

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'The Wines of New France' Eddie Lewis (Laithwaites)

26 March 2014

A Laithwaites tasting always means interesting wines, and as Simon mentioned in his newsletter "the less well known regions of France have been producing some exciting wines over the last few years with lots of potential". Eddie aimed to show us the differences and diversity available in France with wines from better-known and less familiar regions

The wines

Whites

1. Roche Lacour Cremant 2011, AOC Cremant de Limoux

12% £12.49

A bottle-fermented sparkling wine from south west France, with top Bordeaux name Denis Dobourdieu (several properties, notably Doisy-Daene in Sauternes) lending his experience. Blend is Chardonnay/Pinot Noir with a touch of Chenin Blanc, and the vineyards are relatively high altitude - 5-6% cooler than the surrounding area. Pale lemony gold, persistent mousse, touch of 'chenin' character on the nose, citrus notes. 10-15% barrel fermentation of the Chardonnay provides some richness in the middle. Soft pleasant finish. Overall freshness a bit reminiscent of sparkling Vouvray. We all liked this! Good value.

2. Domaine Gadais Le Vieux Clocher 2013, AOC Muscadet

12% £8.99

Modern style Muscadet in a non-traditional bottle screwcapped for freshness. The pale watery lemon colour gives no hint of the depth of flavour to come. Immediate 'saline' character on the nose, very slight hint of pear drops that quickly recedes, fruit-dominant palate balanced by crisp acidity, minerality and a decent length. Not a 'sur lie' but fuller flavoured than many that are – a relatively rich palate. Lively and full of true Muscadet character.

3. Le Coin Sauvignon Gris 2012, AC Bordeaux

12.5% £10.49

Made by Laithwaites. Bordeaux now acknowledges that a % of their 'Sauvignon Blanc' vineyards may actually be planted to Sauvignon Gris – an earlier ripening pink grape making white wine. But finding it as a single varietal is unusual (although it's been done in Chile by medal-winning Secano Estate - a lovely wine available at M&S). Le Coin includes small amounts of old vine Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc in the blend. My notes say 'nose is pure white Bordeaux territory'. Big rich spicy palate with the merest hint of oak from partial barrel fermentation, for complexity not oak flavour. Really good length, character and balance – a wine with breadth and grip and just 12.5% alcohol. It can be done...

4. Les Cailloux Dores Chardonnay 2011, Vin de France 13.5% £9.99

Grapes from high vineyards near Carcassonne, night-harvested for freshness and trucked back (Aussie style!) to the Laithwaites chai in Castillon for vinification – very new world! Yellow gold, fresh nose ('sticking plaster – the cloth ones' was heard in the room, as was 'something of the first aid kit about it' - I didn't really get that but clearly some of us did!) On the palate new French oak ('low toast') quite evident, reasonably well balanced with fruit and particularly vibrant acidity. My notes say 'oak a bit prominent – maybe needs to sit in the glass - not quite all of a piece?' – but a good long finish and Eddie thought it might have further to go.

Rose

5. Domaine de Pontefract Rose 2013, AOP Cotes de Provence 12.5% £10.99

Grenache/Carignan/Cinsault blend. Rocky limestone soil, sunny exposure, small full-flavoured grapes. A lovely Provencal pale salmon colour. Quite an immediate *floral* nose for a Provence rose, but a more citrus and summer fruit character developed in the glass. A full but delicate warm-climate rounded palate with sharp redcurrant notes at the back. Sufficient 'body' for herby Provencal food. Classy.

Reds

6. Chapelle St Roch 2012, AOP Faugeres 13.5% £13.49

Syrah/Grenache/Mourvedre. Schist soils, old vines, slow ripening. A developing rim, coloured 'legs', some Syrah burnt rubber character on the nose, with herbal notes too. On the palate hints of liquorice, dark fruit, tobacco. Partial oak barrels and stainless steel fermentation – fruit prominent at present, some tannic structure but already soft. Nice firm mid-palate, savoury (rather than peppery) on the finish.

7. Chateau Portal Cuvee Jerome 2012, AOC Minervois 14% £10.99

Syrah/Grenache/Carignan (some from 100 year old vines). 1 year in French oak barrels. 'Mocha coffee nose' was heard in the room. My notes say 'a slightly edgier nose here, a little more volatile and farmyardy and herbal'. A very different character from wine 6 – this has more backbone and structure underpinning the bramble fruit and mocha intensity – it's nothing like as soft on the palate as wine 6. My notes say 'lots of *energy* whereas the last wine was *unctuous*'. Different style altogether. I liked this a lot.

8. Le Presbytere 2007, AOC Cotes de Castillon 13% £19.99

Laithwaites' premium claret made by traditional methods (by hand and feet!). 100% Merlot from 112 year old vines. Only 1200 bottles annually. Deep colour, very little rim yet. Nose is 'mocha-plum' (one comment), sensual nose and palate, appearing very soft after wine 7, definitely more immediately accessible. Tannins almost imperceptible by comparison with wine 7 – they are there but much less overt, though more obvious on the finish. Very concentrated Merlot palate with new oak vanilla, very smooth. A crowd-pleaser with life ahead of it.

An interesting and informative tasting showcasing the diversity of regional France. For me, wines 2 and 3 were standout whites in their respective categories.