

UK Sommelier of the Year 2009 Laura Rhys visits IWC “Sparkling Winemaker of the Year” Régis Camus

Britain’s Top Sommelier joins Head Winemaker of Champagnes Piper-Heidsieck & Charles Heidsieck as he narrows his blending decisions based on the 2009 harvest

UK Sommelier of the Year 2009 Laura Rhys, head sommelier at Gerard Basset’s Hotel Terravina in the New Forest, celebrated her triumph in grand style on 25th and 26th January in Reims, the capital of the Champagne region. As the winner of a first-class trip to Champagnes Piper-Heidsieck & Charles Heidsieck, the title sponsor of the UK’s most prestigious sommelier competition, Rhys was the personal guest of head winemaker Régis Camus.

Rhys was crowned UK Sommelier of the Year last 29th April at London’s Tate Modern after beating Yohann Jousselin from the Hotel du Vin Bistro in Winchester, and Christopher Delalonde of London’s two-Michelin-starred The Square. Her tasks included blind tasting, wine and food pairing recommendations and correcting errors on a wine list. She also mastered the daunting task of pouring a single magnum of Champagne Piper-Heidsieck Cuvée Brut into 16 glasses, ensuring that each glass was equal, no glass was revisited, nothing was spilt and the bottle ended up empty. Rhys had previously won the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs UK Young Sommelier of the Year Competition in 2008 before placing 2nd in that organisation’s International Young Sommelier of the Year Competition.

Camus is no stranger to winning competitions either. London’s International Wine Challenge has named him “Sparkling Winemaker of the Year” in 2004, 2007, 2008 and 2009. His wines are routinely given the highest honours by the most discriminating juries around. In 2009, the International Wine Challenge gave his Charles Heidsieck Blanc des Millénaires 1995 the award for “Sparkling Wine of the Year” while Decanter awarded his Piper-Heidsieck Rare 1999 their own “Sparkling Wine of the Year” trophy.

In addition to spectacular dinners at Arnaud Lallement’s l’Assiette Champenoise and Laurent Laplaige’s Le Millénaire and a visit of the fabled House’s Gallo-Roman chalk cellars, the highlight of the trip for Rhys was certainly the opportunity to taste a variety of still wines from the 2009 harvest along with selections from P&C Heidsieck’s immense collection of reserve wines with Camus. Each year, Camus has the incredible task of blending the wines of both Piper-Heidsieck and Charles Heidsieck based on the specific characteristics of each of his base wines and reserve wines.

“It was very interesting to place these wines into a context,” said Rhys. “Tasting the 2009 ‘vins clairs’ provided a rare chance to taste these ‘base wines’ before they are blended into the various cuvees of the House.” Asked his feelings on the 2009 harvest, Camus added “After a slightly difficult, rainy beginning, 2009 ended on a very sunny note, giving us base wines with a good deal of opulence. On average the wines had less acidity than some of the austere wines of 2008, giving us wines that showed a rather voluptuous character.”

The UK Sommelier of the Year competition is organised by the Academy of Food & Wine. The 2010 competition will be held on 28th April at The Westbury Mayfair Hotel in London. According to Rhys, “The UK Sommelier of the Year Competition is the perfect platform for sommeliers in Britain, allowing them to push themselves to improve both their knowledge and tasting skills while serving as an inspiration to the industry as a whole.”

Champagnes Piper-Heidsieck & Charles Heidsieck are distributed in the United Kingdom by First Drinks Brands Limited.

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Notes to editors:

The house of Piper-Heidsieck was founded in 1785 by Florens-Louis Heidsieck. Since its creation, Champagne Piper-Heidsieck has always been associated with the greats and the goods; from Marie Antoinette Queen of France to Marilyn Monroe, Champagne Piper-Heidsieck is now the third largest Champagne exporter. With its new British distributor, First Drinks Brands, the emphasis will be made on gaining new distribution channels in the on-Trade. Champagne Piper-Heidsieck has been part of the Rémy Cointreau group since 1988 and benefits from the expertise of the celebrated Régis Camus. London’s prestigious International Wine Challenge has awarded Régis Camus the Sparkling Winemaker of the Year Trophy in 2004, 2007 and 2008 which underlines our efforts to be among the best made Champagne.