BOTTLES ON A WALL
CHÂTEAU MARGAUX IN CHINA

A little under three years ago, Gil Lempert-Schwarz had an idea while standing on the Great Wall of China. It was met with “semi-hysterical laughter,” but it nevertheless came to fruition—in some style.
Paul Pontallier, the general manager of Château Margaux, was feeling a bit tired. He had just walked the 860 steps up to the 35th northern tower on the Great Wall of China, one of the highest points accessible for visitors. I was standing next to him, as was John Kapon of Acker Merrall & Condit. Aurelien Valance, who also works at Château Margaux, and his lovely wife Beatrice. There was a slight breeze on this cerulean blue-sky day, and it felt like a slight breeze on this cerulean blue-sky day, and it felt like Château margaux right here on the Great Wall." It was May said, "one day, I would love to create a special dinner with Château margaux; and his lovely wife beatrice. there was Acker merrall & Condit; Aurelien V alance, who also works visitors. I was standing next to him, as was John Kapon of Château margaux, was feeling a bit tired. he had just walked from barrel. tasting into semi-hysterical laughter. It did sound completely insane. A three-Michelin-star chef cooking dinner for a Bordeaux first growth would already be a big deal—but on top of the Great Wall of China? After numerous trips to Beijing to make sure that all the proverbial ducks would all be in a row, I came back to Château Margaux to give a final presentation of how it would all work. And because this was to be an alfresco dinner on top of the Great Wall. I also made a couple of extra trips to the famous temple on Hollywood Road in Hong Kong to burn some incense for the Chinese god of all weather. The Kempinski Hotel Group manages a resort—Commune by the Great Wall—which is a mere 20 minutes from the Juyongguan fortress, as well as a private 5-mile (8k) stretch of the wall, which is all the more dramatic for being unrestored. I made Commune our base for the weekend, organizing a welcome dinner there for guests on the Friday night, with wines from "The Imperial Cellar". no Bordeaux was served but, rather, stellar selections from Burgundy, the Rhône, and Italy. I was at the Juyongguan fortress by 11am the next day and was starting to worry about little things. I had agreed to have an additional 2.5-mile (4k) stretch of the wall lit up, to have the entire fortress bathed in light, and to have several golden dragons projected on to the hillsides, as well as to have big red flags and entry points set up. None of that was yet visible. But my partners and logistics people from Beijing reassured me that all would be well, even if they could not finish their preparations until the last public visitors had left at 5pm. They also mentioned that they had laid out 22,000 lanterns along the wall the day before.

Clockwise from top left: a glamorous attendee at The Gateway of Mankind; Paul Pontallier and Gil Lempert-Schwarz at the beginning of a special evening; a diner peruses the mouth-watering menu; Corinne Mentzelopoulos and John Kapon dot the eyes of dancing dragons; Guy Savoy raises a well-earned glass
As I arrived at the Juyongguan Fortress in the evening with the other guests, I sighed in relief, for now in the waning hour of daylight, the magnificent cut-dragon gate entry pointed its fierce eyes at the onlookers. The dragons, flags, and giant red drums for the opening ceremony. The tables were set in splendid fashion, and the string quartet was setting up in the fortress temple.

Corinne had been among the first to arrive. A quick glass of refreshing Krug 1988 Oud de Mesnil calmed the nerves as she checked on Aurelien V alance and Paul’s energy levels. Corinne and John dotted the eyes of the dragon and feeding the nerves as she checked on Aurelien V alance and Paul’s energy levels.

As we sat savoring the wine, many of the guests seemed dazed or dazzled, and some of the Chinese people present even cried softly, overcome by the historic significance of the occasion. And then, as if by magic, at midnight, all the lights along the wall and on the temple fortress went out, despite the leather, truffles, and stems, but the paler was a marvel, so complex and so fascinating, finishing only slightly shorter than the ’61. It was a fabulously pleasurable pairing.

The finale was Pichon Margaux—a stewed Rose pear in a rich but not sweet Château Margaux sauce. The redolent style of the sauce gave the dish a savory character, which was perfect with the 1953 from magnum. I nibbled on the pear but was more focused on the wine. Its nose was all elegance and finesse, with a balance of fruit acidity, tannins, and wood rarely found anywhere else this vintage. One of the last vintages at the château cellars, it was very special, lingering for minutes and reminding us why Margaux has remained on top for so long.

I don’t think any other chef in the world could have done what Guy Savoy pulled off that night. Guy savoy was such a special dinner for other reasons. And then, as if by magic, at midnight, all the lights along the wall and on the temple fortress went out, despite the leather, truffles, and stems, but the paler was a marvel, so complex and so fascinating, finishing only slightly shorter than the ’61. It was a fabulously pleasurable pairing.

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