

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'Eastern Europe' Presenter: Derek Avery

27 April 2016

Following a presenter cancellation, Derek stepped in at short notice to give us a splendid look at the some current M&S discoveries from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean

Welcome aperitif

Cremant de Bourgogne NV

£7.50

A bottle each of white and rose sparkling Bourgogne, made with grapes from Stephen Taylor's own vineyards by a Burgundy winemaker who provides the winemaking for local growers' grapes. Fresh, enjoyably gluggable, good value, and much appreciated by the group!

The wines

Whites

1. Thymiopoulos Malagouzia 2013, Greece

12% £9.00

Restrained nose with backward herbal notes, lightweight palate with more stone than fruit flavours. 'Kernels' was an apt description overheard, as was 'oiliness like Riesling' since despite the light palate a certain 'texture' was evident. Some thought it seemed like a lighter Viognier in style if not in mid-palate substance. 'Grilled sardines' were mentioned as a potential match (think Greek harbour tavernas...) This grew on the group, and coming back to it half an hour later it had really developed in the glass. *JS note: Malagousia was a 'lost' grape variety saved from extinction in the 1980s by Vangelis Gerovassiliou at his winery near Thessaloniki – his version is super-concentrated and costs £20+*

2. Tikves Smederevka/Rkaciteli 2012, Macedonia

12% £7.00

A much more upfront nose here, 'honey, but bog-standard' was one description, 'inflatable beachball' another! It was a good night for quotes - Eastern European wines clearly elicit inventive descriptions, not surprising given that these are still (as yet) uncommon flavours. A little spritzy still on the tongue, quite a creamy finish while retaining crispness, but rather obvious flavours and not a lot of mid-palate or finish. Simple drinkable stuff. 'I like it better than I think I ought to' was overheard... Probably one to drink up given the vintage.

3. Golden Valley Grasevina 2014, Croatia

13% £9.00

Big slightly autolytic nose described well by one of the group as 'grass and hay'. Golden colour as befits the name, quite lively on the tongue with an attractive spritz. A fuller richer palate than wines 1 and 2 – 'heady' was heard, and there was certainly more aromatic punch here. Generally liked, and we thought good value at 9.00. I can vouch for its staying power as I took the remains of the second bottle home to enjoy the following evening (if only there'd been a bit more left!) Seems to confirm the good reputation that Croatian wine is building abroad – they've no doubt always known it locally...

4. Tblvino Qvevris Rkatsiteli 2013, Georgia 12.5% £9.50

A white wine from Georgia made in the local 'amphora' tradition whereby *'the juice and skins are fermented and partially matured in large clay jars (Qvevri) that are buried in the earth for several months'* (thanks M&S!) So the slightly oxidised style - a hint of fino sherry on the nose - is absolutely deliberate and the wine is 'textured' on the palate in quite an unusual way reminiscent of quince (quoted on the label and agreed by the group). Another comment overheard 'you could run lawnmowers on it' wasn't on the label...so it's fair to say that this got mixed reactions in the room! I say full marks (geddit) to M&S for being 'out there' with their wine-buying and opening up our minds and tastebuds to an unusual and genuinely local wine.

Reds

5. Tikves Vranec Merlot 2013, Macedonia 12.5% £9.00

Aromas of 'cloves' with a soft palate, easy drinking style. 'BBQ wine' many of us thought – inoffensive, smooth, a bit of a mass market feel to it. Apparently Derek was only charged 4.65 for this at the till but it wasn't clear why the large discount! Probably about halfway between that and the shelf price might be more realistic we thought. It was very nice with the Brussels pate...

6. Anfora Trio 2014, Turkey 13% £8.50

Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon/Kalecik Karasi blend (40/20/40%). 'Red fruit and cocoa' (from the back label) on the nose, slightly jammy perhaps, and 'cocoa powder rather than cocoa' was the verdict in the room! A hint of the metallic about it too – also heard was the comment 'like sniffing a brake disc'... We thought this might benefit from a couple of years' bottle age – it wasn't disliked but opinion varied. The 40% local grape seemed quite prominent in the blend. Grapes from a high altitude limestone plateau, unoaked.

7. Chateau Ksara Clos St Alphonse 2013, Lebanon 13.5% £10.00

Syrah/Cabernet Franc/Cabernet Sauvignon blend (50/30/20%) from the Bekaa Valley (of Ch Musar fame). Not as wildly idiosyncratic as Musar - some of the same off-beat flavour and style, but not that edge of near-volatility you sometimes get with Musar so probably more suited to the international palate. That said, one comment heard was 'I feel assaulted by that wine!' - which indicates something a bit out of the ordinary. One bottle had been decanted, one not, which proved to be an interesting comparison. Nose of mint and burnt rubber ('more the rubber than the mint!') with smoky spiciness on a big mid-palate. Very mixed reactions - I loved it but then I'm a fan of Musar... Probably one to keep – it's still pretty young, and £10 looks a good price in that light.

8. Chateau Mukhrani Saperavi 2012, Georgia 13.5% £10.00

Saperavi means 'dye' and this was a deep garnet/purple colour with very little rim. A slightly medicinal nose, quite restrained, and some thought it had 'a smell of the sea' about it. Quite a classy palate, again restrained, but some attractive spicy notes and a good lengthy finish. Generally liked and felt to be good value.

A really interesting selection from Derek reflecting the diversity of often historic winemaking regions, whose wines are becoming more widely stocked in the UK by more enterprising retailers. M&S is certainly in that category judging by tonight's wines.

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