

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'Blind Tasting (with one eye open)' Presented by Simon Plumtree and Derek Avery 27 October 2010

Simon and Derek repeated last year's very popular 'half-blind' tasting in which the wines are tasted conventionally in the first half of the evening, then the bottles are disguised (no labels, just numbers) and we have to re-taste and decide which wine is which. Simple, no?

Welcome aperitif

Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru 'Les Caillerets' 2005, Domaine Jean-Noel Gagnard (BBR bins, £2!)

An astonishing curiosity to start with. At full price this wine would cost upwards of £50 per bottle depending on the vintage – the 2007 is currently listed on BBR's website at £66. The fact that Berry's had put this into their 'cooking wines' bins at a giveaway price shows that they had tasted it and considered it well over the hill. But - a 2005 premier cru white burgundy from a really top domaine - over the hill at 5 years old? How come? And it certainly was – mid-gold colour revealing immediately that it was oxidised, an impression confirmed by the palate. Sadly you could see what it would have been – the richness was still there but devoid of all freshness and zip, and with a distinct whiff of sherry about it – not right at all! A bit worrying for any of us with white burgundy of this age stashed away, although of course there is no telling how this particular bottle might have been stored or from where it had been sourced by BBR, but it does rather lend credence to recent press comment about the high incidence of premature oxidisation in some white burgundies from surprisingly distinguished producers.

The wines

All sourced from BBR's outlet store in Basingstoke

Whites

Wickham Estate-bottled Vintage Selection 2009, England

£9.75 12%

Aromatic gooseberry-leaf nose, quite upfront without being pungently 'New Zealand' (although the winemaker did work in NZ). Almost a hint of the floral Germanic style. Nice punchy palate without being too astringent, and a slight spritz. Clean, fresh, fair length, just lacks the concentration you might expect for around a tenner. In New Zealand you'd get more oomph for your tenner, but England is not (yet!) New Zealand and I thought this a pretty creditable example of what England can currently produce in this style. The general opinion wasn't universally favourable – it was felt to be too pricey for the quality. The BBR discount price of £7.45 would be more reasonable.

Les Trois Demoiselles Touraine Sauvignon Blanc 2009, France

£9.95 13%

A much less obviously fruity nose and a very nice mineral palate – more so than the previous wine which was all floral fruit. Just a hint of bubblegum on nose and finish but not obtrusive. Leafy restrained nose, spritzy palate again, mineral dry finish, better length. A more austere stony style – typically Loire - but there is a lot more residual sugar left in these Loire sauvignons nowadays (New World influence) and they are less lean than they were a few years ago. A pretty good example of modern Touraine sauvignon, and generally much better liked than the previous wine.

Pecan Stream Sauvignon Blanc 2008, Waterford, South Africa

£8.85 12%

Now here was a different style of Sauvignon. Fuller, richer, much more developed on both nose and palate (2008 – the extra year showed) and an almost 'animal' character to it – a

typical South African trait that is usually more evident in the reds. Derek suggested that it might well have had time on its lees. Still a slightly spritzy palate but more bitterness on the finish here (not necessarily a criticism). Rather less alcohol than suggested by the finish – only 12% which is low for a quasi-New World sauvignon – the impact on the finish is bitterness not alcohol. I liked this – it had character – and it was generally felt that it would be one of the easier ones to identify later on...

Benito Santos Igrexario de Saiar Albarino 2008, Rias Baixas, NW Spain

£10.95 12.5%

There was a wicked glint in Simon's and Derek's eyes... Surely this would be dead easy to pick out later on by comparison with the previous three wines? Mmm. The first wine with a greenish tinge on the colour. A hint of pear on the nose, and not even the smallest hint of gooseberry on the palate so should be easy to distinguish we thought. Softer, oilier, fatter texture than the first three wines, and acidity less apparent. Good balance, nice finish, some weight on the palate. Richer than you might expect but again only 12.5% alcohol. These Albarinos from NW Spain are getting fashionable – they are a bit different from the ubiquitous sauvignons and pinot grigios and have real regional character. I felt this one was worth the price.

Reds

Vina Tarapaca Cabernet Sauvignon 2008, Chile

£7.95 13%

On to the first of two Chilean reds, each showing distinctive characteristics. This had some 'meatiness' on the nose – definitely not just fruit. A pale rim that deepened quickly to the core. Some Cabernet structure apparent on nose and palate. Tannins reasonably evident but with a New World roundness on the finish (due to more residual sugar than say a Bordeaux Cabernet which would finish dryer). A bit of typical Cabernet mintiness too. This mellowed nicely in the glass over the next 15 minutes or so. A pretty good £8 worth.

Chono Reserva Carmenere 2007, Maipo Valley, Chile

£9.15 14%

Mostly Carmenere with 5% Cabernet Franc to provide a bit of backbone. Deep colour, opaque, hardly any rim, not showing much obvious age yet. A less meaty nose, silky, with a discreet leafiness there behind the plums. Round very plummy palate with 'structure' less obvious than in the Cabernet. Tannins rounded and integrated. Hints of tobacco and some coffee grounds on the finish. A nice example of Carmenere and a good indicator of the quality you can get from Chilean wines at the sub £10 level.

Verdad Tempranillo 2004, Santa Ynez Valley, California, USA

£14.75 14.5%

Cranking up the alcohol levels now. This is actually a blend of 75% Tempranillo, 13% Syrah and 12% Grenache. A much lighter, at first seemingly simpler berry nose with redcurrants to the fore. A lighter palate too, with noticeable 'sweetness' which caused some difference of opinion in the group – some thought it off-putting but others felt it grew on them. Certainly not like a typical Rioja tempranillo – this had a whopping alcoholic finish which to me suggested maybe a certain lack of balance – see the next wine. But the cherry berry character did develop and become more prominent in the glass – always a good sign. Again, we thought this one might be easy to pick out from the rest come the second half...

Frankland Estate Isolation Ridge Shiraz 2004, Western Australia

£14.50 15.5%

Big, big alcohol here – but what terrific balance! I'm always doubtful about the alcohol levels in big Aussie Shiraz – can any table wine really carry 15%+ alcohol successfully and still be a pleasure rather than an effort to drink? Well, when they are made in cooler climate Western Australia by a producer such as this, yes they can. Browner edges to the rim here, showing some age as you'd expect at 6 years. Beautiful developed spicy Syrah nose, rich unctuous dark palate with layers of complexity. Huge legs in the glass, but the alcohol carried really well and balanced by the natural weight of the wine. Fully mature. Sadly this is no longer

available at BBR's outlet store but they did at the time of writing have a couple of other Frankland Estate reds (plus a terrific Isolation Ridge Riesling) to try. Fill yer boots...

The second half

So how did we do? Well predictably not too well overall – perhaps the 15.5% alcohol had something to do with it! The best score by a country mile was an impressive 6 correct answers out of 8 and no-one else approached that. It was a game of two halves...

A hugely fun evening, and suitably humbling to those of us who thought we could pick our Sauvignons from our Albarinos!

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog is by **Julia Shaw**