

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'2010 AGM Surprise Tasting' Presented by Derek Avery 24 November 2010

Derek's angle for tonight's tasting was 'the same grape from around the world'. He chose Viognier for the whites and Syrah (as opposed to Shiraz) for the reds. Lots of scope, and he deliberately ensured that all the wines were readily available from major supermarkets – mostly sourced from Sainsbury's.

Welcome aperitif

Pinot Grigio della Venezia 'Via Vecchio'

Not sure of the source of this easy-drinking Pinot Grigio nor the vintage, but I suspect it may have been from Asda (Derek will correct me if I'm wrong!) A decent supermarket example, best as an aperitif, no real complexity (and none expected!) but nicely made and quaffable.

The wines

Derek had some pithy comments on Sainsbury's wine selection in the big Basingstoke store, not being impressed with the fact that sauvignon featured so heavily as to be almost comical - 'what's your favourite wine – sauvignon blanc? - OK we'll stock just about every example we can lay our hands on then'. More observations on supermarket wines below!

Whites - Viognier

Pepperwood Grove Viognier 2008, California

£7.99, Asda 13.5%

I was thrilled to see this on Derek's list as I remembered a very good affordable Zinfandel from Pepperwood Grove that won 'wine of the year' in one of the annual competitions about 10 years ago. The label is owned by Sebastiani, a big name in Napa/Sonoma. So the provenance ought to be good but this was a disappointment - maybe Viognier is just not that easy to do well out of its comfort zone. Colour pale gold, spicy nose but very astringent for Viognier and more grapefruit than peach. Mid palate had strange marmalade pith notes and the fruit seemed to fall away. The finish was alcoholic and slightly 'odd'. The general view was not favourable. A pity since Asda's wine department is moving deliberately upwards from the cheap and cheerful and now has some hidden treasures on its shelves – there are some rich pickings in new world reds in the £6-£8 price range.

Cono Sur Viognier 2009, Colchagua Valley, Chile

£6.99, Morrisons 13.5%

Sighs of relief all round as reliable Cono Sur never lets you down – it's a brand with interesting wines right from entry level to the top of their range. And their 'green' credentials are excellent! Here was a proper mineral nose, some Viognier creaminess on the palate, but also the zingy acidity that invariably saves New World Viogniers from the flabbiness that can affect some cheaper southern French examples. That high acidity might suggest that they are really making a Viognier for Sauvignon-lovers since it's not wholly typical though very well made. A word on Morrisons – you can find some interesting bottles amongst quite a lot of ordinary stuff. Their Moscatel de Valencia costing all of £3.49 is terrific and has won awards.

Yalumba Y Series Viognier 2009, South Australia

£7.99, Sainsbury's 13.5%

The first of the two more typical Viogniers of the evening. Yalumba is a respected family-owned winery making some highly individual wines. Indications of quality are the use of wild yeasts and lees aging which was evident on the nose. Colour had a definite green tinge and the nose was restrained. The palate here is creamier and weightier in a much more typical Viognier style than the Cono Sur. Lower acidity, alcohol still a reasonable 13.5% though a

little pronounced on the finish perhaps, but this was still young and could maybe do with a further year in bottle. Obvious quality for this price and a great label design too. I took the remains of one bottle home and it was delicious the following evening.

Las Moras Viognier 2009, San Juan, Argentina

£5.99, Sainsbury's 14%

Argentina's USP is altitude which has a profound effect on the quality of their white wines. These grapes were grown at 1300m and the temperature contrast from day to night is what gives the wine such freshness. A slight greenish tinge to the pale gold colour and an ultra clean nose with just a hint of oak. This had malolactic fermentation (controlling the acidity levels) and a touch of French oak - surprising at this price. Very clean fresh palate, not hugely complex but good pineapple notes, and arguably the best balanced white of the evening although the least expensive. A bit of a find.

Reds - Syrah

Fish Eye Rose 2007, California

£4.39, Sainsbury's 12%

100% Syrah rose. '2007' immediately cast a seed of doubt as most inexpensive roses of this sort need drinking within a year of the vintage to show at their best. As expected a slightly tired nose with a hint of caramel – not unpleasant but not what this wine should be about really! It had also lost a bit of fresh colour (beware older roses in clear bottles!) Have to admit my initial impression was 'past it' and the rather subdued palate bore that out. I think it's a bit naughty of Sainsbury's to have a sub-£5 rose from two vintages back still for sale and sitting under those lights...

Les 3 Lys Crozes Hermitage 2007, Rhone, France

£6.49, Sainsbury's 12.5%

One third Syrah grapes from the Northern Rhone. Nice peppery nose with good fruit. Really strong structure here, but with soft tannins and not 'big' for 2007 (one of the best recent Rhone vintages at all price levels). This was terrific with the mince pies! A fine example of a good basic Rhone Syrah, uncomplicated but with some lovely pepper and spice notes.

Sacred Hill Hawkes Bay Syrah 2008, New Zealand

£8.99, Sainsbury's 12.5%

Good to have a New Zealand Syrah on the list and one from Hawkes Bay too – along with Nelson my favourite NZ wine area as the wines from both regions have a little more restraint than those from Marlborough. Quite a 'northern Rhone' style with definite minerality from the Gimlett gravel soil. Only a slight spritz on the tongue gives it away immediately as new world. A refined and relatively austere palate. Needs a year perhaps, but not for the long haul – these wines are made for earlier drinking than most Rhone Syrahs.

Turtle Sands Western Cape Syrah, South Africa

£7.99, Sainsbury's 14%

From the Taste The Difference range, made by Graham Beck, famous for (good!) Pinotage. Big opaque purple colour, a nice hint of 'animal' South Africa in the nose, very characteristic! A big wine in all respects but well balanced. Very savoury palate but plummy nose – a nice combination. If you like your Syrahs big and robust this is a good wine at the price.

It's always good to be able to compare different versions of a grape from around the world, and as *not* the most avid admirer of Viognier I was pleasantly surprised by the last two examples. Of the Syrahs I liked the rose best...no I'm kidding. I thought the Crozes Hermitage was possibly the best *value* red – a really good buy at £6.49.