

## How to serve wine to a president

A surprise request led to Shanghai-based sommelier Jean-Marie Pratt hosting a wine tasting for the presidents of France and China in front of the world's media earlier this week.



A plan was set; president Emmanuel Macron and Chinese premier Xi Jinping would taste top French wines together at a Shanghai expo on 5 November as they sought to tighten trade relations between their nations - before enjoying a private dinner that evening.

But, French officials needed to find someone on the ground who could host the tasting.

'I'd known for about two weeks, but I didn't mention it to friends - I wasn't sure if it was really going to happen,' said sommelier Jean-Marie

Pratt, a partner at Liber Wines in China and who has lived in the country for seven years.

Did president Macron just call him up?

That's not a million miles away, according to Pratt, who has worked in Michelin-starred restaurants and is also a judge at the Decanter Asia Wine Awards. 'I was contacted by the French embassy [in Shanghai] and they said they needed a sommelier to host a wine tasting during Macron's visit.'

The embassy then added that the tasting would involve both Macron and Xi Jinping together, on the opening day of the International Import Expo in Shanghai. 'Paris and the French embassy chose the wines,' he said.

They were **Louis Latour's Corton Grancey Grand Cru 2010**, Gérard Bertrand's Château L'Hospitalet 2016 from La Clape appellation in Languedoc-Roussillon, plus Cheval Blanc 2006. Officials initially thought that the presidents might only stop by a few moments.

Perhaps the line-up changed their minds. 'They actually stayed for about three minutes,' said Pratt, who served all three wines.

The two leaders sampled the Burgundy wine first, followed by Bertrand's Languedoc wine and then the Bordeaux from Château Cheval Blanc.

'Macron was very engaging and very enthusiastic,' he said. 'Xi was very responsive and was also making some comments [via a translator].'

The Chinese premier was understood to have said that he enjoyed the wines and he also spoke about a 'quality drive' within China's domestic wine industry in recent years.

On the day, Pratt tasted through the wines an hour before the presidents arrived. But he was also instructed to taste the wine in-front of the two leaders, before they had a sip themselves.

'I've worked for Gordon Ramsay, so I know pressure,' he said. 'I just told myself in the morning that I'm going to do my job, like in a Michelin restaurant.' He credited his time working alongside the late Gérard Basset OBE MW MS for helping him to 'learn a lot of tips on how to act when you're in a stressful situation in a restaurant'.

For now, it's back to the day job. 'It was an extremely special experience. I've had so many messages from Chinese friends,' said Pratt.

'In your lifetime, you might meet the head of state of your own country, but for a European to meet the Chinese president is extremely rare.'