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Steven Spurrier Sparkles in Napa with Bride

May 17: Exactly 40 years after the 'Judgement of Paris' orchestrated by him, when Napa Valley wines came ahead of their Bordeaux counterparts, the then wine merchant and now an influential and respected expert Steven Spurrier has launched his Bride Valley English Sparkling Wine in the US through the exclusive importers Boisset Collection which organised a friendly 'Judgment at Napa' at Raymond Vineyards on Sunday May 15 at the Launch



The event commemorated the history and legacy of the 'Judgement of Paris' and celebrated Steven's contribution to the historical event on May 24, 1976 that unexpectedly brought Napa Valley wines onto the world stage and influenced how one thinks of Napa Valley wines today. Primarily, it was used to launch the Bride Valley English Sparkling Blanc de Blancs 2013 in the U.S. Spurrier flew in from London for the event and was alongside the flamboyant Raymond owner Jean-Charles Boisset for the occasion.

The event was strictly on an invitation basis and members of the Press, trade and key opinion makers within Napa Valley were invited. To make it interesting, a blind tasting was organised for the bubbly against Boisset's JCB No. 9 Russian River Valley Brut Blanc de Blancs 2009. Apparently outnumbered by the

California tasters, Steven saw the voters lean on the Napa Valley bubbly once again as it was voted the bubbly of choice.

This was the first time that anyone could taste and purchase the Bride Valley English Sparkling Blanc de Blancs 2013 in the U.S. and special commemorative gift sets were available to those who attended. Each set included a bottle each of the blind tasting wines along with a copy of George M. Taber's book, *Judgment of Paris*, and sold for \$150 each including the option for personalization.

Additionally, guests were treated to a flight of rosés following the blind tasting which included Spurrier's Bride Valley Rosé Bella 2013 of which only six bottles made it into the country, because of its limited availability and the quantity produced in 2013. Boisset's JCB No. 13 2009 Crémant de Bourgogne Rosé and JCB 2009 No. 34 California Brut Rosé were also served.

Speaking of the collaboration between Boisset Collection and Bride Valley, Boisset says, "Our dear friend Steven and his family had an endearing vision of producing sparkling wine on par with the world's best in the chalky soils of England. At the time of his original vision as early as 2007, he recognized England's potential for sparkling wine before the world had fully realized its potential."



Says Steven, "After 50 years in wine business and inspired by the unique chalky soils on my wife Arabella's sheep farm in Dorset, we decided to join the English sparkling wine revolution. In 2008, Bella and I went to select the finest Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier root stocks from Burgundy's famous Pépinières Guillaume vine nursery. In 2011, our very first harvest was picked, selling out on release in 2014. Now we have over 24 acres under cultivation, making three delicious wines, on the chalky south facing slopes above the beautiful Dorset village of Litton Cheney."



Steven who is known to be modest and a thorough gentleman, also shares his thoughts on the competition and the comparison of the two bubbly with delWine, 'Jean-Charles Boisset's JCB Blanc de Blancs 2009 beat the Bride Valley Blanc de Blancs 2013 by 53 votes to 27 and I would have voted for his wine! The BV showed very well, but the vines were only 4 years old and the acidity a little high for the Californian palate. It wasn't really a competition, more 'hands across the ocean.'" (This should also send message to Indian wine producers who feel that within 3-4 years of planting their vines start giving superlative quality fruit).

While running Les Caves de la Madeleine and L'Academie du Vin in Paris in the 1980s, Steven had reportedly chalky soil samples from Arabella's 80 hectare estate tested and the results came out very similar to Champagne. This is not surprising because the village of Kimmeridge is just 40 Kms as the crow flies from Bride Valley. After two decades and three visits from Boisset's sparkling wine expert Georges Legrand, vines were planted on the best sites in the bowl of the amphitheatre-like estate. Three hectares were planted in 2009, rising to a total of 10 hA (24 Acres) in 2013 when planting was completed, according to Liberty Wines.

Boisset Collection is naturally the exclusive importer of Bride Valley English Sparkling wines and will officially launch the brand to the U.S. market in January 2017. The Bride Valley Blanc de Blancs 2013 is selling for \$75 and is currently available in very limited supply at the Raymond Vineyards tasting room.

Spurrier's Bride Valley vineyard consists of 42,000 vines planted in over 24 acres, with 55% planted with Chardonnay, 25% Pinot Noir, and 20% Pinot Meunier- the three prime grapes in Champagne. The 2013 Blanc de Blancs sparkling wine was fermented in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks and underwent malolactic fermentation to give it roundness and balance; a crystal clear Blanc de Blancs that shows the chalky soil and freshness from a light vintage and very young vines. The palate is fruity with hints of brioche, a lean citrus edge on the palate with fine mousse and racy acidity.

Bride Valley Wines has already appointed distributors in Germany, Tokyo and Netherlands. You can pick up a bottle of the fine English bubbly from Selfridges or any of the distributors in London or other parts of UK. It's doubtful that there will be a market for such expensive English sparkling wines when even champagnes at similar prices are not able to make much headway in India.

But Steven has been Chairman of Wine Society of India for several years, right from inception till it downed its shutters in February this year. He has been to India many times and due to his frequent writings in Decanter and the collaboration on various projects, he has a fan following. People respect him a lot and there might be a niche market of collectors and even people recognising his contribution to the promotion of Indian wine industry with which he has been involved for several years. Only recently, he has collaborated with Piero Masi of Fratelli Wines to bring out two blends- a white and a red. It would be worth celebrating his contribution with the Bride Valley English Sparkling Blanc de Blancs 2013- seemingly the second vintage release.

For more information, visit www.bridevalleyvineyard.com

