

# u3a ST AUSTELL WINE APPRECIATION GROUP

## FEBRUARY 2026 NEWSLETTER



Dear Wine Group Member

It is February in a few days, and knowing that the month of January is virtually over is heart-warming after incessant rain and the storms we have endured. We have to now wish for drier days, less wind and perhaps a glimpse of the sun, fingers crossed.

I hope most of you have avoided the many viruses that have been attacking some of our members and that everyone will be fit and well for our first tasting, which sold out in days. Perhaps everyone has had enough of the cold and wet and needs some sunshine in their glass to cheer them up?

I must thank the members who took time to let me know about the festive wines they enjoyed, and have copied their descriptions below for your interest ...

*“I saw in New Year on the roof terrace of my holiday rental near Valletta, watching fireworks and drinking Verdala Gellewza Frizzante, a rose made with a local grape variety.”*

Wow what a way to enjoy a fizz with an unbeatable view and see in the New Year in Malta!

*“I was proud to write a little sheet of tasting notes for our family festive meal as a bit of fun. Something I would never have dreamed of doing before I joined the wine group. We had Champagne (brought back from France) followed by a Spanish Priorat from Ellis Wharton with a sweet Sauternes with dessert (also brought back from France - definitely a reason to holiday there!)”*

Well that is a lovely recommendation for joining the Wine group if nothing else, and I am delighted that a little bit of knowledge gave you the confidence to write tasting notes. A future presenter perhaps???

*“I really enjoyed a sparkling **Vina Pomal** as a Friday night fizz. I thought it unusual to find a sparkling wine from the Rioja Denomination de Origen Calificada. It was the Reserva 2020 and 12% ABV. It has been shown a little oak but was nice and fresh which is my preference. It's made from 100% Garnacha (Grenache) and known as a Blanc de Noirs. So made from a red grape which will have been pressed so that the skin colour and flavours don't influence the final taste or colour. Bodegas Bilbainas have been making sparkling wine since 1913 and it shows. I bought it from **Majestic**. It's currently **£14.50 a bottle** or £13 on a mixed six and it's in my basket to buy again.*



*My second treat was **'MELPO' the Valley of the Muses**. I'm often asked what my favourite wine is. I don't have one but I do drink a lot of Rose at home. This one is made in the popular dry style. It smells of strawberries, there is plenty of berries in the mouthfeel and the lemon note at the end cuts through the sweetness without leaving a bitter taste. It's made in Central Greece from Syrah and another indigenous grape variety Roditis Alepou. If you see this second grape variety on a label I recommend you try it. It's the Roditis which adds the lemon taste.*

*We all like a story behind the label and listed in Gold to the right of the tree are the 9 Greek Muses who were the daughters of Zeus. Here are their names and associations:*

*Clio: History Erato: Lyric & Erotic Poetry Calliope: Epic Poetry & Rhetoric Euterpe: Flute & Lyric Poetry*

*Melpomene: Tragedy Polyhymnia: Hymns, Sacred Poetry & Mime Terpsichore: Dance & Chorus*

*Thalia: Comedy & Light Verse Urania: Astronomy & Astrology*

*The Muses were associated with Mount Helicon which is where the wine is made!*

*It was 12.5% and great with the Salmon starter but good on it's own too. It's available from **Laithwaites at £13.99** and stands up well on price v value in what has become a competitive rose market. “*



Thank you for two unusual recommendations, plus a history on the Greek muses, how interesting. I will certainly look out for them both when shopping in Majestic or Laithwaites.

## **International Wine Dates in February – if you need an excuse to open a certain bottle!**

1<sup>st</sup> as previously described last month, its International Furmint Day

2<sup>nd</sup> Its Happy Birthday to South African wine, celebrating 367 years of wine making

5<sup>th</sup> National Rose Day. Luckily for us, the following day we will be tasting an unusual Rose presented by Janet.

16<sup>th</sup> as previously discussed last month, International Syrah Day.

28<sup>th</sup> Open that bottle night! Always the last Saturday in February. Back in 2000, a husband and wife team who are wine critics, authors and journalists, decided it was THE day to open that special bottle of wine you have been waiting for a special occasion, but never got round to actually opening it. Someone had spent a long time perfecting that wine for you to enjoy, and this is the day to bite the bullet and open it! There is a social media #openthatbottlenight where people have posted their special bottle of wine which they had finally opened. Perhaps this is something you can try?

### **Review of 3 Californian Wines – and an idea for you all**

Chris and I, along with two other couples hold what we call “Wine Explorers” evenings approximately every other month, taking it in turn to decide on which grape, or country or any other theme. We then buy usually 3 wines which we hope the others have not yet tried, as a way to explore interesting wines we don’t generally buy. The hosts provide the wine alongside the usual foodie bits, cold meats, a cheese board, breads and other accompaniments. They also do a bit of research so that they can give information as to where it is grown and made, a little about the winery, and finally about the wine. Everyone contributes their opinion, which vary greatly as to nose and taste, and then mark it and guess the price. It is always a truly lovely and spirited evening, and we have found some gems. I tell you all this, so that perhaps you too could get together with friends, or

family and do a similar evening and let me know what wines you find. There is no need to be a wine expert or know much at all, as dear old Google will give you so much information!

Last night (as I am writing) Chris and I hosted a Californian evening, and I thought you may be interested as we all loved all the wines, and actually converted one couple who hitherto had been wary of Californian (mass marketed) wines. We purchased them at the beginning of 2025 in Constantine Stores, Mawnan Smith, so current pricing could be more expensive, but luckily two of these wines can be found in Majestic as I write, (different vintages) and a great price if you purchase a mix of 6.



**Wine 1: Kendall Jackson Vintner's Reserve Chardonnay 2022. 13.5% £16.99 (Majestic have a different year 2023/4 £20.50 or £15.00 for 6)**

**Grape Varieties:** 100% Chardonnay (from diff regions): 47% Monterey County, 25% Mendocino County, 18% Santa Barbara County, 10% Santa Maria Valley

Consensus was this was everything you wish a Chardonnay to be!

Kendall-Jackson is a well-known American winery that produces a wide range of wines, and this Chardonnay is made using grapes grown in the cool, coastal regions of California, which gives the wine its crisp, clean flavour. The wine is aged in American and French oak barrels for 5 months, which adds notes of vanilla and butter to the wine's fruit-forward flavour, a delicious medley of tropical, citrus and stone fruit aromas on the nose is followed by a toasty, rich and complex palate. This is known for its balance and complexity, and the Vintner's Reserve has the structure to age well for a number of years.

A great wine to pair with roasted white meats, creamy chicken dishes and was wonderful with our warm brie and cranberry tartlets and pigs in blankets.

**Wine 2: Giornata Barbera 2018 13.5%**

**Grape Varieties:** Barbera 100%      **Region:** Paso Robles

**Price £24.99 not available in Majestic.**

Everyone really loved this Barbera, until we had the final wine and then the decision was split.

Barbera is a red Italian wine grape variety that, as of 2020, was the third most-planted red grape variety in Italy. It

produces good yields and is known for deep colour, full body, low tannins and high levels of acidity. Century-old vines still exist in many regional vineyards and allow for the production of long-aging, robust red wines with intense fruit and enhanced tannic content.

Paso Robles, officially El Paso de Robles, is a city in San Luis Obispo County, California, United States. Located on the Salinas River about 30 mi north of San Luis Obispo, the city is known for its hot springs, abundance of wineries, production of olive oil, almond orchards.

Vibrant Barbera has on the nose notes of crushed dark cherry and blackberry fruit and gentle violet flora. The palate is silky with medium body and great purity of cranberry and red cherry fruits with a savoury almond note adding some complexity. Hint of liquorice and earthy spice. The finish is fresh, juicy and elegant. The acidity means this can be paired with many food items including seared vegetables, pizza, tuna, and cheese rich sauced dishes. Great with charcuterie and strong cheeses on the night.

### **Wine 3: Kendall Jackson Vintner's Reserve Pinot Noir 2019 14.5%**

**Grape Varieties:** Pinot Noir 100% **Region:** Sonoma County

**Price £16.99 (Majestic have a 2021 for £20.50 or £18.50 for 6)**

This was a heavyweight Pinot Noir, absolutely delicious and full of rich flavours, which kept changing in the mouth and also the glass. Absolute bargain for such a great Pinot Noir.

Kendall Jackson Vintner's Reserve Pinot Noir is an exceptional varietal from California, USA. Renowned for its

exquisite bouquet, it tantalises the senses with aromas of black cherry, raspberry, and hints of spicy oak. The palate is an elegant medley of dark cherries, ripe strawberries, and pomegranate, complemented by subtle caramel undertones. Its velvety tannins marry beautifully with a rich, lingering finish. This Pinot Noir showcases true craftsmanship and is an absolute delight for wine enthusiasts. An enchanting accompaniment to roasted lamb or duck, it also offers an ambrosial interlude when savoured solo.

**I hope you do go and buy at least one of these, you won't be disappointed.**

## **2026 Wine Appreciation meetings**

I am excited about our programme of events this year, especially with many members volunteering to present or indeed, run an evening. It is what the u3a is about, and great that some of you feel confident now to do so. Thank you so much, the variety of tastings we can look forward to is much enhanced by you members.

Something we all need to bear in mind is that the cost of wine has risen in the past 12 months due to import duty amongst other factors, and at home we personally have noticed a big hike in the cost of our regular purchases of certain wines. Additionally we have the increase on the cost

of food. I am very keen to keep the cost down of our in-house tastings as much as possible, but sometimes it is out of our hands where suppliers are involved and this depends very much on them individually, and which will impact the cost of tastings when we visit wine suppliers. Ellis Wharton, for instance, have kept the cost of our tastings at the original price for many years due to our loyalty to them, but now have no choice but to increase the cost to us and all their tastings.

Allen's Travel have been very kind and are holding the cost of the minibus for this year, no increase in price. We will not be giving a minibus cost in advance of people booking the bus, as we cannot afford a loss, so the cost will be equally divided by the numbers using it. Once the deadline for bookings is reached, or the bus is full, we will give you the cost.

Looking way ahead to December and our Christmas event, I know that everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves at the Cornwall Hotel, and as such my contact there has offered us a similar package keeping the 2025 cost for this year. A generous offer, which I have agreed. I must say that I thought the cost of the evening was more than worthwhile for the quality of everything we enjoyed. I am hoping the wine group, through raffles, will be able to pay for a glass of prosecco on arrival again. Staying there was a pleasure, and thoroughly worth the reduced rate, especially being able to use the pool and spa, and having a leisurely cooked breakfast the following morning. Just a thought for those who didn't stay last time!

FOR NEW MEMBERS MAINLY BUT ALL TO REMEMBER,  
the way to book for any event is:

1. Contact Sue Osbrink to check there are spaces
2. Pay the amount online giving the correct reference, starting with your membership numbers then WG...dependant on the month
3. Quick email to Sue confirming you have paid.

If this process is not followed, **your place cannot be guaranteed.**

Regarding refunds, I am afraid that once the deadline for payment date has passed, we cannot refund the cost as we will have had to either purchase the wines based on numbers, or pay wine merchants, usually 4 weeks prior to the event. We will if time allows, offer the place to other members and if they take up the place, once paid we will either refund or give you a credit.

**Events now open to book:**

**March 20th – food volunteer please**

**Wines of South Africa, by Sebastien from Wadebridge Wines. Arts Centre** 6.30pm for 6.45 start, finish at 9.30pm for clearing up, taxis at 10 please. **Cost pp £25** which includes the room fee, the food, and of course 6 wines. Maximum numbers 30. Pay by February 25th, reference xxxxWGMAR26.

Sebastien who returns again by popular request, giving us his extensive knowledge, oozing that French charm, accent and passion for his wines and who has given us memorable tastings in the past. We will taste a total of 6 South African wines, probably a Sparkling, a rose, 2 whites and 2 reds.

Sebastien will bring supplies of the wines, for members to buy on the night, or will take orders for delivery. One not to miss.

**THURSDAY April 23<sup>rd</sup>. At Old Chapel Cellars, Truro.**  
**“Wines with coastal influences”** Minibus with pickup Penrice by 5.20pm and Arts Centre 5.30pm (**earlier times than usual**).

Tasting to start at 6pm, to finish by 8pm with a departure at 8.30pm so time to browse and purchase from their extensive stock. **Cost £30pp for the tasting.** Minibus cost depending on numbers, tbc. Max number on minibus 16, if you wish to take a taxi and make your own way, please tell Sue on booking.

Old Chapel Cellars have just won “No 1 Independent Wine Merchant in the UK” a very prestigious award and a reflection on their professionalism and wide variety of stock.

Director of Old Chapel, Louisa Fitzpatrick will present to us this fascinating subject. It is always a pleasure to visit Old Chapel and especially enjoy Louisa’s great expertise, with time after to peruse their huge selection of wines and spirits.

Please eat beforehand as there will **only be nibbles** provided!

Pay ref xxxxWGAPR26 and pay by March 15<sup>th</sup>.

**May 15<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> Camel Valley?**

There is nothing currently planned for May, and I did not receive any feedback as to what you would like to do. So, I have a suggestion that for 15<sup>th</sup> May you book yourselves

onto a **Camel Valley wine tasting and tour (Nanstellon, Bodmin)** <https://www.camelvalley.com/tours>

Very local, and Camel Valley has a fantastic reputation for their award winning wines. Unfortunately they will not book group tours, and suggest everyone books a tour direct through their website.

The tour starts at 10.30am and finishes in a wine flight of 4 flagship wines, at a table until 12.30. **Cost £20pp**

Alternatively there is a Wednesday evening 13<sup>th</sup> Grand Tour for £30 starting at 5pm and finishing at 6.45pm.

For the daytime tour, I do not think the minibus would be available early enough as they are involved in school runs, so would suggest taxi sharing in 4s. For the evening tour if enough of you wanted to go perhaps we can arrange the minibus.

I will ask Sue to co-ordinate interest at this stage, so say whether you would prefer the daytime or early evening visit. Once enough of you for either one, you would then have to book yourselves direct, for the same date. Luckily at the moment their calendar for May is pretty free. We could then co-ordinate the minibus.

**Sunday June 28<sup>th</sup> Summer Garden Party, 12 noon onwards, taxis to depart by 6pm** hosted by Mark and Lin Stephenson, 7 Kingswood View, Trewiddle, PL26 7FT (next turning after the Cornwall hotel from St Austell end)  
There is **no parking, so please arrive/depart by taxi for a drop off only.**

After many happy Garden Parties in the garden of Chris and Karen Scott who have now passed the baton on, we are very lucky and appreciative of Mark and Lin offering their newly planted flat garden (which is also wheelchair friendly).

A wonderfully convivial afternoon sharing food and wines, get to know fellow members in a relaxed setting, with the fabulous **Garker Street Band** playing once again for us, (donations to the RNLI so bring cash please). Always a complete joy. There is a contingency there should the weather not be kind. Thanks so much to our generous hosts.

There is **NO COST for this event**, simply bring a large platter of finger food (Sue Osbrink will coordinate) and a bottle of wine which is all shared. Bring cutlery and crockery and of course wine glasses. Plus some cash!

**We will need extra tables and chairs**, so if you have any please bring them, or drop them off in the morning or day before. Let me know.

**July date tbc, Ellis Wharton Wines, Indian Queens “A taste of Portugal”**

Tasting to start prompt at 6.30pm so **arrival at 6.15pm**, depart after time for purchases **9.15pm**. Minibus depart Penrice at 5.30pm and Arts Centre 5.40pm.

Cost of tasting 6 wines plus starter drink, plus DaBara delicious cheeses, meats, foccacia, pickles and crisps **£45 per head**. Minibus cost dependent upon numbers booked.

Now in our 7<sup>th</sup> year visiting Ellis, always a very popular and enjoyable tasting. Sadly I learnt at the weekend Jim Bass is leaving Ellis soon, and until his replacement has been found, I cannot confirm final details of the tasting.

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup> August: “Summer Wine cruise along the Canal du Midi by Carol Avery, Wines with Carol”.**

**Dock: Pentewan Sands Sailing Club, Pentewan.**

Welcome drink served at 1900hrs, suggest **arrival 6.45pm**, Concludes by 21.30pm. Tenders (taxis) **depart from 21.45pm** opposite outside the Ship Inn, Pentewan

After her visit late Summer 2025, Carol will regale us with anecdotes and wines from the beautiful South of France.

“Come on a summer wine cruise along the Canal Du Midi with Wine with Carol. We will likely start with deeper looks at both a well known fizz, and then a familiar white wine before sampling a delicious rose from the heart of The Canal du Midi. Then we will taste a red wine from an historic chateau and finish with a comparison between two more full bodied reds (a Reserve and a Grande Reserve) both from vieilles vines which are unusual to find produced as a single grape variety.”

Accompaniments: du pain et fromages.

(Volunteer please, hopefully from Pentewan to assist with buying the food, and layout, Carol will help.)

Suggest everyone books a taxi for drop off outside the Ship Inn and walk from there. Any mobility issues please let me know.

Information on further months will follow in subsequent newsletters.

Please note:

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

**ACCOUNT NO 23132587 (Barclays) SORT CODE 20-30-47 (U3a St Austell)**

I am attaching an updated Programme for the year.

Kind regards

***Amanda***