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Is terroir the most important focus for the production of quality sparkling wine?

Renowned international Champagne and sparkling wine expert Tom Stevenson will chair what promises to be a lively debate at this year's International Sparkling Wine Symposium on the importance of terroir in the production of quality sparkling wine. The debate will be the final session on Day One of the Symposium on Tuesday 3rd December 2013 at Denbies Wine Estate, Surrey, UK.

Speaking for the importance of terroir will be Pepe Raventós of Raventós I Blanc and Alexandre Penet of La Maison Penet Champagnes. Last year Raventós announced that his company was withdrawing from the Cava DO and filing for a new DO Conca del Riu Anoia "to create the Conca del Riu Anoia, the name of a small geographical area, to help us to better understand and convey our viticultural traditions, the strength of our land and the characteristics of our soils."

When asked why he was keen to be involved in this ISWS terroir debate, Raventós said, "I believe there is an opportunity for honest terroir driven sparkling wines resulting from a single estate, a specific climate, native grape varieties and rigorous, well-defined and respectful forms of viticulture. I believe in a NEW authentic sparkling wine category."

Alexandre Penet is also a great believer in terroir-driven Champagnes and sparkling wines. He comments: "We recently launched a unique, single-vineyard Champagne coming from a Grand cru plot planted to both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Because more and more discerning consumers are demanding comprehensive and transparent information, our labels mention detailed, technical information on the type of soil, the vinification method and the main milestone dates of the wine throughout its production process."

Speaking against the importance of terroir will be wine business consultant and MD of Litmus Wines, John Worontschak, and global drinks commentator, consultant and speaker Robert Joseph.

Worontschak explains: "Winemakers from around the world strive for the perfect balance of structure and acidity for harmonious base wines. The regular use of both oak and reserve wine to achieve this harmony, followed by lees ageing, clever liquoring and cork ageing, mean that terroir is relatively unimportant in sparkling wine production compared with other wine styles."

Debate chairman Tom Stevenson comments: "This is a complex and interesting topic and I look forward to hearing a diverse range of comments and views from delegates as well as our speakers. Bring it on, I say!"

The third biennial Symposium takes place on Tuesday 3rd and Wednesday 4th December at **Denbies Wine Estate** in the UK and is set to be the most dynamic and exciting forum yet. It is aimed at all those involved in the global business of sparkling wine, whether on the production, commercial, promotion or retail side of the industry.

Delegate tickets cost £345 + VAT for the two days, or £265 + VAT for one day. Tickets and further details on the program and speakers are available via the website www.sparklingwinesymposium.com.