

# Meet the connoisseurs

The gentlemen behind Burgundy, a wine-and-dine concept that is unique to the entire region, happily share with *Time Out's* **Jade George** a fraction of the knowledge they have garnered over their years of passionate devotion to the grape.



Edmond Asseily and his brothers are fulltime fund-traders and Ziad Mouawad is a practicing medical doctor who recently moved back to Beirut from France. It was when he felt himself seriously challenged at the markets of Les Halles de Lyon that a mere leisure pursuit began to take a more serious turn.

Les Halles de Lyon is like a temple of French gastronomy; a syndicate of some of the finest merchants and producers in the world. When Mouawad found a stall going vacant at the market, he sought information about how to become part of it, only to be greeted with ridicule. That did not hamper his perseverance and before the world knew it, Mouawad's wine shop was up and running.

Mouawad didn't meet Asseily until he moved back to Beirut, naturally during a wine tasting session. 'I have a decent wine collection of my own, but it doesn't even compare to that of Edmond's,' Mouawad admits. 'He's got one of the best collections in the regions and possibly one of the finest Burgundy collections in the world.'

Asseily explains that there are mainly two types of wine collectors, the compulsive kind, addicted to piling up as many bottles of certain kinds of wine as possible and the ones that stick to gathering only certain bottles that are sometimes worth a fortune.

It is this type of collector that Asseily thinks of himself as. "My affair with wine started almost two decades ago. You find yourself saying things like 'I have to have it,'" says Asseily. 'If you have a true passion for something, your passion has to keep progressing. The love of wine is not any different. Your knowledge keeps expanding and the sky's the limit.'

Asseily would not disclose how much he has valued his collection at, but explains that the only way your expertise in wine develops is by tasting more and more fine wines. 'Your passion is not complete until you share it with others. Just as you cannot possibly enjoy a deserted island on your own, you cannot experience the optimal pleasure of a wine without sharing it. That's where Edmond and I come in.'

The partners became exclusive licensed importers of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, considered among the greatest wine producers in the world. They are known for their La Tâche Pinot Noir, which you'll certainly find at Burgundy, Asseily and Mouawad's new shop. 'Like everybody in the field, I started my journey with Bordeaux wines. But all roads lead to Burgundy. It is said that Bordeaux wine is like making love to your wife, while Pinot Noir is like making love to your mistress. The velvety texture of Burgundy gets you hooked and despite

what you may hear, it is the lightest and easiest to digest of wines. Now, after tasting, collecting, tasting some more, becoming an exclusive agent and sharing with loved ones, the next logical step was to educate people and share my passion. Luckily I found just the right guy to do this with. No one knows wine the way Ziad does.'

Mouawad is handling the operations of Burgundy and is aided by food expert Rania Abboud who has also just moved back to Beirut from the Big Apple. Burgundy aims to match the French region's finest wines with top-notch delicacies prepared by only Michelin-starred chefs. In addition to retailing and offering a wine tasting bar, Burgundy will accommodate for about 26 guests at once for an experience which combines gourmet food with wine, prepared by a duo of 2-Star Michelin chefs and four sous-chefs. The partners want to offer people the ability to savour wine the way they do and make way for a dining experience that is worth every penny spent. 'We believe that Lebanese people are ready to be educated about authentic French wine. Who knows, maybe if this works we'll find ourselves selling our own wine one day. It's never-ending.'

(01 999820, 03 074949) 752 Gouraud Str, Saifi Village. Burgundy is scheduled to open at the end of February.