

# u3a ST AUSTELL WINE APPRECIATION GROUP

## FEBRUARY 2024 NEWSLETTER



*Thanks so very much to one of our members Sue Smith, for painting the above new “logo” for our Wine Group as part of her u3a Painting for Pleasure project. It’s great!!*

Dear Wine Group Members

I trust if you were doing dry January (or “Try January” as some wine merchants were advertising it) you feel very sanctimonious now, but will be looking forward to restarting your tasting adventure in wine. Welcome back and Cheers to another year of u3a Wine Group!

### **General Wine News**

#### **Vineyard Fires**

I have just read of the ingenuity of a family run vineyard in Italy a month or so ago, where predicted overnight temperatures were so low that their vines, which had already started to shoot new buds, would have been destroyed. As the temperature did indeed start to decline as predicted, workers stayed in the fields all night lighting bonfires in-between rows of vines. From afar the

vineyard look on fire, but the fires were carefully managed, and come morning all the vines were saved. What dedication to the cause.

## **Thieves Steal \$1.63 Million in Wines from Legendary Paris Restaurant La Tour d'Argent**

More than 80 rare bottles went missing from the Grand Award winner's cellar, perhaps during recent renovations. The owners of La Tour d'Argent, the legendary Parisian restaurant and Wine Spectator Grand Award winner, filed a complaint with police last week following an inventory taken of their extensive wine collection. More than 80 bottles, worth \$1.63 million (€1.5 million), are missing from the cellar, including bottles from Burgundy's Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. There were no signs of forced entry.

The theft came to light following an extensive renovation, when the restaurant was closed, between April 2022 and September 2023. The 83 missing wines were taken sometime between 2020 and January 2024, when the most recent audit of the cellar was conducted.

La Tour d'Argent is synonymous with French gastronomy. Located on the Seine at 15 Quai de la Tournelle, the restaurant is known for a stupendous view of the river and Notre Dame Cathedral from the sixth-floor dining room. The atmospheric wine cellar, two floors underground, houses some 300,000 bottles totalling an estimated \$27 million.

La Tour d'Argent's long history begins in 1582, when it first opened as an inn where King Henry III's nobility could dine. The restaurant soon was among the most fashionable places to eat in Europe.

It was rebuilt after the French Revolution. During the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867, when countries showcased their finest inventions and products, Russian Czar Alexander II, the future Czar Alexander III, King Wilhelm I of Prussia and Prince Otto von Bismarck dined at the same table. In the 1930s, the building took the shape it has today, when the owners moved the kitchen and dining room upstairs to take advantage of the breathtaking views. During the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1940, the restaurant's then-owner hid his most prized wines behind a fake wall.

Normally, the wine cellar is under tight security. The bottles are numbered, making resale on the open market difficult. In recent years, though, several top restaurants have been struck by knowledgeable wine thieves, who are suspected of selling to private collectors.

## **What does 2024 hold for the wine world? (courtesy of Wine Searcher)**

The New Year marks the beginning of a fresh cycle of seasons, a harbinger of hope, and if the last couple of years are anything to go by, hope is sorely needed.

Almost halfway through the decade, and what a decade it's been. We've had a global pandemic, two brutal ongoing wars alongside various debased acts of terror, topped off with an escalating cost of living crisis all set against an increasingly alarming backdrop of climate change. Fun times.

On the other hand, the world has never been better, the environment has never been more valued with young people highly conscious of what's at stake. Technology is greening up on a never-before-seen scale – the construction of the Dogger Bank wind farm a shining example.

People have also never been more accepted, with diversity and inclusion widely held as key tenets. Although a fully equal world is still a long way off – and what has been achieved is undoubtedly fragile at the seams – for many, the present day is still kinder than the prejudices of the past.

The wine and spirits industry is also in a state of flux as alcohol consumption continues its downward trend. This is largely thanks to Gen Z, an infinitely more sensible generation than their predecessors, whose coming of age during a global pandemic was undoubtedly sobering stuff.

However, despite the overall decline, some emerging trends may give a flagging industry that much-needed edge.

### **Low or non alcohol**

On that note, one of the biggest trends to grip the wine and spirits world hinges around low – or non – alcoholic drinks for well beyond dry January, think kombucha but different. Seedlip is no longer the only cowboy in town with various rivals like Three Spirit, Ghia and De Soi all having a bite.

Various mock spirits and premixed non-alcoholic cocktails are also hitting the market mimicking everything from rum and Tequila to G&Ts. Non-alcoholic beers are also some of the most successful drinks on the market, giving consumers that distinctive hop hit without a hint of ethanol.

Non-alcoholic wines are also making an impact, although harder to convincingly mimic their alcoholic counterparts than beer and spirits – as the alcohol in wine is often responsible for both the body and a large portion of the aromatics – but serious headway is still being made.

Producers like Giesen and McGuigan have some strong non-alcoholic offerings, while specialist companies like Thomson & Scott are storming the world with their alcohol-free wines that range from sparkling Chardonnay and rosé to still reds and whites.

Unsurprisingly, these trends show no signs of slowing – especially as Gen Z appear to be ever further entrenched in sober living.

## **Beyond Bordeaux**

For those still drinking, every year sees the elevation of a trendy new region or style as it hits the big-time, whether it's Picpoul de Pinet or prestigious Provençal rosé, sommeliers are always on the hunt for the next big thing. So what's it going to be this year?

Old World, New World, red, white, sweet, dry, still, sparkling? Lesser celebrated European regions like Sicily, Greece, Douro, and Hungary might make their mark. The US may see the rise of cool-climate regions like Washington and the Finger Lakes, while South Africa is likely to continue climbing the ranks.

While prestigious regions – like Burgundy and Bordeaux – are unlikely to ever go out of fashion, the top cuvées are generally unaffordable and forever out of reach for most, making less lauded but equally delicious alternatives the holy grail.

Fortunately, when it comes to wine there are many holy grails as intrepid producers endeavour to get their wines to market while sommeliers delight in discovering them. These fresh alternatives to the big names in wine are only set to grow in the year ahead.

## **Room at the inn**

The focus on diversity and making the world of wine and spirits a more accessible place is also likely to continue. Initiatives like the She Can Fund founded by the McBride Sisters, which aims to close the gender and race gap within the world of wine, are gaining traction.

## **Going green**

Another key – and increasingly essential – trend is the focus on sustainability, as 2023 has been widely reported as the world's hottest year by a not-inconsiderable margin.

Brands like Packamama and Silver Oak – frequently considered California's most eco-conscious winery – are leading the way whether it's lightweight flat packaging, solar panels or water conservation.

Green practices within the vineyards are also gaining traction alongside a greater awareness of what pesticides do to soil health and, despite the global decline in wine consumption, the production of organic and biodynamic wine is on the rise.

## **Rise of the machine**

Finally, artificial intelligence is undoubtedly the great mover and shaker, while remaining deeply enigmatic as the implications and all it entails continue to unfurl, albeit at a rapid pace.

In the world of wine, viticulture is already being assisted by robots like Oxin – which can mulch, spray, mow and trim – and Burro which busily take grapes from the picker to the winery.

Outside of the vineyard, AI can also be used to generate generic grape profiles and tasting notes, although so far, stopping short of creating artificial olfactory and gustatory systems, the ability to smell and taste remains exclusive to us carbon-based lifeforms – at least for the time being.

So all in all, let's hope 2024 sees a greener, more inclusive, forward-thinking wine industry, but for that to happen, people have to keep drinking – Gen Z, we're looking at you!

*So that last statement must mean our generation has to maintain and uphold the sales of wine ourselves, and so with that in mind...*

## **2024 Programme**

**I must reiterate, that before making payments for events, check with Sue Osbrink that there are spaces left.** We are seeing a good number of members paying well in advance for our monthly tastings, both in-house and external, and when numbers are limited this process is essential.

Due to a last minute cancellation, we have a space (or could make 2 spaces) for next week's tasting. Please contact me asap if you are interested see below, **£15 per head.**

**9<sup>th</sup> February 6.45pm start, Arts Centre - Members' Tasting of wines around £12**

Sue Smith presenting a fizz, Chris Wright showing a white, myself and Chris showing two styles of red wine and Karen Scott and Lucinda Davison a dessert wine.

Book taxis for 10pm or just after so that you can help clear up, many thanks. Thank you very much also to Elaine Nelson, Mike & Wendy Edwards and Ann & Malcolm Harper for a joint effort in preparing the food for this month, and of course to our brave wine presenters.

Don't forget to bring your tasting glasses.

**Next month March 15<sup>th</sup> 6.45pm Arts Centre** we have Mick and Jenny Skipp and Shirley Sallis who have bravely offered to jointly run a **“Call My Bluff evening of wine tasting with food” £15pp.**

We are told **“We are the panel! You are the Audience!** All based on the Call my Bluff TV Programme. You will be blind tasting 5 wines. 1 rose, 2 whites and 2 reds and it is for you as teams of 4, to decide which is true and which is false from our descriptions after tasting. After all, everyone knows the phrase “Mad as a March Hare” and we think that's all you need to know for now! It will be an evening of fun and full of surprises”.

Booking now open, pay before February 28<sup>th</sup>. Ref WGMAR24 after your membership number(s). Remember to confirm with Sue Osbrink there are still spaces prior to payment. **Numbers are limited according to the bottles of wine purchased and only a handful of tickets remain.** Bring your own tasting glasses.

**April 12 tasting is in Pentewan** at the Sailing Club, and once again **Carol Avery** is giving us a tasting with a difference. All the wines will be **Volcanic wines**, they will have been grown near or around volcanos where the soil is very definitely volcanic.

**Suggest you taxi share where possible, to be dropped off at the Ship Inn** (the Sailing Club is on the opposite side of the water). **Arrival 6.45pm for 7pm start and finish by 9.30pm** but departure taxis for 9.45pm earliest to give time to walk over to the Ship. **Cost pp is £27** and Carol is providing “generous platters of food”. Take your own tasting glasses please. An exciting and new tasting for us all and will sell out rapidly if the past few years are anything to go by.

Numbers are limited due to the nature of the Sailing Club. **Book by March 30<sup>th</sup>.** Ref WGAPR24 plus your membership number(s).

**PLEASE NOTE** our **May date at Old Chapel Cellars** has had to change to May 9<sup>th</sup> – Thursday. **9<sup>th</sup> May Old Chapel Cellars wine merchant, Truro.** Arrival by minibus or own transport for 6.30pm start, to finish at 9.30pm with

time afterwards there to make purchases. Minibus pick up/drop off at Penrice School and Arts Centre. Cost is **£30pp** ref WGMAY24. Minibus cost is **£14.50pp** return. If booking the Minibus please state where you will be collected/dropped.

On this visit Louisa will present the topic **Grape Varietals**....intriguing title I think! As ever with this visit to one of our favourite Wine Merchants, we will taste a minimum of 5 wines with accompanying cheese and nibbles.

The system is to please email Sue Osbrink on [susanosbrink@gmail.com](mailto:susanosbrink@gmail.com) that you wish to book an event, once she confirms there are spaces, please pay the due amount and confirm back to her you have paid. This is essential especially where numbers are restricted, and if transport is being used as the minibus used seats 16 only. Should an event be so well subscribed that we need a coach, I will then look at the costings.

When paying for an event, your reference should be your membership number(s) followed by WG and the month eg xxxx\WGFeb.

**PAYMENTS TO THE WINE GROUP ACCOUNT PAY INTO**

**ACCOUNT NO 23132587 (Barclays Bank)**

**SORT CODE 20-30-47**

**U3a St Austell**

Finally **a little bit of housekeeping about the Arts Centre** and a reminder following the Chairman's email.

Someone recently turned a switch off in the upstairs kitchen which related to the fridge and the following morning it had defrosted and flooded. Should you need to use either kitchen, or any appliance please do not turn off any switches.

Only Group Leaders need to sign in and out of the Arts Centre, not all attendees of the group.

Thank you.

I look forward to seeing those of you who have booked, at the tasting on the 9<sup>th</sup> to kick off our 2024 programme.

Regards

**Amanda**