

## The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



### 'Head West Old Man!'

Presenter: Derek Avery

24 August 2016

Another short notice (though you'd never know it) presentation from Derek - a romp through the west coast of the US, courtesy (for the most part) of that quirkiest of independent wine merchants D. Byrne & Co of Clitheroe

#### The wines

##### Whites

##### 1. E & J Gallo Pinot Grigio 2015, Sonoma

12%    £6.00  
Tesco

Served as our welcome aperitif / wine no 1. Derek quite rightly justified this by stating that you could not possibly have a mostly Californian evening without representing Gallo as the biggest US producer of mass market quaffers, although they do of course also produce some premium wines. Pale lemon, zingy sherbety palate, a fresh simple swig, what it says on the tin. Thankfully not over-sweet on the finish.

##### 2. Firesteed Pinot Gris 2013, Oregon

12.1%    £13.99

Nice to have Oregon represented since the overall quality and small production makes these wines relatively expensive. Sadly the first bottle was noticeably corked – the other bottle was much fresher so we eked that one out between the two tables. My teaspoonful suggested zesty acidity and a bready palate, richer than the 12.1% alcohol would suggest. Generally liked, so a real pity about the corky first bottle (just luck of the draw, and D. Byrne would undoubtedly gladly have replaced it but Clitheroe's a bit of a trek from Basingstoke...).

##### 3. Wente Morning Fog Chardonnay 2014, Livermore Valley

13.5%    £9.59

This family winery with German ancestry featured in the recent Channel 4 series The Wine Show. At this price it must be their entry level Chardonnay but it showed very typical Californian characteristics – a pineapple chunk nose with new oak pretty apparent on the palate. It was a hot evening in Basingstoke and the wine was unavoidably getting a tad warm in the glass which will have accentuated the oak. My notes say 'nice balance, fair amount of oak, some alcohol on the finish but quite a fresh mid-palate, looks good value'. But see comparison with the next wine...

**4. Clos du Val Chardonnay 2013, Carneros** 14.1% £19.59  
Having tasted Clos du Val some years ago Derek's memory of it was of a heavily oaked Chardonnay in an old-school Californian style - a tropical palate teetering towards obliteration by purposeful wood. Can be enjoyable when done well, but only at a price and generally in small doses... So a bit of a surprise here – admirable restraint in the oak department, beautifully integrated into a full rich palate. Still quite closed so probably needing time in which to fully open up. It made wine 3 look rather obvious – this felt like a more distinguished wine with an enticing future ahead of it. Perhaps it also showed how the Californian approach to Chardonnay has changed in recent years from well-over-the-top woodiness to the use of better integrated oak to complement that vibrant tropical palate.

**5. Cline Viognier 2014, Sonoma** 14% £9.59  
Lots of appreciation around the room for the nose on this wine – 'you can just *smell* it!' and some discussion of our group's varying responses to Viognier – always a lively debate! I'm on the side of the doubters but I tend to be more receptive to New World examples than to southern French, and here is an example from a Sonoma Rhone specialist which made a lot of sense to many of us. Classic peach and apricot was noted by many, as was the freshness – no hint here of flabbiness.

### Reds

**6. Cartlidge & Browne Cabernet Sauvignon 2013, Hopland** 13.5% £11.99  
Founded in 1980 as 'the original garage winery' and approved of by Robert Parker. They buy in quality grapes from small growers. Big black colour, good Cabernet nose, very powerful palate, ripe - a writ large 'Parker' wine for sure. Overheard comments - 'a bit of a smell of the garage about it' and 'face-whacker'! Plenty of ripe concentrated fruit overlaid with huge robust structure. Decent finish.

**7. Gnarly Head Petite Syrah 2013, Manteca** 14.5% £11.99  
Petite Syrah is also known as Durif. A definite herbal nose, tangy grippy tannins prominent but with an unexpectedly soft finish. More 'Northern Rhone' than 'Shiraz' in style. Chewy on the mid-palate. Characterful and generally much liked.

**8. Ironstone Old Vine Zinfandel 2013, Lodi** 14.5% £8.99  
'14.5% and climbing...' said Derek. Less intense than wine 7, but unsurprisingly the alcohol seemed dominant on the finish,. Perhaps a bit less 'put together' than the previous two reds, but paradoxically (in view of the alcoholic finish) some lighter sweeter Zinfandel fruit was a pleasant contrast.

**9. Quady Elysium Black Muscat 2012, Madera** 15% £10.00  
What a nice treat this was – I hadn't tasted it for some years. It's a real curiosity made by Andrew Quady (perhaps better known for his more widely available Essensia Orange Muscat) – this is a red dessert Muscat, very aromatic but with a robust core that gives it real bite and interest. Overheard – 'medicinal, in the sense of healing'! A terrific match for the superb home baked rich chocolate tart brought along by Derek. Who needs GBBO?

A splendid evening as always from Derek, complete with a resume of the 'experience' that is the D. Byrne wine shop in Clitheroe (you'd need several hours to do it justice) and a line-up of their wines that might not be so easily available elsewhere at these prices

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