

u3a ST AUSTELL WINE APPRECIATION GROUP
MARCH 2026 NEWSLETTER



Dear Wine Group Member

Apologies for being typically British and discussing the weather, but if like me, you feel you now have webbed feet from the amount of rain we have endured so far this year, think of the local vineyards and how they must be waterlogged. Let us all hope that we are mainly over the torrential rain, can see some occasional sunshine and can all start to flourish once more in drier weather, especially the vineyards!

Review of February Member's Tasting

WOW WOW WOW!

What a really fantastic start to our 2026 wine tasting programme. Our panel of volunteer presenters were lined

up at the front and could have been mistaken for true professional wine experts, they were that good! We certainly tried some lovely wines, some of which are simply not readily available in the UK, a couple we knew of but have not tasted in the past here in the wine group, a wine stored underwater in a cave, and an oaked rose from Italy. A veritable feast for our noses and taste buds.

I must thank Judith and Ann for providing a great spread of cheeses, bread biscuits and grapes, and to two volunteer pourers Elaine and Andrew. All these members do regularly volunteer, for which we all are very grateful.



We started the evening with **Ann Burnett presenting Canadian wines**, which we have not covered in our Wine Group due to lack of availability, and high cost of the wines. However, Ann had sourced two delightful examples. She gave us a thorough insight into the part of Canada she is now living part time, the local wine region she is particularly fond of and many interesting facts and figures.

As an aside she mentioned an exceptional Canadian wine called Burrowing Owl, and I found that Tanners are selling a Chardonnay Merlot and Syrah in the Burrowing Owl range, available on line. If you are looking for an unusual great wine as a gift perhaps...

Here is her presentation:

Canadian Wine Tasting Notes

Wine Producing Regions in Canada



Wine Producing Areas of British Columbia.



Our two wines are from the Okanagan Valley

Wild Goose Riesling, 2017, 12.5% approx. £27 online

Wild Goose Riesling, from British Columbia Okanagan Valley, is a consistently high-quality, crisp, and fruit-forward white wine. This fruit forward Riesling comes from grapes grown throughout the Okanagan Valley. It features vibrant aromas of green apple, lime, and peach with a distinctive mineral undertone. The palate is often characterised by high acidity, offering a refreshing, balanced, and sometimes lightly sweet profile.

This wine can be cellared for 5-10 years, peaking around 3-5 years.

Key tasting notes for Wild Goose Riesling include:

□ Fruit Profiles: Prominent green apple, citrus (lime, lemon), pear, and peach/apricot.

- Aromas/Nose: Floral notes, honey, and sometimes subtle spice or clove.
- Structure: High, racy acidity, light-to-medium body, and often a crisp, clean finish.
- Terroir: A distinct minerality
- Food Pairing: Spicy Indian & Asian foods Duck, Chicken, Pork, Soft cheese



**Mission Hill Family Estate Winery Sauvignon Blanc,
Okanagan Valley, BC, 12.5% approx. £27**

The 2021 Mission Hill Reserve Sauvignon Blanc is a vibrant, dry white wine from British Columbia & Okanagan

Valley, characterised by intense citrus (lime, grapefruit) and tropical fruit (passionfruit) flavours. It features a zippy, crisp, and slightly herbaceous profile with hints of gooseberry, green apple, and mineral undertones, offering a balanced, refreshing finish. The 2021 vintage is considered a top-performing, high-quality, and complex example of Canadian Sauvignon Blanc.

Key Tasting Notes & Characteristics:

- **Aroma:** Pungent and bright, featuring citrus zest, passionfruit, lime, gooseberry, and light herbal notes.

- **Palate:** Intense, crisp, and refreshing. The flavour profile is dominated by pink grapefruit, green apple, and passion fruit, with notable mineral, lemongrass, or grassy undertones.

- **Structure:** Medium-bodied with lively, high acidity, providing a “zippy” mouthfeel.

- **Finish:** Clean, lingering, and zesty.

- **Winemaking:** Partially aged in French oak to add complexity and texture while maintaining a crisp dry style.

Pairs Well With:

- Fresh seafood (shrimp, salmon) □ Goat cheese salads
- Grilled vegetables □ Light, fresh brunch dishes

I think by the feedback I received on the night all members were intrigued by, and enjoyed these luscious Canadian wines. **Thank you Ann** also for sharing photos of your new home out there and for bringing so much literature with you, we felt we had a great feel for this Canadian wine area.

Next Janet Harvey gave us an oaked rose, here below is her presentation. Interestingly she has given the Ellis Wharton tasting notes alongside her own opinion as a comparison.

Saladini Pilastrì Consenso Rosato, Spinatoli, Italy 2024, IGT, Organic 13%, £13 from Ellis Wharton

The noble family of Saladini Pilastrì from dates back over a thousand years and they claim it has produced important leaders and priests during that time. The family home is a country-house dating from the 1400's, surrounded by 320 hectares of farmland which is ideal for both olive trees and vineyards. The terroir is limestone. The present day farm has been in operation for three centuries. It is located two kilometres from Spinatoli, a medieval town whose origins date back to the 5th century B.C. Its name derives from a hill called "Spineola" because it was covered with rose thorns. This is between Pescara and Ancona on the Adriatic coast, just 8 kilometres inland from the sea, which influences the climate. In that time it has always produced wine. Originally the tenant farmers gave up their wine to the Counts Saladini Pilastrì so they could age it in barriques, barrels made of durmast oak.

The vineyard's main grape-growing site faces the Tronto river, dominating one of the many hills that characterizes this country-side, which gently roll down to the Adriatic, with further hectares on the sunny hills of Monte Prandone and Porto d'Ascoli. New vines were planted in the 1970's, and more have been added since. The range now includes Aglianico, Chardonnay, Fiano, Merlot, Passerina, Pecorino, Sangiovese and Trebbiano.

The Cantina used today was constructed beside the old one so that all the production could be kept in the same place. It is actually situated under an antique colonnade at the back of the Saladini Pilastrini villa. There have been more recent investments in equipment, barrels and tanks of 500 litres for the processing and ageing of the red wines.

Annual wine production is around 1400 hectolitres of which 55% to 60% is white, though today I am offering you a rosé. Wine production is organic: on its website the company emphasises that grapes are grown "without artificial fertilizers or pesticides. The most common vine diseases are fought with the use of natural products like sulphur, copper and useful insects, which creates fewer but better quality grapes."

This producer believes that healthy plants can "defend themselves against parasites." The company has been following the rules of sustainable, low-impact organic farming since 1994. It believes that "organic farming is a production method that ensures high-quality products and the protection of natural resources, the environment, the ecosystem and the health of people, animals and plants." Their method excludes the use of chemical or GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) products.

The refining of the best cru takes place in the prestigious “barriques” mentioned earlier, barrels made out of durmast oak which holds the wine in a climate controlled environment.

The estate also has 16 hectares of olive groves, from which it produces olive oil following the same organic principles.

This wine is accredited as Marche IGT. The IGT classification was established in 1995 and has enabled producers in the central Adriatic region of Italy to create accredited wines outside Italy’s denominazione di origine controllata (DOC) regulations. Marche IGT has supported innovation with both indigenous varieties like Verdicchio and Montepulciano, and international grapes. (For further explanation see: <https://italywinelist.com/igt/marche-igt>)

Jim’s tasting notes (EWW) say that Consenso Rosato displays an intense and intriguing aroma with notes of strawberry, blackberry and floral nuances of rose. On the palate, it surprises with a vibrant, minerality entry that concludes with a lovely finish.

This is a wine made for Mediterranean fare: grilled vegetables, seafood salads or salami.

Elegant and structured, with a quietly serious core.

Janet agreed that it is elegant and structured with a serious core. Initially she also found it minerally but then her taste-buds detected strong flavour of cooked Bramley apple and for her that lasted through the finish. Many of those present found the wine’s aroma strongly chemical but found the taste pleasant once they got past the smell!

Janet had tried this wine with a Spanish chicken dish, with which it partnered well, and also with a rich lamb casserole, and with a lunchtime snack of serrano ham, and she found it well suited to both of these too. She suggested one could perhaps be adventurous in roving beyond quieter Mediterranean recipes.

Janet thank you for this rose, which I concur the initial nose was a combination (for our table) of mustiness and vegetal, but opened up to a more fruity nose, although we did not detect the individual fruits. This certainly met the brief of an unusual wine.



After a short interval we then went on to the three Reds starting with Carol Avery.

Mystery Wine by Carol Avery

CHASM - Domaine Laurant Caberet, 2019, Minervois, S France , 14% £19.99 , Grenache & Syrah, Vegan

Carol enters in the dark, with a headlamp, overalls, rope and a paddle Just thought I'd give you a visual clue to the 'extreme cellaring of this wine'

The next wine is in the dark...literally and metaphorically. I'll lead you through some detective work to try and piece together the clues for a wine kept in unusual circumstances.

Colour. Dark ruby red with slight browning at the rim.

What might the colour tell us about the age of a wine?

Aroma. Plum, leather. Game? Earth? Forest floor? Truffle?

Taste. Fruits... Black or Red? Blackberries? Dark Cherries Wild Medicinal or Mediterranean herbs? Mineral Rocky or Licorice (normally only from oak but not in one of these grapes) Olive, Spice. Caramel? Chocolate? Violets? Blood Orange or zingy flavour.

Any clue as to the two Grapes?

It is two of a GSM mix. (Grenache and Syrah) 2/3 Syrah from 30 year old vines - Structure and colour adds blackberry, plum, black pepper, smoke, herbs and jammy fruit, licorice (and chocolate in hotter climes). The peppery kick people perceive in Syrah comes from a compound called Rotenone a natural aromatic also found in black pepper. It's concentrated in the grape skins and shows up

most vividly in cooler climates. So a Barossa Shiraz typically shows a riper, more fruit driven profile.

(Up to 25% are anosmic to rotenone meaning they can't smell it due to genetic differences in their sense of smell). For those that can it has a low sensory threshold so it can be noticed in wine in very small amounts.) Some of the audience found a good match between the black pepper in a mill and the Syrah in their glass. (Extended maceration can boost how much pepper is noticed.)

and 1/3 Grenache - Adds fruit flavours and aromatics to the mix. Versatile grape. Has high acidity. Soft tannins? Rounded palate.

This country has the most plantings of this in the world. Therefore can we guess the Country? France

What about how the wine is stored? (Go through all 3 guesses then explain)

So the Area France – Minervois. Handpicked from tiny vineyards in the hills 15 miles from Carcassonne so part of the larger wine area of the Languedoc. Warm mediterranean with hill breezes . Matured in the Calasprine Caves.

Firstly whole bunches Initial tank fermentation. Then Clay Amphorae in the upper part of the cave at 14 degrees C. This adds texture to the wine as tannins in the wine join up to make it smother earlier in its life. Then after bottling the bottles are carefully lowered by a rope pulley system and hand placed into the rushing subterranean river. Part matured 200m not just underground but underwater in the giant Cabrespine Chasm in southern France. Accessed descending 80m of ladders, squeezing through tight

passages and finally paddling a canoe through the darkness.

What might underwater ageing do to the wine?

Keeps the wine fresh and vibrant. (Apparently champagne from the Titanic survived well). Zero light, (Garnacha is particularly prone to losing it's colour) perfect humidity. Consistent temperature. The stable environment and may also help to keep the tannins smooth.

Finish: Long finish? Smooth. Year 2019 - so 6 years old

ABV? 14%

Great with Cheddar? Plus meats, sausage, chocolate?

Pudding with Orange and liquorice, to match flavours of the Grenache as served by Ferran Centalles Director of El Bulli restaurant until it closed and Somellier and Decanter Judge who reported on a U Tube video about the key tastes in Garnacha.

Vegan, Sylvain Delabre - wine maker

£19.99 - expensive due to production effort however sea aged wines often start at £50 a bottle. It takes 4 hours to retrieve a bottle from its cellar! It's been matured for 6 years.

We played Wordle for Title and it was guessed on row 2.

REVEAL CHASM - Domaine Laurant Caberet!!!!

Thank you Carol, not only for the lovely wine with the most interesting and unusual story of how it is made and cellared, but for your dressing up and giving us hints to uncovering its fascinating facts. Also you certainly made us work, guessing many details and working out the Wordle grid to get the wine's name. Excellent!

Following Carol, we then had **Mike Edwards** presenting a second red wine.

Before starting his presentation, Mike gave a beautiful tribute to Malcolm Harper, who recently passed away, and with whom Mike was originally going to be giving this presentation. In honour of Malcolm, Mike researched the wine and gave this excellent presentation. I think Malcolm would have been very proud, and it was lovely to have Ann present with their daughter Caroline.

Chateau du Cedre, Heritage du Cedre Malbec, Cahors, France, 2022, £14.50 Ellis Wharton, Organic . Blend Malbec 95% & Merlot 5%.

Mike's notes on the wine:

The wines of Cahors were chosen for the presentation because of the Black Wines' influence on the production and distribution of French wine over the centuries.

Cahors wine is of course predominantly made from the Malbec grape and its history is the history of the grape itself. Since Roman times Cahors was a thriving city and wine producer, achieving recognition and far reaching distribution of their "black wines" across Europe and Russia. By the Middle Ages it was the largest wine producing region in France even exceeding Bordeaux.

However from the middle of the 11th century the economy was gradually restricted by major events such as Bordeaux Merchants restricting year round access to its ports and increasing taxes, the 100 years war, the French Revolution and two World Wars.

Whilst maintaining production to varying degrees Cahors was further crippled by a series of natural disasters including the 1876 Phylloxera outbreak ultimately leading to a decline of Cahors' ability to be a leading producer of wine. In order to try and maintain volume Cahors producers began blending wine with a consequent decline in quality until 1958 when vineyards were replanted with another Phylloxera resistant rootstock focusing on the Malbec, Merlot and Tannat grapes.

In 1971 Cahors AOC is created as a red wine only region and a requirement that the wines are at least 70% Malbec and or 30% Merlot or Tannat. At this time only 440 hectares remained on the West side of the city on the limestone shale banks of the river Lot. 60 hectares of this were planted by the Vigouroux family who produce the Malbec that is being tasted tonight.

The wine is a Chateau du Cedre, Heritage du Cedre, Malbec 2022. It is an organic blend 95% Malbec 5% Merlot. 80% aged in tanks and 20% barrel aged.

A rich dark fruit produces blackberry and cassis with floral notes of violets and delicate spices. Tannins are ripe, acidity is bright and the wine has a great long finish.

The wine pairs well with roast duck partridge or other game or with a good cheeseboard.

The Chateau du Cedre has risen to become one of the top producers in the region and the wine can be obtained from Ellis Wharton Wines at a price of £14.50.

Mike, thank you for your beautiful words about Malcolm, and for having the courage to stand up and present your own research on this wine. I can understand why Malcolm enjoyed the wine so much, as did many others.

Karen & Lucinda

Last but not least, we had the pleasure of Karen & Lucinda giving us a joint presentation on an Italian red.

La Marchesana, Negroamaro, Puglia, Southern Italy, 13%, Majestic £10 for mix of 6.

Since I (Karen) was taking part in the U3A trip to Puglia last October it seemed to be a good idea, and certainly no hardship, to try out some of the wines while I was there. Puglia is a region in the heel of Italy where they produce mainly olives and excellent wine. Primitivo is the main wine associated with this region and we have tasted this before as a wine group, so Amanda suggested going a little off piste and so we tried a Negroamaro wine. We found this one in Majestic, £10 each if you buy 6 bottles, and instantly liked it.



Before researching this wine, we tried to work out the meaning of this grape variety but failed completely. We could guess the meaning of negro but thought amaro would be something to do with love. No, amaro means 'bitter' apparently and refers to the intriguing balance of subtle tannins and rich juiciness.

Negroamaro is a significant native red grape from sun drenched Puglia, especially the Salento peninsular, in the far south of Italy, known for its "black bitter" character, offering distinctive deep dark fruit aromas (cherry, plum, berries), spicy notes (pepper, cinnamon), earthy hints with honeyed scents and soft tannins, making it rich yet balanced, perfect for pairing with hearty dishes or enjoying as a versatile, aromatic red or rosé, often blended with Primitivo or Malvasia Nera. It provides richness without being overpowering.

- **Region:** Thrives in the warm, sunny climate of Puglia, the "heel" of Italy, especially in the Salento Peninsula. The vine is vigorous and high yielding with a preference for calcareous and limey soils but adapting readily to others. It is well suited to Puglia's hot summers and exhibits good drought resistance. The grapes carried in bunches of around 300-350g are oval in form, medium-large in size with thick skins, and black-violet in colour. They ripen mid season (late September-early October). The first American producer of Negroamaro is Chiarito Vineyards in Ukiah, California
- **History:** An ancient grape, possibly introduced by the Greeks, with a long history in the region, preserved in monasteries.

Winemaking

- Fermented in stainless steel tanks to control temperature, often with short maceration to extract colour and structure.
- Aged briefly in tanks or barrels, with some DOC wines seeing bottle aging.

Pairings

- Pairs well with pasta in tomato sauce, slow-cooked meats, spicy dishes, cheeses, and Mediterranean cuisine.

Thank you both Karen and Lucinda, a fitting finish to our evening's tasting and certainly a very decent Negroamaro at a very reasonable price.



The wines we enjoyed

2026 Wine Appreciation meetings

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.**

The tasting evening in February reminds me, that Chris and I really need some assistance in setting up. Getting 7 tables and 30 chairs out, laying up the tables with cloths, plates and napkins etc etc takes a while and a lot of effort. Whilst those first to arrive often help in the laying up, it is help with putting up the tables we really need. So, if you could arrive earlier some months when we are in the Arts Centre, please let me know so we can arrange a time to meet, we generally aim to get there just after 6pm.

We also need volunteers for pouring please. Volunteers for doing the food usually come forward naturally as do members willing to take home the cloths to wash and cheeseboards to clean. Thank you.

Events now open to book:

NOW CLOSED FOR BOOKINGS (but waitlist available in event of last minute cancellations)

March 20th – thanks to Andrew & Christine for offering to provide the food

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. BRING YOUR CARDS FOR PAYMENT

THURSDAY April 23rd. 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 or make your own way there, please tell Sue on booking.

Old Chapel Cellars have very recently 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 15th.

May 15th Camel Valley wine tour and tasting

Currently we have a couple of people interested in doing the daytime Camel Valley wine tasting and tour. Can I suggest any others let Sue know, so that we may be able to group you together to book taxis to arrive for the tour starting at 10.30am, assuming you have booked yourselves on...

You book yourselves onto a **Camel Valley wine tasting and tour on May 15th (Nanstellon, Bodmin)**

<https://www.camelvalley.com/tours>

A very local vineyard, 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**

For the tour, the minibus would not be available early enough as they are involved in school runs, so would suggest taxi sharing in 4s.

I will ask Sue to co-ordinate interest at this stage and put groups of 4 of you together, but do not wait too long, or their tours will get full as May is always a popular month.

Sunday June 28th 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 from 2pm, (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 7th 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 14th 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 **Cost £24pp** to include wines and food. Book by July 10th ref xxxxWGJUL26

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)

Reviews

For new members, and a reminder to long time members, if you find a bottle of wine you particularly enjoy, please do send me a review. It doesn't need to be long, it may be that it really went well with a dish you were enjoying, it may be a grape variety you had not tried before, as often our members appreciate these reviews, so please keep them coming in.

Here is a **review from Ann Burnett** of some wines she found on her (sunny) break to Malta, immediately after our last tasting. Thank you so much Ann especially for the photos, so very interesting. I can't say I have looked for Maltese wines here, but perhaps I should make some enquiries especially after Janet's New Year's Eve fizz she enjoyed there too.

"We went to a vineyard today the Meridiana Estate, to taste the wine. It was DOC wine and very pleasant. We tasted 2 red & 1 white. The vineyard is growing on what was an old RAF airfield. They cleared lots of unexploded bombs before they could plant the vines.

The white was a Chardonnay ISIS 2004, but I think if you tasted it blind, you'd be hard pushed to think of it as a Chardonnay. It was very light and very dry. The two red wines were very good, a MELQART 2023 a Cabernet/Merlot blend and particularly the blended Cabernet Syrah "BEL" 2022, wine."

Here are a few of the photos Ann sent.





And finally.....

I subscribe to a wine writer/expert Fiona Beckett on Substack, (“Eat this drink that”) who I find down to earth and always an interesting read.

This week’s article I thought very apt as to why we visit local wine merchant specialists, or ask them to come and present to us. Supermarkets just don’t have the staff, or the time to really talk us through which wines we may enjoy, and more recently I have also noticed their offering has become very limited.

This is Fiona’s article -

“Is wine getting worse?” Or at least much more limited in choice

Prior to my tasting on Zoom recently, I thought it would be interesting to pick up an Australian white blend, preferably a Semillon-Chardonnay on the basis that Australian food is heavily influenced by south-east Asia and its wines were likely to take account of that.

Could I find one? I could not.

Admittedly I didn’t go far as I was short of time. I popped round the corner to my relatively small local Tesco and Co-op and looked in the local Offie but their shelves were stacked with single varietals - mostly Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio and Chardonnay.

It bore out an impression I’ve had for a while that supermarket ranges are shrinking which combined with the fact that prices are steadily rising means we consumers are getting a much poorer deal.

Not only that but the quality is going down too with a progressively larger number of wines being 11.5% or under. That might sound like a good thing but alcohol is an efficient conductor of flavour. Few wines - Riesling excepted - shine at that level.

There also seem to be an increasing number of wines that are designed to taste as little like wine as possible. Jammy reds and 'buttery' whites where flavour is ramped up by sugar and oak (most probably chips). In fact those terms increasingly find their way onto the label. They clearly appeal to drinkers who might otherwise not be into wine.

It's the first time since I started writing about wine in the early 90s that I've been conscious that wines are getting worse. In the 90s and noughties our supermarket wine ranges were the envy of the world. Even the French - well at least some of them - admired the scope of the wines on offer.

It's a sign of the times that Aldi isn't intending to have a press tasting this spring, focusing more closely, as they put it in a recent communication, "on what shoppers are buying and returning to time and time again".

There are obvious reasons. Punitive rates of tax and duty, the burden of bureaucracy caused by Brexit. Consumers struggling with the cost of living and generally drinking less. It must make sense from an economic point of view to limit the range to wines such as Sauvignon Blanc and Prosecco for which people seem to have an insatiable appetite

It's the same with food. Popping into a local branch of Sainsbury's yesterday there was a cabinet and a half of chicken with less than half that space devoted to all the other meats.

Part of the problem, I suspect, is that based on how well they've served us over the years, we go to supermarkets with unreasonably high expectations of getting what we want. But if you want a good choice of books you don't go to W H Smith or T G Jones as it calls itself now. You go to an independent or at the very least a Waterstones. We would all do better to patronise local wine shops though we would undoubtedly pay more.

I was chatting to the manager of the very appealing new Bristol wine shop and wine bar Carmen Street Wine, who was saying how hard it was to find wines that they could list for under £20. Fortunately they have an adventurous clientele that appreciates something different from the norm.

So what do we do? Drink less but drink better is the obvious answer but there are times when you just want an inexpensive glass that isn't one of the usual suspects."

That my dear members is why it is often not just a shopping trip, but a happy and fulfilling experience to visit one of our "local" wine merchants here in Cornwall especially for a special occasion or to find a wine to match food which you will not find in a supermarket.

Kind regards

Amanda