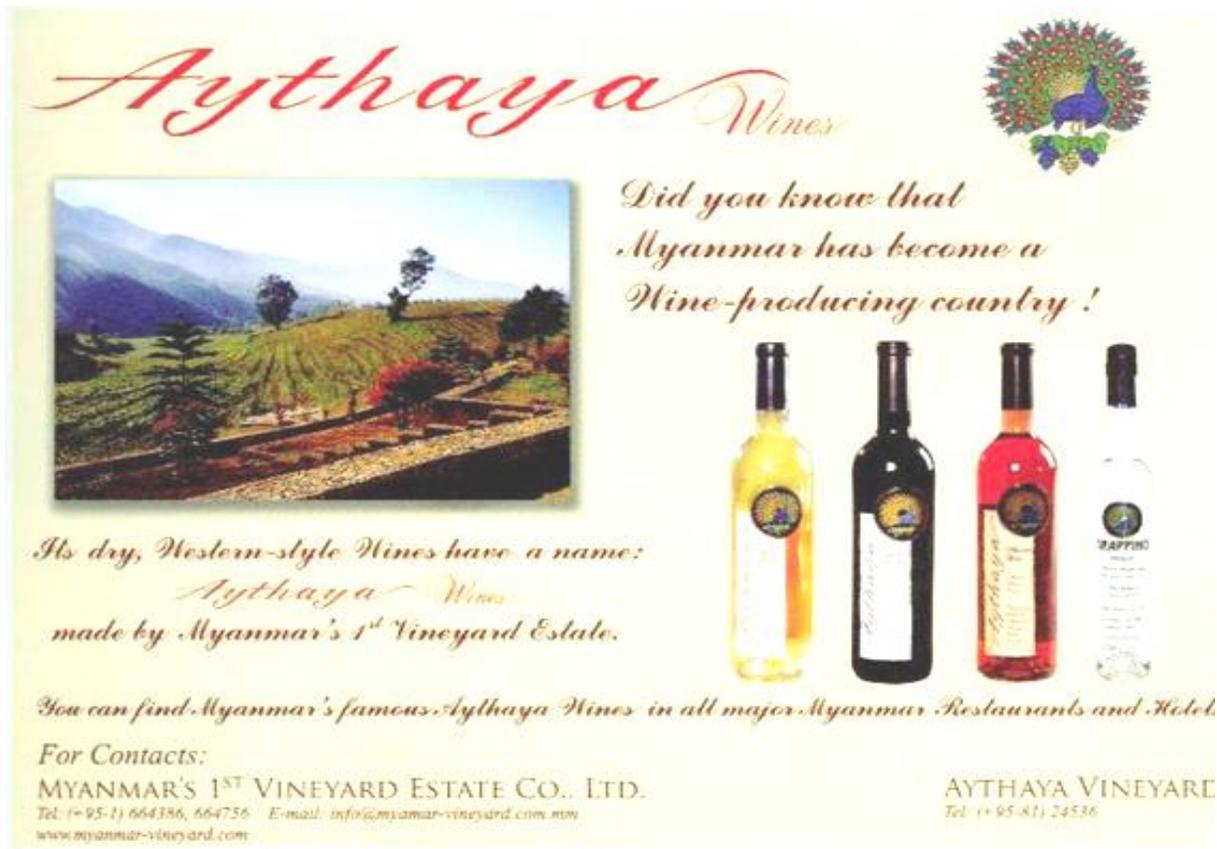
To end our meal we each tried a glass of the 2007 Sauvignon Blanc, to see if it really was as good as it was said to be. It was: rich with fruity aromas, full-bodied and perhaps we should have had it with our meal but, better late than never. After a few sips, Gary told me he was going to get some bottles to take back home.

As we leaned towards each other to toast our wonderful years together, Gary recited softly:

"My beloved, fill the cup that clears

Today of past regrets and future fears..'

And we did forget the past or the future and found joy in the present.



Aythaya Wines

Did you know that
Myanmar has become a
Wine-producing country!

*Its dry, Western-style Wines have a name:
Aythaya Wines
made by Myanmar's 1st Vineyard Estate.*

You can find Myanmar's famous Aythaya Wines in all major Myanmar Restaurants and Hotel.

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