

## **INTERVIEW with Myanmar Times in Nov.2005**

### **Q & A Bert Morsbach**

**Q:** Mr.M. you are German. What made you come to Myanmar to grow wine at a place where many of your predecessors have failed?

**A:** First of all, I was already here in M.. because between 1991 and 1997 I grew organic Basmati rice for export under the name Myanmar Ecoland. It was only when the Minister of Agriculture in 1997 decided to give this business to one of his cronies that I decided to grow wine instead of returning to Thailand where I lived before.

I thought that in a country where the sun shines 150 days in a row it must also be possible to grow wine which only takes 150 days between pruning and the harvest.

**Q:** That sounds simple. Why have all your predecessors then failed?

**A:** Many people have tried who only saw the 150 sunny days.. They didn't realize that the year has more than 150 days and that the rainy season can destroy your vineyard if you don't know how to control pests and diseases which unfortunately love rain and humid weather. That's the key to wine-making in the tropics if you don't want to lose your shirt. It took us 6 years of learning, together with the best experts in the world in tropical viticulture.

**Q:** And then you have a good wine already?

**A:** That's what we thought, too. But again: also wine-making in a hot climate environment is very different to more moderate climates. We had to discard the wine from 2 harvests before we presented our first Aythaya Wine in December 2004, hence less than a year ago. Last Saturday was our second anniversary of Aythaya wine on the market.

**Q:** You mention 'AYTHAYA Wine'. What made you decide to give your wine this name?

**A:** Our vineyard is located in Aythaya, near Taunggyi, not far from Inle Lake. We followed a good tradition to name our wine after the place where the wine comes from. By the way, I would be glad to show you the place: Its wonderful there; it reminds me the Tuscany region in Italy.

**Q:** At your 2005 presentation of your Aythaya wines last Saturday at 'Le Planteur', I noticed that the people seemed to like all of your four different wines a lot. Which one do you think is the best, the White, the Red, the Rose or your Dessert wine, the Aythaya Dulce?

**A:** That's still difficult to answer. If we go by our Sales statistics, then our 'Rose' is the best. Incidentally, we believe that a Rose Wine is the most appropriate for a tropical environment. Maybe it is of interest to your readers that the most popular wines in the Mediterranean countries, for example in the South of France, are Rose Wines. When it is served cold and when you are able to make a fruity Rose you will see how refreshing it is and how well it goes with Myanmar Curries.

As a matter of fact, our ambition is to make Myanmar famous for its Rose Wine. My personal ambition is to make our AYTHAYA Rose the best in Asia.

**Q:** Do you think you can export your AYTHAYA Wine? If so, what are your target markets?

**A:** Our production target is 150,000 bottles per year. That means we have to export our wines. The Government even expects that from us.

Our markets are our neighbouring ASEAN countries; but we also have very promising inquiries from China, the Middle East and even from India.

**Q:** How else does the country benefit from your investment?

We help to save Foreign exchange by offering locally made wines and we will also generate Foreign exchange from our exports.

Besides, we are already an employer for more than 50 families. We import technical know-how and modern vine plants for the local grape-growers in the greater Meiktila area. As we see ourselves as technical service providers, we also would be glad to offer our accumulated know-how to local investors to grow wine for export where we would come in to offer assistance again.

May I remind you that in Germany alone we have more than 4,000 vintners; there is certainly room for at least a dozen wine-makers in this country without much competition.

**Q:** How do you see your personal involvement in this wine project?

**A:** I guess this is my last professional project before I retire and stay in this beautiful country. It is famous for its wonderful and friendly people. My dream is to make this country also known for its excellent wines.

Since the Government is endorsing our efforts I am quite confident that we are on the right way.