

U3A ST AUSTELL WINE APPRECIATION GROUP MAY 2020 NEWSLETTER



Dear Fellow Wine Members

May has arrived, we are still in lockdown and no doubt all coping with different strategies and levels of success. Hopefully the one constant we still have is our enjoyment of wine, and the fact that we can share that with others.

MY MUSINGS DURING LOCKDOWN

... and with the wine appreciation group in mind, I began to think about my enjoyment of wine and where it came from and how it has grown.

I guess it started as a child at our Sunday lunch table where my parents always had a bottle of wine to accompany their food and on occasions my sisters and I were given small glasses of wine to try. How grown up we felt! At that time it was dominated by German whites in the main with a few French reds or in the Summer Mateus Rose in that great shaped bottle (how many people made lamps with them?). Black Tower in its slim elegant black bottle a Liebfraumilch blend, its rival Blue Nun with the photo of the nun in her blue habit, comparatively sweet white wines which evoke lovely childhood memories. (I believe these two wines have since been relaunched.)

In my twenties going out for meals with friends we would often choose a Chianti in the raffia covered bottles as it was thought to be cool. However when holidays abroad showed me wines the like of which I hadn't experienced, a whole new horizon opened up. Early trips driving through France staying at enormous Chateaux where the owner, often a widow, would provide accommodation and meals to supplement her income, and days spent visiting magnificent vineyards tasting wines from the Loire, mineral and flinty Sancerre, Pouilly Fume and being received like royalty by the vineyard owners. Staying in Epernay and going around the champagne houses was a dream, the earthy reds of Bordeaux such as in St Emilion and then Cognac houses where the cognac permeates the stone walls and you actually can breathe it in was an eye opener to the younger me. Viognier from Condrieu in the N Rhone, fragrant and floral and utterly delicious. Needless to say every holiday since has had to include some form of wine tasting..

Supermarkets and off licences started to expand their range of wines with imports from all over the world, which allowed experiments at home, and as budget allowed choosing different wines out in restaurants; who knew that Riesling I used to hate as too sweet would go so well with a curry, that in an Italian restaurant there were actually some wonderful rich and luscious wines, not as I had remembered them. Then the advent of Dinner Parties came along and we all tried our best to find wines that were not just “plonk” to match our lovingly prepared dishes, and this is when I also found my taste for dessert wines; rich unctuous sweet liquid.

30 years ago we moved, joined a Wine Appreciation group to meet some new friends. It was an excellent decision and through this group tasted wines we would never think of buying, and some we couldn't afford to buy. Hungarian Tokai with the sweet noble rot grapes, the fabulous Lebanese Chateau Musar, (now a favourite for very special occasions), the delicious wines from Alsace, small quantity Swiss wines generally kept in Switzerland for their own consumption and wines from almost every country that produces and exports wines. We heard of organic and biodynamic wines, we learnt about second fermentation, about disgorgement in the champagne process and much more – much of which sadly has not been retained in great detail! Favourites we remembered and purchased after meetings, some we disliked, but the

experiences of simply trying new wines and savouring the flavours was utterly absorbing. Tasting the same grape variety from two or three countries that taste so completely different, trying the same wine but different vintages and suddenly quality and flavour can change. Wine is now totally accessible to everyone at every level, whether you want a supermarket bottle for £6 or you want to buy wine as an investment, it's all there for us, how lucky we are. We should never close our minds to wines, which is why in the Wine Group we can try something new in our tastings. Each wine has been made with love and care by the wine maker, some won't necessarily be to our taste but we may just come across one we absolutely love and have great fun on the way looking for it.

MEMBERS TASTING NOTES

Ros and Ian Mitchell kindly sent in this very comprehensive tasting description, for which I thank them.

“Thank you for the recent Wine Appreciation Group messages which we have enjoyed reading.

Having received the first of your wine group messages following “lockdown” I went out to the recycling bin to take a cheerful photo of the last bottle of wine we had drunk. Sancerre is a Loire wine made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes. We were introduced to it years ago when camping in France with a young family. Ian’s father arrived to join us with a bottle and proceeded to empty our tiny but precious camping fridge of its food content to ensure that the wine was appropriately chilled! It has a slightly metallic gooseberry taste and has become a real favourite over the years, often enjoyed with fish dishes.



Having drunk the Sancerre we had come to the end of the wines we had brought back from holidaying in France last year. With no possibility of a visit to France at the moment to renew wine stocks we were very interested to read your further messages which included information about obtaining wines from local suppliers. We enjoyed choosing a case of wines from Ellis Wharton who gave a quick and efficient delivery service.

From the delivery we have now enjoyed a lovely Vouvray pictured. The grape is Chenin Blanc and the taste was metallic, honeyed fruit, slightly sweeter than the Sancerre.



This weekend we sampled a Saumur Champigny, continuing the Loire theme. The grape is Cabernet Franc, the taste was of caramel, quite dry and most enjoyable.



We do hope that you and all the other members of the group are keeping well and look forward to meeting up again when possible.”

Over last weekend, Chris and I opened two bottles of wine we had bought for around £6/7 per bottle not expecting great things from either of them but wanted to compare as both from Sicily. One I thoroughly enjoyed and the other Chris preferred. My choice a Castellore Sauvignon Grillo 12.5% from Sicily, purchased in Aldi for around £5 which I really enjoyed as an aperitif. A dry elegant Sauvignon with late-harvested coastal Grillo gave tropical notes alongside a floral and herbaceous aroma and perfectly balanced this elegant wine. A bargain.

However Chris preferred a wine purchased from Wine World Honiton, on one of our many trips up the A303, (now online as cheapstreetwine.co.uk - they have small quantities of bin ends at very reasonable prices) for around £7, the Ca' di Ponti Catarratto 12.5% also from Sicily. This is a grape we didn't know with aromatics of floral peach, tropical fruit and a hint of aniseed, rounded flavours with lemony acidity. I think I preferred the Aldi wine as there was less acidity surprisingly, but it was a good comparison looking at two similarly priced wines from the same island.

Janet Harvey sent the following, a great idea for wine tasting in lockdown:

“I decided to approach lockdown wine choices as an opportunity to travel ‘virtually’, deliberately setting out to explore wines somewhat off my beaten track even if I cannot try them on their native soil. My first such expedition was to Portugal. Both of my choices are whites.

My first recommendation is Casa de Vila Verde 2018, Laithwaite's (online), £10.49. It's been a long time since I drank vino verde: it's not fashionable so not too widely available. Casa de Vila combines the juice of 4 grapes: Loreiro, Arinto, Trajadura and Avisso. It's fresh and fruity with a pleasant aroma, a slightly fizzy sensation on the tongue, and a good finish. It is fine on its own as an aperitif, but also goes well with food, particularly pasta and seafood.

My second choice is Arinto 2018, Waitrose, £7.99. This is a single-grape wine. Arinto grapes are grown in the Lisbon area and the variety is also known there as Pederna. It has a fresh, almost sharp, and slightly mineral quality. It's akin to Sauvignon Blanc, but the typical Sauvignon gooseberry aroma is replaced by more complex aromas of apple and citrus. As with my previous choice, it goes well with food: I tried it with the first of this season's asparagus and it was a good match.”

Please keep your thoughts, ideas and tasting notes coming it's a great way to keep in touch, and even though we can't sit together in a room tasting I am sure we can all close our eyes and imagine!

Stay safe everyone, enjoy the weekend.

Regards Amanda