





# Ageing Well

VISOOTH LOHITNAVY IS A MAN WHO WITH AGE PERFECTS HIS DISTINGUISHING FEATURES. LIKE A GOOD WINE, SAYS KALTHIRA KOOMPIROCHANA

**J**UST LIKE A GOOD WINE that develops its character as it ages, Visooth Lohitnavy has over time perfected his business skills and entrepreneurial flair. A wine aficionado as much as a wine connoisseur, the 64-year-old realised his dream by establishing a winery, naming it GranMonte Asoke Valley after its location in Khao Yai in Nakhon Ratchasima. His passion for the beverage also led him to assume the position of president of the Thai Wine Association.

Although from the outside the winemaker appears cool, calm and collected, he is in fact a man blessed with endless energy. And unlike many men his age, the CEO and managing director of GranMonte continues to work seven days a week. Visooth's life has always been one with a fast pace, and his great passion for automobiles is, perhaps, a reason as to why. "When I was only 10, I already wanted to sit behind the wheel," he recalls with a cheerful laugh. After completing a degree in car engineering at Weber's Private Technical School in Munich, Germany, Visooth worked as an intern at BMW. In 1970, upon his return to Bangkok, he started as manager at National Travel Service. Yet, car racing being one of his favourite pastimes, he adds, "I was almost like a professional car racer, albeit without sponsorship." Having entered many competitions in Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and Malaysia, Visooth later became managing director at Motor Car magazine in 1972.

Recalling the old days in Germany, he relates: "I was enamoured with the picturesque views of the vineyards. I also preferred drinking wine

to beer, but I couldn't afford a bottle of wine at the time. A longing to own a winery might subconsciously have been triggered back then." Indeed, Visooth eventually realised this desire. "I surveyed many areas and Khao Yai is the most suitable location for growing grape vines in Thailand. It is not too humid and the weather is drier compared to that of the North, and it's cool," he explains. "In addition, this region is ideal for tourism thanks to its close proximity to the national park. But in turn, property prices in Khao Yai are very high."

Combining his master's degree from Chulalongkorn University's Graduate Institute of Business and Administration (SASIN), known as GIBA during his student days in the 1980s, with his work experience from Wellcome Singapore and Rentokil Initial, the high-flyer quickly turned GranMonte into a success. Though still in its younger years, the winery has already produced labels that have earned it wide acclaim. In the Wine Report 2008, Tom Stevenson listed GranMonte's Primavera Unwooded Chenin Blanc/Colombard as one of the top 10 quality wines in Asia. Driven by his entrepreneurial spirit, Visooth never ceases to think of new ventures. "We welcome those visiting our vineyard with European cuisine served at our restaurant, VinCotto, which attracted close to 70,000 people last year. I am also contemplating business expansion and cooperation with foreign firms," he says.

Speaking about his eldest daughter with wife Sakuna, Visootha, who is currently studying for a bachelor's degree in oenology at the University of Adelaide, he says proudly: "She is expected to become the first female winemaker in Thailand, and of course a significant addition to our business." As a self-made man, Visooth applies a Western parenting style with an emphasis on the importance of self-dependence. "By the age of 25, all my children must be able to live on their own," he explains. Given the example their father has set, this policy can only gain ground. ■

## AT A GLANCE

### STATUS

Married

### TREASURED POSSESSION

Engagement ring given by Sakuna; his father's *phra rod* amulet

### NEXT AMBITION

To establish a winery that can represent Thailand on the international stage

### FAVOURITE BOOKS

The Oxford Companion to Wine; Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia; The World Atlas of Wine

### EARLY MENTOR

Suthep Wongkamhaeng