

U3A ST AUSTELL WINE APPRECIATION GROUP

DECEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER



Dear Wine Group members

Despite now knowing we are in “Tier 1” for the moment, and what we are “allowed” to do over the Festive Period, it doesn’t alter the fact that we still cannot safely meet in person face to face as a group. I have bumped into some of you on my walks around the area, and the common theme is that everyone is missing the U3A groups not only for the learning and sharing they offer, but more the social contact. Fingers crossed we can resume our Wine Group in the not too distant future and reconnect. In the meantime, here are my ramblings, and apologies if they go on too long. For any of you who don’t want to read acres of reviews, do look through to find where I recommend a couple of wine themed films, which may keep you busy for an hour or more, hopefully quaffing a glass or two.

A recent zoom wine tasting “Chablis and Beyond” gave us 8 styles of Chardonnay which showed the diversity of this great grape, ideal at Christmas. I tried to take notes and taste at the same time, so apologies if any facts are incorrect, and the tasting notes are my own! Prices are “offer price for the tasting” but they can be sourced cheaper if you look around on the internet and if you ask a local wine merchant I am sure they will point you in a similar direction.

Firstly we were informed that we were possibly using incorrect glasses to taste! We should use a **big bulbous glass to taste Chardonnay**, which gives a larger surface area in which to release more aromas. For information, Reidel tasting glasses are considered the best and there is, apparently, a tasting given by them which shows how the glass completely changes the character of a wine. Note to self: buy more wine glasses (but where to store them??)



Our 100ml bottles lined up ready for the tasting with first one already poured (no not specimen samples!)

Chardonnay as we all know, takes on different characteristics depending on cool climate (light and crisp, lemon, apples, peach, elderflower, pear and melon) or warmer climate (pineapple, boiled sweets, honey, nuts, rich and creamy). Chardonnay not only thrives, but needs harsh conditions and poorer soils, it positively thrives on limestone, rocky and flinty soil (all typical flavours for Chablis).

Wine 1

Chateau de Poncie 2019, Beaujolais Villages Blanc 12.5% £13.42

Vale pale colour, with medium legs, slightly petrol on the nose, flavours of vanilla, toast, slight oak (used oak barrels for only 7-8 months), clean and rich. Interesting wine from Beaujolais known for its reds, and where only 2% of the total vines are Chardonnay. Chateau de Poncie found a site where the soil was very light and sandy, ideal for these grapes, with gentle rolling hillsides, only 2.2 Hect. production with harvesting done by hand. Like most Chardonnays would pair with white meats, roast chicken, mushroom risotto, scallops or salmon or seafood gratin. A good start.

Wine 2

Savigny Les Beaune Premier Cru, Hauts Marconnets, Bourgogne, 2017, 13% £29.88

Here we enjoyed the charming French tones of Vincent Wallays from the producer, Domaine Chanson (1750 onwards, latterly acquired by Bollinger but still family managed) who talked eloquently and lovingly about two of their wines we were about to taste. This Premier Cru is planted on very poor soil, on steep slopes making the

roots work hard to dig deep and give forth the aromatics of the soil into the wine. Again this area is known for its Pinot Noir, and only 5% is planted with Chardonnay. 15% of the wine is in new oak for 12 months. The 2017 vintage in Burgundy was the first "normal" vintage for 7 years, giving perfect grape growing conditions.

A golden appearance with good legs. Sesame seed on the nose, which is typical from this region, very slight citrus taste and white pear, with a freshness (acidity) and elongated length. A complex but delicious wine particularly good with chicken and turkey, fish and cheese.

Wine 3

Chablis Grand Cru Bougros 2016, N Burgundy, 13%, £42.20

This second wine from Domaine Chanson is grown on "Kimmeridge soil" a very unique type of soil found at the core of the Chablis wine region. The soil was classified in the middle of the 18th century - by a French geologist Alcide d'Obigny, while working in Dorset near the town of Kimmeridge in the south of England. He identified a unique layer of dark marl which he named Kimmeridgian (the Kimmeridgian soils found in France, differ from that found in England. The layer is a relatively uniform chalky marl, though with thin marly limestone containing rich layers of seashells. Strata formed from the post Jurassic period continued to be deposited in the shallow sea areas which once covered this part of France.) Grand Crus are always from this soil, giving great flinty aromatics so typical of Chablis. This 2016 vintage is rather special as that year suffered with a double Black Frost episode and only the strongest vines survived giving the best wine.

This Grand Cru is one of only 7 "Climats" (named production sites) in the Chablis Grand Cru classification, sitting in the NW edge of the region.

The pale golden wine gave a light peach scented bouquet, which also had hints of tropical fruit and flint. On the palate fresh minerality with a creaminess and long finish. Pairing with lobster, pate, goats cheese and turkey.

This was my favourite wine of the evening for its pureness and complex flavours, but at the price should have been. It should improve each year and will keep for many years to come. This is one reason why wine tasting is so interesting, to be able to taste wines like this but not have to buy a whole bottle to see if you like it!

Wine 4

Ventisquero Grey (Glacier) Chardonnay, Casablanca Valley, Chile, 12.5% £13.16

Ventisquero started making wines in 1988 when some big names in the wine world eg Penfolds, assisted their start up. They have 230 Hect. in this region which offers irrigation from the mountains and moderate temperatures. 2016 vintage grapes were cooled immediately to 13-15 degrees, 80% matured in lightly oaked barrels, the remainder in stainless steel. The wine was dark golden but no legs, much tropical

fruit on the nose including melon and mango, with a well balanced taste including dried fruit, vanilla, honey and delicate acidity. Would pair with oily fish, pasta and white meat.

Wine 5

Wente Chardonnay Morning Fog, San Francisco, California 2018, 13.5% £13.42
(vegan and vegetarian)

Founded more than 125 years ago, Wente Vineyards is America's oldest, continuously operated family owned winery. The winery has over 2000 acres of vineyards in the Livermore Valley, San Francisco Bay. "Morning Fog" due to the daily fog coming in off the ocean each morning, which covers the vineyards and cools the atmosphere, giving a more Mediterranean climate than other US wine areas. This winery has a female team and is into sustainability.

The wine was very pale golden with good legs. On the nose pears, peach and apricot with subtle oak. To taste fruit, vanilla and very light oak with a semi sweetness which disappears into a richness. Would pair well with creamy dishes.

Interestingly we were then told about the "**Judgement of Paris in 1976**". Steven Spurrier a British wine merchant in Paris and "Educator of Wines" selling French wines, realised he needed to diversify from purely French wine. Spurrier in 1976 organized and led the "Judgement of Paris" (JoP), a blind tasting for the French trade and media, pairing some of the best Bordeaux and Burgundy alongside newly discovered California Cabernet Sauvignons and Chardonnays. The wines from the US beat the French (no one more surprised than Spurrier) and the reputation of US wines was firmly established. In 1986 the same type of tasting took place and again the US wines beat the French!! On the 30th anniversary in 2006 the same happened. Spurrier now has a vineyard and winery in Dorset. There has been a film made based on this "shocking" event "**Bottle shock**" which we watched the following evening and enjoyed very much. Alan Rickman plays Spurrier, and there is a bit of a love element, but a good gentle film. We found it on Amazon Prime.



A painting of the "Judgement of Paris"

Wine 6

Lyme Bay Chardonnay 2016, Dorset England, 12% £19.14

This wine was pale golden, a zesty pink grapefruit and vanilla nose with taste of sharp stone and citrus fruits, slightly oaked, average length. Although this was a Gold Decanter winner, it was not for me as rather thin and wishy washy. 2016 had a very dry warm late Autumn which was great for the grapes, which had stainless steel fermentation and then French oak barrels. Only 3,000 bottles were made. The grapes are actually grown in Essex (a very good Chardonnay growing area 50m above sea level) and then the juice taken to Devon. Lyme Bay Winery also produce cider, fruit wine, liquers and spirits. Light enough to pair with a variety of dishes.

Wine 7

Nautilus Chardonnay, Marlborough, NZ, 2018 13% £21.34 (vegan, no finings used)

We were treated to a tour of part of the vineyard and wine making area and cellars by Adam Balasoglou. Nautilus owns six vineyards, and in 1980 planted a vineyard of Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay. In 1973 the first Marlborough grapes were planted, but were young varieties that just didn't work. In 1989 the first Chardonnay was ready. Their location is ideal with protection from hillsides and mountains and a North West wind to blow away disease. 70% of their wines are exported to 40 countries. They are sustainability certified.

A beautiful golden appearance to the wine, perhaps popcorn on the nose with a well balanced taste, fruit rich, slightly sweet with a good minerality and bit of acidity. Should develop a creaminess as it ages. Suggested food caramelised onion tart with feta.

Wine 8

Shaw & Smith Chardonnay M3 2018, Adelaide Hills, Australia 13.5% £23.20

Cousins Martin Shaw & Michael Smith from the Adelaide Hills are surrounded by hearty red wines in the North and big heavy reds all around. With their extra altitude and cooler climate and rainfall, ideal Chardonnay conditions which they started 20 years ago. They now produce in addition, Shiraz, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. Very keen on sustainability, and use sheep to control weeds and seaweed as a natural fertiliser.

Flower blossom notes on the nose, citrus and nectarine taste with very slight oak and sweet acidity, longish length to this very pale golden wine. Would pair well with roast pork or mushroom dishes.

I hope this has not bored you, but I thought it fascinating how one grape variety used as 100% Chardonnay looked, smelt and tasted quite so different. After tasting each wine I gave it a rating and other than the Grand cru, which scored the highest, the other two French wines were very close with the Wente Morning Fog from California coming in next.

A few days after watching the film “Bottle Shock” we found, (again on Amazon Prime but you may well be able to find elsewhere), two more films we enjoyed on the subject of wine. The first a documentary style film, called **SOMM3**, about the power world class Sommeliers have on the fate of wines, and therefore the fortunes (or otherwise) of the vineyards with real life Sommeliers in the top echelon of US wines, and also included Steven Spurrier (as above) and Jancis Robinson. The 2nd docu-film was “**A Year in Burgundy**” following two Burgundian vineyards and the wine makers and shows just what they face to make the perfect bottles of wine. If you have an hour or so on a wet dismal day, you could do better than watch one or all of these films, and I hope you enjoy them if you do.

During another wine tasting zoom event (which I won't go into now as I have probably bored you rigid already) there were two unusual beverages we were given to try which I will briefly tell you about.

A virtually alcohol free... **Wild Life Botanicals Blush (Bubbles with Benefits) 0.5% £13.20** (full bottle size) by the creator of Cornish Sea Salt, made and bottled here in Cornwall. This is a pioneering sparkling wine that introduces the concept “Bubbles with Benefits”. The champagne method is used but then the wine is **dealcoholized**, leaving a virtually no alcohol “fizz” in both a “nude” or “blush” variety. We tasted the blush which was quite fizzy, very fruity, (think wild strawberries and cream) and very aromatic. These drinks are infused with an elixir of many vitamins, minerals and botanicals chosen for health giving properties, and each glass contains less than 35 calories. A useful bottle to have if you need a pick me up, or want to take to a party but not drink alcohol. I would like to taste the nude to see how it compares to a Prosecco...



Graham's Blend No 5 White Port at 19% from Douro, Portugal. £18.44. This is made by the 5th generation of the Symington family who now own many of the large Port houses, and who wanted to make a new contemporary style White Port to appeal to gin drinkers! Grapes used are Moscatel Galego and Malvasia Fina, two very fragrant varieties. The Port was extremely pale almost clear, it had a floral nose with tropical notes and a deliciously intensely floral and semi sweet taste. I loved it on its own, or would have it as a dessert wine, but the suggestion is to have with a dash of tonic water.

Not wishing to take any more of your time, I would like to wish you all a Happy Christmas and stay safe, and to thank you for your patience during this year when we haven't been able to meet physically. Let's all raise a glass to our wine group and look forward to the day when we can hold a wine tasting in person!

Amanda