

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'The Wine Explorer' Argentinian Malbec, Pinot Noirs from around the world, and the Southern Rhone 22 September 2010

The 'Wine Explorer' **Graham Mitchell** made a welcome return, this time with an evening made up solely of red wines. He showed us some boutique Malbecs from a small Argentinian winery, then a distinguished selection of Pinot Noirs from around the world, finishing with two top southern Rhones.

Welcome aperitif

Tesco's Chilean Sauvignon Blanc (Tesco 3.99)

I think many of us struggled with this one – it wasn't at all typical (except that it was probably quite typical of wine at this price point!) Not the best example of Chilean Sauvignon by any means, and a good illustration of that fact that most of that 3.99 would not have gone into the wine itself.

A footnote to last month's introductory wine – the Aussie Semillon was the very delicious and somewhat underpriced (around £8) **Tesco Finest Denman Hunter Valley Semillon**, produced for Tesco by McGuigan and to my mind one of their unsung gems. It repays several years bottle age to develop the classic Semillon honey and lanolin flavours (I have a couple of bottles of the 2005 which should be developing nicely now). The 2010 vintage is currently in store so if you want a pretty decent Hunter Valley Semillon at a very reasonable price to mature over the next few years, buy some now and stash it away...

The wines

Reds – Argentinian Malbecs

Tempus Alba Tempranillo 2007, Maipu, Mendoza, Argentina

£10.50 14%

The first of three wines from one of Graham's small winery discoveries, Tempus Alba. Colour quite developed on rim. Big nose for a tempranillo (slight hint of the Ribera del Duero style?) Vanilla oak quite pronounced on both nose and palate. Dark fruit, good acidity. Rounded, but with a slightly alcoholic finish suggesting balance not quite there yet?

4000ft vineyard (the altitude the vines grow at is a big USP in Argentina - many winemakers put it on the label) and the resulting temperature variation from day to night helps the acidity levels and gives Argentinian wine the freshness that is so attractive.

Tempus Alba Malbec 2008, Maipu, Mendoza, Argentina

£10.50 14%

Minty nose, deep opaque purple, very little rim. Some tannic structure apparent but soft already. Alcohol on the finish is less evident here – better balanced perhaps. Nice fresh finish and quite a savoury palate – this needs a steak! Might be interesting to compare it with Catena's Malbec, widely available at a similar price point.

Tempus Alba Pleno 2006, Maipu, Mendoza, Argentina

£16.45

Graham Mitchell described this as a 'free-range line-caught' wine, meaning that it gives no concession to mass market appeal. A more concentrated wine due to lower yields. 50/50 Cab Sauvignon/Malbec and the Cabernet structure was apparent. As expected, more development on nose and rim. Big minty palate, some mild eucalyptus notes. Fine tannins, still a way to go (4-5 years?)

Reds – Pinot Noirs

Wedgetail Estate Single Vineyard Pinot Noir 2006, Yarra Valley, Australia

£20.05 13.5%

One of Graham's favourite wineries, this Wedgetail Pinot was an immediate contrast from the Malbecs. 12 months in French oak, open vats, wild yeasts in fermentation – all very much 'of the moment' techniques. Yarra Valley a relatively cool climate. Colour OK, nice and pale as expected, fairly developed farmyardy nose, rounded mature palate, quite a persistent finish. I have 'strawberries' on my tasting note. Fair tannins. Worth £20? Coming back to it after 15 mins or so, I have a note that it had gained aromas in the glass - sign of a lively wine. Winemaker is Guy Lamothe.

Fiddler's Green Pinot Noir 2004, Waipara, New Zealand

£19.50 14%

This seemed immediately a more robust wine than the Wedgetail, but possibly not quite as refined – some delicacy seemed to me to have been lost here. Deeper colour than Wedgetail despite being two years older. Well-developed nose, nice whiff of the farmyard, robust palate, more alcohol evident on the finish. A more powerful wine altogether. My notes say that the nose mellowed considerably after 20 mins in the glass. Not my favourite Pinot style but it grew on me.

Meerlust Pinot Noir 2008, Stellenbosch, South Africa

£21.05

From this highly regarded winery, a wine with a definite 'South African' nose – very up-front, slightly animal, with some tar, fennel and aniseed notes. Not conventional! Deepest colour of the three Pinots so far. A really herbal, almost 'garrigue' palate like some southern French wines. However, at the same time rather tight and closed up at this stage. A long life ahead of it – 7-8 years maybe? Graham – 'will be great'. I have a final note scribbled later on: 'you get used to the nose'!

Reds – Southern Rhone

Chateauneuf du Pape Alchimie 2007, Domaine de Trois Celliers

£18.45 14.5%

From the very rich 2007 vintage, a Chateauneuf to which Jancis Robinson had apparently given an 18/20 score. Also had a gold medal sticker from the 2008 Vacqueras Concord de Vins. I could see why – a distinguished restrained nose, lots of spice. A jammy palate, but in a good way, ripe but not over extracted. A bit rustic in a way, but with a surprisingly fine tannic structure. Excellent long finish. Most 'complete' wine of the night for me.

Gigondas Domaine de Longue Toque 2006

£17.45 15%

Dom de Longue Toque a famous Gigondas property so this was quite a treat. A whopping 15% alcohol marked it out as being from the more 'modern' school of southern Rhone winemaking (ultra ripe and lots of extraction). Similar nose to the Chateauneuf, perhaps a little less immediately attractive. But on the palate the difference was in concentration, and although it carried the alcohol reasonably well I felt 'hotness' was more apparent on the finish than in the Chateauneuf. May need 3-5 years to really come together?

Graham discussed the premium paid for the Chateauneuf name and argued that a good Gigondas is always better value than a corresponding Chateauneuf. Was this the better wine? Not sure, but I took a third of a bottle home, left it with the cork just pushed in, and the following day it had certainly settled down into a smoother whole.