

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'Western Australia' Presented by Derek Avery

AGM Tasting November 2011

Derek brought four whites and four reds including a couple of well-known names from Margaret River in Western Australia - a prestigious cool climate region famous for restrained wines that challenge the stereotype of the 'big Aussie chardonnay'

Welcome aperitif

Cava Freixenet Excelencia Brut (Waitrose)

Lively bubbles, lemony and quite full flavoured with a nice bready Cava nose. A good example.

The wines

Whites

The Parcel Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2009, Margaret River £7.49

Majestic

Bottled for Majestic. Cool fermentation, retaining all the fruit flavours, with 3 months on the lees to develop character and depth. A very 'Sauvignon' nose with just a hint of Semillon lanolin in the background. Very fresh style, fullish and ripe, possibly just a tad harsh on the finish but a good buy at this price.

Plantagenet Samson's Range Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2010, Mount £8.99

Barker

Waitrose

The oldest family-owned company trading in Australia, Plantagenet was the pioneer producer in Great Southern, Western Australia. The 2010 vintage of this classic blend won a gold medal at the International Wine Challenge. A spicier palate, fuller and better balanced than the previous wine. Descriptions overheard from around the room included 'grass', 'hay', 'lemongrass' and 'heavy on the sauvignon'. Generally much liked by our group.

Vasse Felix Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2010, Margaret River £10.99

Waitrose

Flagship Margaret River estate Vasse Felix produces this blend from its best parcels and ferments a portion in new oak barrels – a technique also used in some of the better New Zealand sauvignon blancs. Oak flavours are not the aim here – depth and complexity is. My notes say 'the first nose with a real blast of minerality. Length and complexity on the palate – not all on the nose here. Really good acidity – would be searing without the oak balance?' Elegant finish, real length, and a great price considering the step up in quality.

Vasse Felix Chardonnay 2010, Margaret River £12.50

Majestic

Partial wild yeast fermentation in individual parcels with 9 months in French oak barrels. A nice touch of rich bready yeastiness on the nose, oak apparent but not intrusive – my notes say 'sweet oak'. At least that was my view! Other comments from around the room picked up on the oakiness and not necessarily in a good way – a pity really because its use here is judicious. Give it time in the glass! After the style of the first three wines this *will* smell and taste more oak (it could hardly do otherwise) and the right food with it would certainly soften up the oak notes. I thought this a good example of fresh cool climate chardonnay with some complexity, made with typical Margaret River restraint.

Reds

Moss Wood 'Amy' Blend 2009, Margaret River

£14.99

Waitrose

Many of us commented on the lush plummy Merlot nose, however this apparently has only 5% Merlot in it, with Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot and Malbec making up this Bordeaux blend. Deep purple with a very narrow rim. Lovely aromatic plum and cassis nose, soft silky tannins, sweet palate, a crowd pleaser certainly, but there's some structure there in the background. But the overall impression was of typical New World softness and ripeness. Pushing £15 may perhaps seem a couple of pounds on the steep side in comparison with the next wine?

Vasse Felix Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot 2009, Margaret River

£12.49

Majestic

A little development here on the nose, and a less obviously purple colour in the glass. Blend is Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot with Cab Sauv just tipping the balance. This is a different animal from the last wine, with 'structure' more apparent and clearly made for the slightly longer haul - probably needing another year or so to reveal its best. A consistent medal winner year on year, the latest an IWC Silver. Leafy aromas with black fruits and berries. Tannins are far more apparent here than in the previous wine but they're ripe and the finish is quite complex. Should open up even more given a bit of time. Excellent value.

Plantagenet Samson's Range Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon 2009, Margaret River

£8.99

Waitrose

Another Waitrose exclusive from Plantagenet in Great Southern, this is actually a blend of Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir (only in the New World would Pinot Noir be in such a mix!) Compared with the last wine this came across as a simpler style, easy drinking, nice and peppery, relatively low tannins, limited complexity but a nicely made dark fruit-driven blend to cater for most tastes.

Cape Mentelle Shiraz 2009, Margaret River

13.5% £17.50

Majestic

On to the big gun now with the highly regarded Cape Mentelle (original home to the founder of cult winery Cloudy Bay in New Zealand). Note the alcohol level here – this is cool climate Shiraz which proves that you don't necessarily need pushing 15% alcohol to make a good Aussie Shiraz. My notes say: 'chocolate, black, and legs! – but a soft smoky nose, and blueberries (overheard) is right!' An attractive mintiness on the palate – a little surprising to be so prominent in a Shiraz but many of us commented on it. Structured soft tannins, subtle, good length. Also overheard '...worth taking a pint of water to bed with!' Concur totally – a really attractive wine and worth the money.

A lovely selection from Margaret River, showing just what a difference the cool climate and some restraint in the winery can make to the balance and purity of these wines.

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