

# Worthwhile wine-bars in Tokyo: 'Le Mont-St-Michel' by Ned Goodwin, MW

It is with great reluctance that I go wine-bar hopping in Tokyo. While there are some fabulous places such as **Shonzui** in Roppongi and **Nuits Blanches** in Shinbashi to mention a couple, many are tokenist set-ups selling a smattering of exceedingly dull and inexpensive wines that-despite the punctilious attention to storage in Japan that better bottles receive-are often left in warm alcoves as decorations. It was with exuberance and a grin therefore that I threw myself into the lists at two outstanding wine-bars in **Mejiro**.

The first is located out of the eponymous JR station's only exit and a left-turn away. It is Le Mont-St-Michel ([www.creperie-mont-st-michel.com](http://www.creperie-mont-st-michel.com)), about 30 meters down the street on the left-hand side. The first floor is a creperie while the second houses a slick little wine-bar, called **Le Terroir**, with yes, a holy grail of not the merely drinkable, but wines that make one giddy in the acknowledgment that good wine can be sold even in perpetually recessed Japan as long as there are staff with brio and passion; an owner with vision and good taste.

In fact, Le Mont-St-Michel is fueled by owner Yves Ringler's love of southern France although the list does not end there. Quality producers' Chignin, Cote de Brouilly and Chinons are poured by the glass to accompany charcuterie, while the leading light of the Loire, **Chateau du Hureau Saumur-Champigny**, is represented across various cuvees. It is the south though that sparks Yves' zeal and wines from the Languedoc and the Roussillon in particular.

Yves has decided to import a select swag of wines from these regions among which, is the particularly impressive **Mas Champart 'Causse du Bousquet' 2007**. This is a large-framed wine boasting the ripeness of the south and in particular, of the 2007 vintage. Aromas of fig, damson plum, pepper and briar are focused by a ferruginous energy from schistous terrain. You see, Saint Chinian is very much a tale of the right side and wrong side of the tracks. It is kind of like Chapel Hill North Carolina or any other American town really, except in this case, we are not talking about the difference between affluence and the ghetto, but the palpable juxtaposition between schist and clumsy old water-retaining clay! Champart's propitiously located vineyards - all on the hallowed schist - give the wine an energy that sashays and shimmies enough to negate the cloying warmth and sweet fruit that often mars wines from warm to hot regions. Moreover, there is a dollop of Mourvedre in the blend which provides focusing tannins and a moreish brush of tobacco flavour. Looooong! **93**

Another wine that Yves imports and sells at the bar is Chateau Mas Neuf's 'Compostelle' 2008, a white wine of distinguished refinement from Costieres de Nimes. The nose is akin to lemon curd and truffle with a cool herbal twist. It is very much natural yeast-driven. The palate is broad with reverberating notes of apple, pear, quince and stone fruits, yet not at all sudsy or too blowsy. The wine has been raised in third-use d'Yquem barrels apparently to give it some lift and tang from residual botrytis. Long and persistent and most importantly, very easy to drink. This is not something that I can often say about wines from these parts which is why they have rosé. **91**