

" Denis is a very talented and creative person. But in the kitchen, I made the decisions. "says Mika diplomatically.

The attractive kitchen, in bone white, is a very practical, well-proportioned room. The rest of their house - originally a stable on the family estate - is furnished in rustic farmhouse style. The room is dominated by a fine dining table of solid, dark wood. A crackling fire in the big open fireplace by a faint fragrance of hardwood smoke through the room. On the floor in front of the fire is a big cushion à la japonaise. Evidently Mika's influence extends beyond the confines of the kitchen. The house's colour scheme is dominated by red and green with dashes of blue.

" Whatever I do is guided by my feelings, and colour affect me strongly, " says Denis. Red is an aggressive exciting colour. Green is peaceful. And blue is very distinguished. "

" While we are talking, Denis brings out some bottles of his own champagne - excellent, of course, and an award winner in blind tests.

" It contains 80 percent chardonnay, not 40 percent like many other champagnes. This means it is less acid - it is kind to the stomach and kind to the head. You can drink two bottles without getting a headache, " he says gaily.

Mika is wearing a pretty red dress with the same striped pattern as Denis Charpentier's champagne bottle. And, as she shows me, the pendant she wears round her neck is modelled on the same bottle. A wide bracelet - a chain in an entwined pattern - turns out on closer examination to be the letters DC.

Denis Charpentier makes red and white wines too. Of the very best, once again. With dinner he serves wine exclusively from 1987 - a fairly poor vintage, he says, but a very good wine to drink this year.

" It's part of my philosophy to understand things, " he says, explaining, " if you really want to understand a wine, you should never try a good vintage. You should tast a bad year. "

Right now France is in the throes of an airline strike and Denis Charpentier has to catch a train to meet business contacts at Bordeaux.

" It's absurd " he says, his adrenalin visibly pumping. " An agreement is an agreement and I had four meetings arranged. Now I'm only going to have time for one. I detest being missing appointments - it means one lacks respect for other people. An agreement is made to be kept. "

He is a man with many irons in the fire - this is evident even while he is steering his sporty little Cabriolet Mercedes through the congested Paris traffic. At the same time as he toots the horn at other, slower road users, he is talking about his philosophy of life, talking to Mika on the phone, smoking, searching in the glovebox for his plane tickets, exchanging comments with the drivers of neighbouring cars, and putting the paper in order of his meeting! ...

Now Denis Charpentier hopes to launch his quality products in Sweden, where the newly established importer Vingarden Ohlsson is to be his agent. Vingarden Ohlsson will have a range of the finest products on offer.

Denis Charpentier has plans for his own brands of gin and vodka. But before it is time for that, a whisky is first on the agenda.

" yes, now I am looking for a distillery in Scotland where we can make the world's finest whisky. I know what it should be like. My favourite drinks of all is whisky, " says the Cognac King.

Picture caption:

- (1) Denis Charpentier rarely peels a potato these days. He makes a first-class cognac which is now on his way into the Swedish market
- (2) The stalls of the old stable have been converted into a wine cellar where Denis Charpentier collects his own favourite wines.
- (3) Mika and Denis Charpentier live in what was once the stable on the family estate, which they have furnished to their own taste.

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