

POUL PILGAARD JOHNSEN

The clock has melted and is running off the edge of the table in the chambre séparée of the Japanese Tower in Tivoli. This is quite fitting, as this first Wednesday in July is the hottest day of the year so far, but of course the clock is just a piece of merchandise brought in by the restaurant to give it a touch of Salvador Dalí.

After all, his 1931 painting *The Persistence of Memory*, featuring melting clocks is surrealism's most famous work, and the restaurant, which is visiting Copenhagen from Dubai, is called Maison Dalí. The name is apparently only due to the fact that the baker behind the restaurant in the desert state is crazy about surrealist art in general and the Spanish painter in particular, but on the other hand, the chef is truly talented:

British chef Tristin Farmer earned three stars with Restaurant Zen in Singapore in 2021 before accepting the offer from Dubai earlier this year.

In the midst of it all, Tristin Farmer and some of his key employees have also found time to visit Denmark, where Tivoli is currently engaging in a kind of gastronomic diplomacy by inviting star-studded restaurateurs from around the world to run a pop-up restaurant in the tower for a month at a time.

The surrealistically twisted shapes of the table candles are clearly also meant to evoke Dalí, and while it all sounds a bit artificial, it all comes together when Jørgen Krüff welcomes us on the terrace outside. Next to a Jeroboam-sized bottle of champagne – three litres, equivalent to four regular bottles – and while we eagerly devour the accompanying snacks with generous amounts of caviar, the legendary Danish wine importer explains the meaning behind it all.

The visit of a restaurant called Dalí is – contrived or not – a welcome opportunity to present what changed his view of Dalí as an artist half a century earlier: “Forty-five years ago, I happened to be shown some pictures in a book and asked which wines the pictures were supposed to represent,” he begins, showing a couple of pages in a large book with a golden cover: “It turned out to be Salvador Dalí’s book *The Wines of Gala*, in which he has painted a series of pictures that express the personality of a number of great and famous wines. I was able to identify many of them before it was revealed which wines were depicted. What was remarkable was not only that I was able to guess, but that Dalí had such an intimate knowledge of the wines that he was sometimes able to caricature them.”

Krüff is the driving force and organiser of the evening, and although we are also going to eat 13 courses, the focus, in his words, is on “Salvador Dalí’s eminent sense of the individual character of the world’s greatest wines and his talent for visualising it.”

These are precisely the wines we will be drinking tonight: Ten Divine Dalí Wines, selected and illustrated by the artist himself.

THE BOOK, which, like his previous absurdist cookbook, *Les Diners de Gala*, is dedicated to his muse and wife of many years, Gala, was published in 1977 and reprinted in 2018 by the German publisher Taschen.

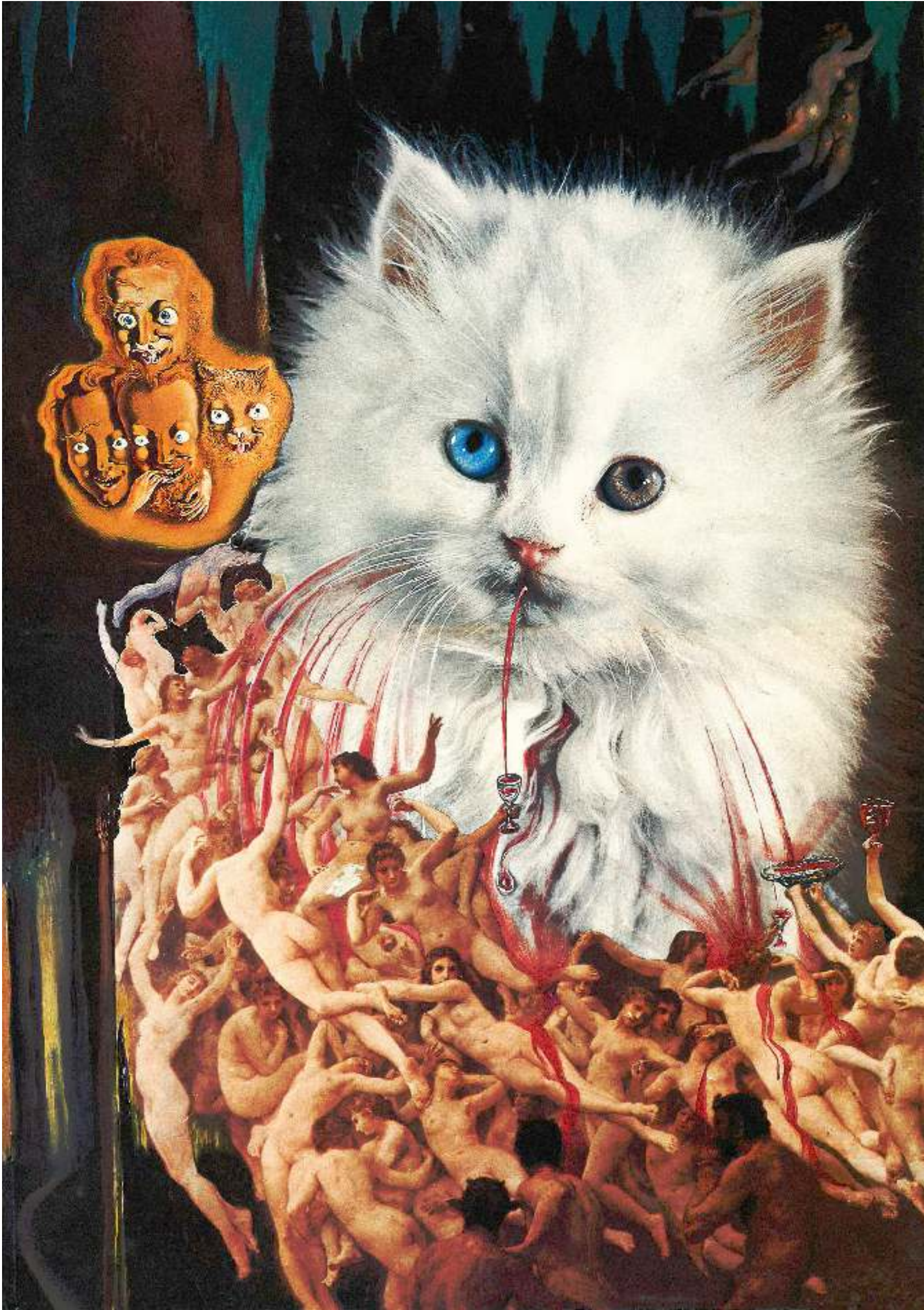
At first glance, it could look like a purely speculative venture. Dalí did not contribute any text himself, and many of the book’s more than 140 illustrations are sketches and details from the artist’s earlier paintings. Even the original works he created for the wine book were often produced by slightly altering other artists’ works, painting over them and adding to them.

This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that Dalí anticipated a modern phenomenon – the artist as an international brand – and always had an eye for ways to capitalise on his carefully cultivated image: The exaggerated moustache smeared with wax, the cape and cane he wore, and the haughty gaze were just as marketable as the countless knick-knacks in gift shops featuring melting clocks as a motif. He appeared in well-paid TV commercials for everything from chocolate to Spanish brandy and Alka-Seltzer, which relieves both heartburn and headaches, and made no secret of his shamelessness: “Dalí is very rich, and Dalí loves money and gold enormously. Dalí sleeps best after working for a day and receiving a huge amount of cheques,” he said in an interview on British television in 1973, and statements like this only contributed to Dalí’s strange fate in art history:

On the one hand, he is recognised as a key figure in 20th century art, and on the other hand, the art world rejects and ridicules much of his work as kitsch and repetition.

The fact is that, together with artists such as André Breton and Luis Buñuel, he was a central part of the surrealist movement, which, inspired by Freud and Jung, sought to reproduce the subconscious symbolically. Dalí was expelled from the group after distancing himself politically from his anarchist colleagues, and his more or less explicit support for the Franco regime in Spain did not help matters either.

On the other hand, he was tireless and produced not only thousands of paintings, lithographs, collages, sculptures, photographs and films, but also a number of curious literary works, including a novel, poetry books, diaries and manifestos. As well as a museum dedicated to himself in his hometown of Figueres. “When I was six, I wanted to be a chef. When I was seven, I wanted to be Napoleon. Since then, my ambitions have only grown,” he said, and if that sounds ridiculous, consider that in 1982, Spanish King Juan



In 1977, Salvador Dalí published a book in which he had painted a number of famous wines with his surrealist touch. In *The Cat with the Wine-Loving Whiskers* (1975), wine flows like a fountain through the cat’s whiskers. Painting: Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres/ Taschen

FLASKENS ÅND • Salvador Dalí’s bizarre wine bible anticipates a new era in the world of wine, characterised by the ultra-personal experiences and emotions that a good wine can evoke.

Surrealistic rush



Wines are depicted for the experience they provide when drunk. Like the motif *The Blood of the Fossils* (1975), where Dalí illustrates the wine Chateau Lafite Rothschild with an erection and bones. Painting: Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueres/Taschen

Carlos honoured Salvador Dalí by appointing him a marquis – a title of nobility ranking between count and duke – and that pop art à la Warhol and artists such as Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons are his true heirs.

AND THEN THERE IS Dalí’s wine book, which – whether commercially or not – according to Jørgen Krüff, testifies to a quite extraordinary sense of the personality of great wines and their mental impact on humans. Tasting the legendary wines that we will be drinking during dinner today is “both a pleasure and a privilege,” he declares. “Closer to God,” says French ambassador Christophe Parisot. Diplomacy is not only culinary on this occasion; there are two genuine ambassadors on the guest list: the French ambassador, because most of the wines are from France, and – for obvious reasons – the Spanish ambassador and his wife.

A few representatives of the press are also invited, while private individuals who pay their own way must fork out 15,000 Danish crowns to attend the wine-themed gala dinner. If that sounds like a lot, just look at the world market prices of the four wines from the Premier Cru of Bordeaux, which we are to have in the great 1996 vintage. Plus wine from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, Burgundy’s most famous estate, 1962 from d’Yquem, which is Sauternes’ finest, and La Côte Faron from Champagne’s undisputed star producer, Jacques Selosse.

As with the welcome champagne from the large-format bottle of Henri Giraud from the 2000 vintage, the grapes in the Selosse champagne come from the village of Aÿ, whose famous wines are also the theme of the very first chapter of Dalí’s wine book: The chapter “The Wine of Aÿ” is illustrated with a picture of a ram puncturing a young woman’s body with spurring semen outside her virginity, thus creating a virginal wine.

The champagne from Selosse is a so-called solera, which is topped up with a new vintage every year as it is bottled from the barrel. La Côte Faron, formerly known as Contraste, contains wine dating back to 1994, and it is in every sense a wine from another world. The exclamations around the table testify to this, and so we are off. Both with the dinner and with the book, where Romanée-Conti is illustrated with a huge white kitten exuding a ruby-red liquid from its mouth and whiskers. Beneath the animal, there is an orgiastic jumble of naked bodies, some of which are holding cups to collect the wine spraying over them. In the air to the left of the kitten’s head float four small faces staring with zombie-like smiles.

“They are paralysed by desire, and when I saw that, I thought it had to be an illustration of Romanée-Conti,” says Jørgen Krüff. There is excited conversation, big smiles around the table and a tingling sensation in my limbs as Romanée-Conti’s 2014 Richebourg is poured into the glasses, followed by a 1996 from one of the famous Bordeaux estates, Château Latour, which Dalí illustrates with three well-formed naked women – graces – who are beautiful, but also a little puerile. There is really nothing sensual or erotically provocative about them. “Latour is always more Apollonian than Dionysian. More well-formed, serene and restrained than ecstatic, intoxicating and boundary-breaking. There is something cool and reserved about the image, and I associate that with the wine, which is always classic, beautiful and elegant, truly grand and aristocratic, but never hedonistic,” says Krüff.

Dalí’s illustration of Chateau Margaux is a black-and-white charcoal drawing of women striding along in beautiful lace-like robes, and anyone who, like us tonight, drinks this wine, which exudes crackling splendour, will understand.

AND THEN IT GETS FUN! The 1996 Mouton Rothschild is a wonderful wine on this July evening in Tivoli, but in the book, the estate suffers the indignity of being ridiculed by Salvador Dalí. At first glance, the illustration features an impressive elephant with sumptuous decorations, but then you notice the elephant’s legs, which are just bones and as thin as sticklebacks. It looks stylised, and that is probably the intention:

In the 1855 Bordeaux classification, Chateau Mouton was not included among the very finest in the Pre-

mier Cru, but was relegated to being number one in the Second Cru. It was only after much lobbying that the estate was elevated to the Premier Cru in 1973, which has never happened before or since. “The image is a fantastic portrayal of Mouton. There was a reason why it was not originally a Premier Cru, because it does not have the same distinction as the other four,” says Krüff.

And then there is Chateau Lafite Rothschild on the table – and in the book. In Dalí’s collage, there are two main things: an erection and bones. “Lafite almost always has the quality of being demonic, but also quite festive,” Krüff observes, elaborating on all the red in the image. About the Dionysian, sensual and ecstatic, about death as a companion and orgasm as a little death.

It is difficult to follow Lafite, so we go in a completely different direction and are served a sparkling Lacryma Christi del Vesuvio as the penultimate wine, which is a wine with a special legend: when the fallen angel Lucifer and his companions were cast out of the gates of Heaven, they fell to Earth and landed right next to Naples. The demons corrupted the beautiful region, and when Christ looked down on all this evil, his tears fell on the fertile soil of the volcano Vesuvius, and from the tears sprouted the most beautiful vines.

Lacryma Christi means “tears of Christ” in Latin, explains Krüff. “That must be why there are 12 of us around the table tonight,” says the French ambassador.

Søren Frank’s orgasms, which have been frequent in the newspaper in recent years, are well deserved, and it strikes me on my surrealistically loaded walk home from Tivoli that we are both, in a way, indebted to Dalí.

THE LAST WINE OF THE EVENING is a 1962 from Chateau d’Yquem, which also has its own chapter in the first part of *The Wines of Gala*, but in reality it is perhaps the second part of the book that points most towards today. Here, French agronomist, author and former head of the state wine organisation INAO, Louis Orizer, describes wines from all over the world in a Dalí-esque and totally innovative way.

He categorises wines according to their emotional resonance rather than prosaic features such as geography or grape variety, and in the introduction Orizer himself explains that his mission is to “organise wines according to the sensations they create in our innermost depths”.

The categories, which range from *Wines of Joy* and *Wines of Aestheticism* to *Wines of Light* and *Wines of Generosity* to *Wines of Frivolity* and *Wines of the Impossible*, prove to be surprisingly useful ways of organising a vinous world view.

Take, for example, the *Wines of Dawn*, which are essentially rosés – Côtes de Provence, Tavel, Rosé de Cabernet d’Anjou – and which are categorised in this way because “these wines evoke a summer morning in our minds, moist with dew. What image could better convey the joy of a gourmet who is asked to look at a luminous bottle of Côtes de Provence permeated by the delicate colour that precedes sunrise and gives his hand a feeling of morning coolness?”

The Wines of Joy include both red and white wines, including Beaujolais, Chignon, Muscadet and Swiss white wines, which “carry a harmony of cheerfulness supported by of a simple melodic line so pure that it is almost abstract and as glowing and joyful as a ray of sunshine.

It may sound artificial and contrived, but hidden in this 50-year-old text is a revolutionary proposal for a new way of thinking about and describing wine. I tried it myself when I started writing about wine 25 years ago, because when the wines were great, I didn’t find the usual wine vocabulary with expressions such as blueberry tones, roasted coffee beans, cigar box wood, and whatever else wine writers used, was enough. It was something else, something more inexplicable, that made these wines so fantastic, so instead of describing their aroma and taste and comparing them to things we already knew, I wanted to describe the experience. What was happening inside us, around us and between us when we drank these great wines.

It was not well received everywhere. When I published the book *Flaskens Ånd* (*The Spirit of the Bottle*) in 2003, Denmark’s most prominent wine critic, Søren Frank from Berlingske, wrote:

“I myself have been present when some of the wines Pilgaard describes were served, without feeling the urge to cry, throw up, dance to Kim Larsen for four hours or see spiders – yes, it almost makes you want to ask whether good old-fashioned pink elephants are no longer good enough.”

But just two years later, in a report from a visit to the world’s finest winemaker, the legendary Lalou Bize-Leroy in Burgundy, Søren Frank asked himself, if it was a tear in the corner of his eye, and from there it has only become more personal.

In 2010, he describes how the 1990 Clos du Mesnil champagne “sends an almost Kundalini-like energy down my spine, ending right out in my toes,” and last year it was both a 2008 from Selosse that made him “notice that my legs were tingling and that I had goose bumps all over my body,” and Danish winemaker Emil Skyttes’ wine (Etheria 2022):

“Slowly but surely, it began to tingle first in my legs and then in my arms. Yes, it was all good, it was one of those rare occasions when I experienced a wine orgasm.”

SØREN FRANK’S ORGASMS, of which there have been several reported in the newspaper in recent years, are well deserved, and it strikes me on my surrealistically loaded walk home from Tivoli that, in a way, we are both indebted to Dalí, or at least to something he anticipated.

In its own way, his book heralds the movement in recent years away from anaemic assessments and scoring systems – Robert Parker’s long-dominant 100-point scale is the best and worst example – towards a more personal relationship with wine.

So how can one describe and speak authentically about the emotional experience of wine? Hardly by imitating Orizer and Dalí, who sometimes take it to the point of the bizarre, but like new journalism writers such as Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson forced journalism to reinvent itself by infusing it with literary methods and the inclusion of a distinct “I”. Dalí’s book provoked new thinking.

Just as winegrowers themselves, who all over the world have begun to challenge the conventions of traditional viticulture and vinification and now make ultra-personal wines with unknown, long-forgotten, marginalised or unpopular grapes and different techniques.

In this way, *The Wines of Gala* may not just be a commercial stunt by an ageing and washed-up artist, but in fact a modern wine bible.

A few days later, Krüff calls. He has tasted the remains left in the bottles after the Dalí dinner:

“The next day, Lafite was not just better. It was electric! From the tips of my toes to the roots of my hair.”

Salvador Dalí: *The Wines of Gala*. Taschen, 2018.