



Perfect Pairings

The InterContinental Hong Kong and Dom Pérignon join together to offer guests a sensual dining experience unlike anything else.

By Brenda Silva

Twelve diners eagerly come together, impeccably dressed for an event that has the feeling of an opening night. Tonight, the combination of bold foods paired with one of the finest champagnes ever produced will be the main attraction. It's a private dinner called the Seven Sensualities, and like the name implies, the seven-course tasting is designed to tempt taste buds. Through seven sequences, *Dom Pérignon Vintage 2000* is explored with its elegant, sensual duality.

As originally created by Richard Geoffroy, Chef de Cave for Dom Pérignon, the seven sensualities are labeled as Pure, Tactile, Glowing, Carnal, Fusional, Ethereal, and Complex. *Dom Pérignon Vintage 2000* invites tasters to experience a vintage that has been called, "fresh yet mature, sparkling and serene, precise and caressing, and austere and seductive" by many who have already drunk the fruit of its nectar. The products and ingredients in each of the food pairings are intended to evoke a different response through each course from the wine. In fact, as no two bottles of champagne are alike, neither is the reaction elicited to the various combinations. The experience is exclusive and divine.

InterContinental Hong Kong is the sole Hong Kong partner with Dom Pérignon for its Seven Sensualities private tasting. The hotel's Executive Chef Laurent Andre and Events Business Development Manager Stella Wong

traveled to the Dom Pérignon Chateau to work with Geoffroy to learn first hand how to prepare and present the Seven Sensualities. InterContinental Hong Kong was selected by Dom Pérignon because of its reputation for fine food and its leading chefs.

The private dining experience can be arranged for up to twelve people in any contemporary setting that offers a kitchen and sufficient counter space to prepare the dishes. It is not meant to be held in a restaurant or function space, and is better served in an atmosphere that is a suitable companion such as a private home, art gallery, yacht, or other intimate space. The dinner is typically served on special china designed by Dom Pérignon, and is used only for this event. During the course of the evening, a wine specialist personally introduces each champagne and dish, and explains each pairing to guests. The rest of the tasting experience is entirely up to the individual, because, as Geoffroy insists, "If you give enough of yourself to the wine, it will give back."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS TO LUXURIOUS FINISHES

Dom Pérignon was born Pierre Pérignon in 1640, the son of a clerk to a local judge at Saint-Menehould, a small town east of the Champagne region. At the age of 19, he entered the Benedictine Order at the Abbey of Saint-Vannes at Verdun. By age 28, he was appointed

cellar master at the Abbey of Hautvillers, near the town of Épernay. Although Dom Pérignon is often mistakenly credited with the invention of champagne, evidence shows sparkling wine was first intentionally produced by an English scientist and physician 30 years prior to the work of Dom Pérignon.

Throughout his life, Dom Pérignon persevered to improve the wines of Champagne, and earned a reputation as a remarkable viticulteur (grape grower). The Abbey of Hautvillers flourished under his stewardship, and as a sign of honor and respect, Dom Pérignon was buried in the section of the Abbey traditionally reserved only for Abbots.

Many years after his death in 1715, the Moët et Chandon house adopted Dom Pérignon's name for their Prestige Cuvée of champagne. The first vintage of Dom Pérignon was 1921, and was only released for sale in 1936, after the Great Depression. Vintage champagne is only made in the best years, with all grapes used to make the wine harvested in the same year.

Approximately five million bottles are produced in each vintage of Dom Pérignon, which is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and/or Pinot Meunier grapes. Aficionados of Dom Pérignon champagne are well aware of its ever-changing character, from one vintage to the next, and often from the bottle to the glass and tongue. As such, it continues to garner sensory appeal on many levels and

current vintages suggest it will remain this way for years to come.

SEVEN SENSUALITIES PRELUDE

As a prelude to the Seven Sensualities tasting, guests sip a cup of Pu Er tea, called Ba Da Chun. The tea has been selected by Madame Tseng, whose Maison des Trois Thés in Paris is of the world's most highly respected tea conservatories. Madame Tseng is the first Grand Tea Master to settle in Europe. It is light and clear, and is chosen to prepare guests' palates for the paired items to follow.

SENSUALITY ONE: PURE THREE FRUIT VARIATIONS

In honor of the grapes that are the very source of *Dom Pérignon Vintage 2000*, the Seven Sensualities ritual begins with the purity of fruit.

First Pairing: Ice Plant and Chilled Hyblon Olive Oil.
The Tasting: Crunchy, green ice plant leaves are served on wafer-thin slices of daikon, a mild Japanese radish.

The Experience: The pure, unhampered taste of *DP Vintage 2000* is heightened through the freshness of the ice plant, with its slightly acidic leaves, combined with the oily texture and fruitiness of the olive oil.

Second Pairing: Rambutan and Green Mango Soup.
The Tasting: With a Thai inspiration, the soup combines

smoky aromas with the sharp acidity of green mango and the woody flavor of the pandanus leaf.

The Experience: The red rambutan, a relative of the lychee, contrasts the soup's acidity by offering a sweet, subtly flavored flesh that serves as a complementary liaison between the soup and *DP Vintage 2000*.

Third Pairing: Scallop Carpaccio
The Tasting: The slightly briny flesh of the scallops are dressed in lime flavor of yuzu, bamboo salt, and the anise flavor of tarragon, and then drizzled with Sacha Inchi oil.

The Experience: The combination with *DP Vintage 2000* reinforces the sensuality of purity in taste, allowing the taster to segue unabashed into what the next sensuality offers.

SENSUALITY TWO: TACTILE

Firm, white flesh of cod is combined with the freshness of peach slices, which lifts the *DP Vintage 2000* for a heightened tactile experience that is both sweet and savory.

Pairing: Cod, Truffle Juice and Peach
The Tasting: The cooked meat of Portuguese bacalhau is accompanied to the table by an almost game-like truffle that has been warmed in the fish juice.

The Experience: Sea meets earth as the coarse yet velvety freshness of peach slices lifts the wine, which glides

through the mouth like a light, silky caress, revealing one of Dom Pérignon's timeless charms: tactile seduction.

SENSUALITY THREE: GLOWING

The first sequence illuminated the wine's precise austerity with a flash of white light, while this one exalts in the warmth of golden fruit. The lighting has changed; the grapes have absorbed the sun, and the wine gives back a hundred times over with exuberant generosity.

Pairing: Roasted Eggplant with Moroccan Honey and Spices

The Tasting: The eggplant and honey combine to release the aromas and textures of cooked figs, while spices such as harissa, salt, pepper, ginger, garlic and lemon provide a strong accent, which is ultimately abated by the sweetness of the honey.

The Experience: *DP Vintage 2000* adds just the right flavor to the pairing with a nod to the warmth of the golden grapes, ensuring both yin and yang are balanced.

SENSUALITY FOUR: CARNAL

One of Moroccan culture's most wonderful culinary traditions: a magnificent dish of Moroccan squab is made for a woman who has just had a baby to restore her strength and vitality after the birth.



Pairing: Moroccan Squab and Couscous

The Tasting: Tender squab breast meat pairs with the roundness of couscous, and a rich stuffing made from garlic, onions and smen, North African clarified butter). A caravan of spices of *ras en hanout* brings the dish to life including Sir Lankan cardamom, mace from Java, galangal from the Far East, pepper from Guinea, cinnamon from China, turmeric from India, truncheon from Sudan, ginger from Japan, rose buds from Damascus, fennel flowers, lavender and more. It is served with aged blue-green Chen Yin tea, harvested in 1992.

The Experience: The carnal pleasure of dining on such rich foods is complemented precisely with just the right amount of acidity from *DP Vintage 2000*, prodded by the *ras en hanout*.

SENSUALITY FIVE: FUSIONAL

Flavors, aromas, and textures of the fusional kind draw near each other, then move away, mingle, and separate for a kaleidoscope of pleasures.

Pairing: Caviar, Barley with Argon Oil and Saffron Ice Cream

The Tasting: The briny and saltiness of the caviar combine easily with the earthiness of barley that has been accented with the hints of almond and hazelnut from the Argon oil. Flavors continue to build as the smoky saffron ice cream is made demure by its temperature.

The Experience: Spicy and icy, raw and cooked, grainy and tender, briny and oily. *DP Vintage 2000* assumes its

place in this kaleidoscope of flavors as though it was there all along, a welcome supporter of all combinations both sweet and salty on the tongue.

SENSUALITY SIX: ETHEREAL

After the fusion comes tranquility with an airy union of a powerful tea and tender rice pudding. The sixth pairing serves to preview the taste buds for the final sensuality.

Pairing: Tea and Coconut-Ash Pudding

The Tasting: Pu Er Sheng Cha tea, harvested in 1990, with its woody, earthy aromas that call to mind whiffs of leather, mushrooms and peppery, tobacco leaves, harkens back to the beginning of the Seven Sensualities journey when diners sipped the young Pu Er tea to start the journey. The black, sticky-rice pudding with coconut ash, a delicacy served during the Thai New Year, is presented wrapped in a banana leaf.

The Experience: Facing the pairing of the tea and rice pudding, the wine enters with an airy vibration. Then a wonderful, intriguing space opens up for *DP Vintage 2000* to offer a maturity of flavor that may lead one to blush at the depth it offers.

SENSUALITY SEVEN: COMPLEX

The final pairing continues the flavors introduced by the prior sensuality, allowing a petit corona cigar to prolong the airy, woody, smoky evocations of the tea and coconut ash with intelligence and balance.

Pairing: El Rey del Mundo Petit Corona Cigar

The Tasting: The Petit Corona de El Rey del Mundo offers the wine its smooth, toasted harmony, slightly earthy vegetal roundness and moderate spices.

The Experience: The accord is immediate. The vintage opens out its vibrant, fresh, fruity amplitude, wreathed in a cloud of hazelnut aromas. Fruity and toasted flavors bounce back and forth. A fusion of smooth and fresh is born of this combination of smoky and winy impressions.

BEYOND THE SEVEN SENSUALITIES

The assemblage of each Dom Pérignon vintage is a creative act in the most inspired and daring sense of the term. The extra effort that goes into its making enables each vintage to express a unique character while affirming the timeless style of Dom Pérignon. All this is true for Dom Pérignon Vintage 2000. "Mysterious, yet present, enigmatic and luminous, austere and opulent, elegant and sensual, this vintage, which opens the 21st century, couldn't possibly be a better expression of Dom Pérignon's timeless style," says Geoffroy. The Seven Sensualities offers a ceremony of the senses with Dom Pérignon Vintage 2000 at the center of it all as the conductor. ■

To organise an exclusive Dom Pérignon Seven Sensualities dinner in Hong Kong, contact Stella Wong at the InterContinental Hong Kong, +852.2313.2201.