

FRANCE (REBIRTH FROM THE ORIENT)

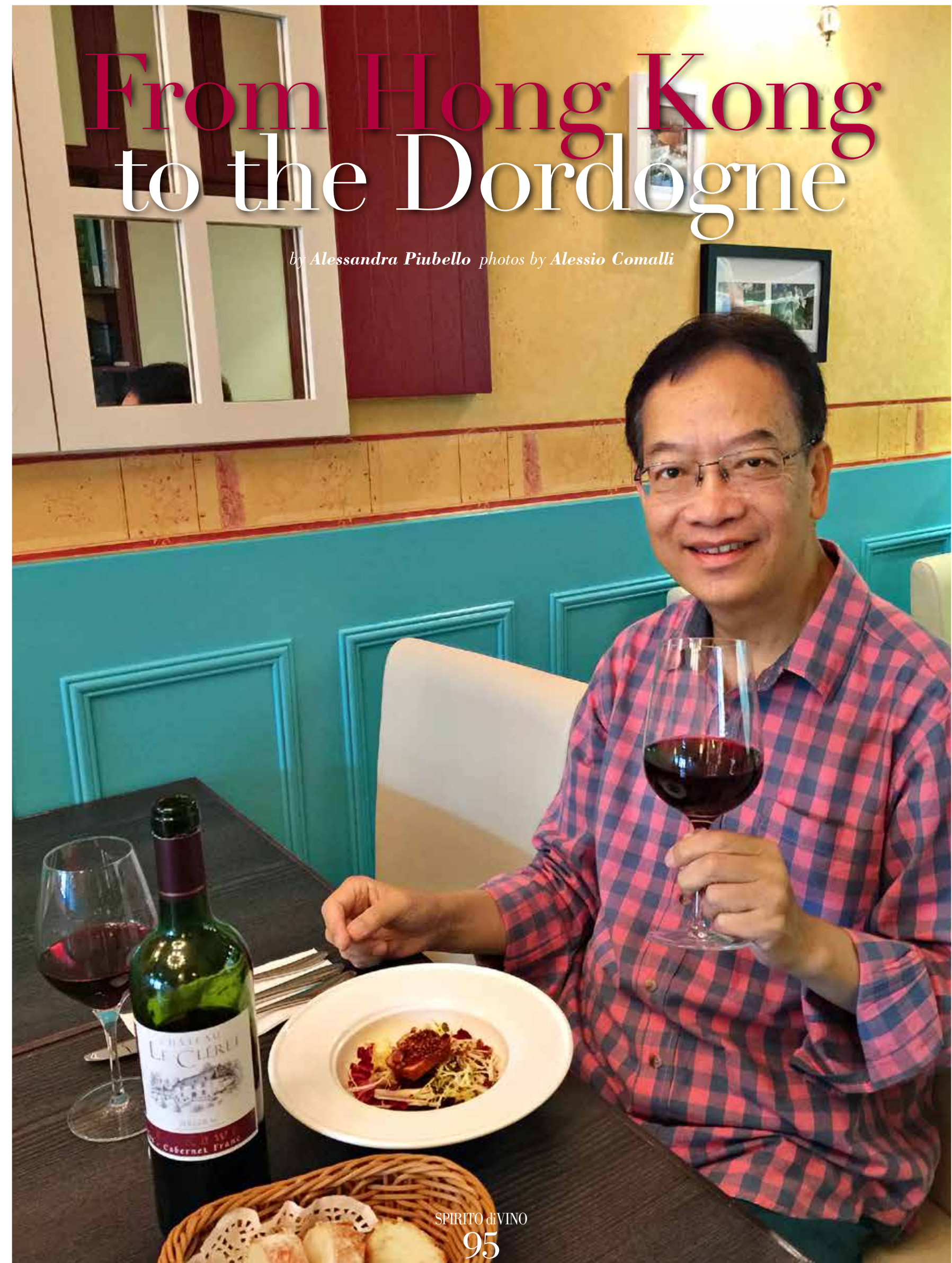
Owned by the French royal family for three centuries, Château Le Cleret is looking to the future, thanks to entrepreneur Simon Wong. Cuvée Kawo is the first step along the way



Above, wine from Château Le Cleret new course: find out which one on the next page. In 2012, it was purchased by Simon Wong, an entrepreneur from SAS SWK in Hong Kong. After 15 years spent importing wine into HK, he moved to France to create his own wine: "I invested in France, a historic land from the winemaking point of view, ideal for its culture and oenological tradition," he says.

From Hong Kong to the Dordogne

by Alessandra Piubello photos by Alessio Comalli



60% Merlot, the rest Cabernet Sauvignon, native yeasts,



Travelling the little white tree-lined road that brings you to Château Le Cléret is like reaching an indefinite space-time dimension. The place is cocooned in indescribable peace, surrounded by centuries-old grounds. Beyond lie the vineyards, three hectares planted with Merlot and Cabernet Franc. “The first plot was planted in 1957, and the second in 1987”, says Tim Richardson, who manages the cellar with oenologist Caroline Chaveton, and the vines. The complex dates back to the 17th century and was owned by the French royal family for 300 years. Over the centuries the estate was refurbished and remodelled several times. Then, in 2012, it was purchased by Simon Wong, an entrepreneur from SAS SWK in Hong Kong, who also renovated and rebuilt the complex. “I worked in the wine importation sector for 15 years”, explains Wong. “I imported from France, Spain, Italy, Chile and the United States. I travelled a great deal, visiting vineyards in various places all over the world. Three years ago I decided it was time to produce my own wine, so I invested in France, a historic land from the winemaking point of view, ideal for its culture



and vineyards going organic: the first fruit of the new management

and oenological tradition. When I laid eyes on Le Cléret, I was stunned by the beauty of the grounds and the house”. We are in Port Ste Foy, 20 kilometres from Bergerac, and 70 from Bordeaux. The estate is near the Dordogne River and in the vicinity of extensive woodlands, factors which, according to Tim Richardson, guarantee a perfect micro-climate. The soil is silty, calcareous clay, and deep.

The vineyards have been converting to organic since 2014: the company aims at sustainable development while respecting the environment. Biodiversity is a value that receives a lot of attention. Horses are used rather than tractors, to avoid compacting the soil. “I have worked here since 2002”, says Richardson. “The estate’s great renewal is a rebirth. There is still a lot to do, but we are headed in the right direction”. Almost ready to host wine buffs who love plunging into the peaceful countryside, not far from the Périgord region with its castles, or from Monbazillac, or cult centres of wine such as Saint-Émilion or even Bordeaux itself. “I would love to introduce my countrymen to these places”, continues Wong. “I would like to receive them at Château Le Cléret”. Tim fills our glasses with the first fruits of the new management, 2013 Cuvée Kawo (this is the Chinese version of Wong’s name, he explains to us): 60% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, only steel. Native yeasts, pumpover and gravity. The bouquet bears notes of red fruit, citron, and cassis. Fresh on the palate, it needs time for the best to emerge. Leaning decidedly more towards woody nuances (nine months in second-passage barriques), Cuvée Cornelia 2009 (Tim also had us taste wines from the previous management), has a hint of plum; it is a warm wine awaiting the harmony that is sure to come once evolution has played out its course. Cuvée Optima 2005 has notes of ripe fruit and spices; on the palate it is mellow (here Merlot makes up 80%) and has good extension. Wines that lie between the past and the future, then. A bright future for Le Cléret. Word of Mister Wong. 🍷



Above, right, Above, the edifice of Château Le Cléret, which dates from the 17th century and is characterized by the peace it bestows on the centuries-old grounds. Top of page, from left, the vineyards and Tim Richardson, in charge of the vines and the cellar with the oenologist Caroline Chaveton, at Château Le Cléret since 2002. Adjoining page, Cuvée Kawo, from Mr Wong’s Chinese name.