



News

WSWS

WestSurreyWineSociety

December 2005



Christmas Party Time

Party time is here again so I hope you've all booked for next week.

You have seen the food menu (can you remember what you booked?) but the wines are going to be better than ever this year. Most, if not all, have Wine and Decanter Blind Tastings awards.

We start with a sparkler, then two different dry whites, two reds (from

Chile and from Portugal) then a "sticky" and (for those with stamina) a Port with which to finish. It is planned that you will be provided with tasting notes in case you are uncertain which is which!!

Don't forget, it is **7.30 for 8 start** (we hope to be seated shortly after 8), and carriages should be booked for 11pm.

"Smart casual" is the dress style.

Have a great time and Happy Christmas to all.

Some dates for your diary

19th December	Christmas Party at Blacknest
16th January '06	TBC
20th February	Charles Metcalfe on Portugal
20th March	Philip Tuck MW to talk about wine making
24th April NB 4th Monday of month	Simon Evans, Languedoc wines
15th May	Australian
19th June	AGM plus some super wines!
17th July	
August (date to be announced)	Summer Party

November Tasting Report Chilean Wines

'I'm glad to back here' said Rob at the start of his presentation – and we were no less glad to see him back. Those of you who were unable to be there missed a real treat of a tasting – 'wines of remarkable quality throughout' commented Graham at the end, and such a wealth of information that I found I had scribbled 3 pages of notes.



So, where to start? Well, a bit of background - Rob is Regional Sales Manager and Wine Training Manager for Hatch Mansfield who represent Errazuriz, whose wines we were tasting, in the UK. The estate, owned by the Chadwick family (who are not among the deprived of Chile as among other things they own are the Coca Cola rights to South America) was first planted in 1870 and its vineyards lie to the north of Santiago.

Geographically, Chile has a number of unusual features, stretching 2,500 miles north to south but only 80 miles across. Bounded by sea and mountains the climate is very hot by day but thanks to their influences is very cool at night with huge diurnal variations - thus the wine is far more cool climate in style despite the vineyards being near the equator in the north. One of the key factors benefiting wine quality is that the grapes enjoy up to 160 days between flowering and harvest, compared to an average of 100 in France, enabling the grapes to develop and ripen to their full potential without getting overblown.

Another advantage is that the dry conditions and mainly sandy soils have prevented Phylloxera from developing – though the story that no Chile vines are grafted as a result is a myth. These dry conditions also mean that the normal foliar diseases such as Oidium rarely occur, though, viticulture is not all plain sailing as the same conditions encourage nematodes and viruses.

Enough of geography and agronomy, we were there to taste the wines – 10 in total (oh absent friends!). Though classed as a new world producer, Chile's wines are far from new and have been made for over 500 years. Wine making and styles are also more old world and development has lagged behind that of progressive countries such as New Zealand and Australia, and the market image is of safe but unexciting wines – a reliable fiver's worth – an image that Errazuriz is working to change.

We started with 3 whites. First a 2005 Estate Sauvignon – crisp and floral, less pungent than New Zealanders, but easy drinking. This like several others came from the Casablanca Valley – a sought after area as it is open to the cool sea breezes. In contrast the 2005 Single Vineyard version was softer but rather lacked flavour. The 2002 Wild ferment Chardonnay, made with wild yeasts, is meant to emulate a Burgundy. The grapes are picked early as wild yeasts don't like high sugar levels – the result was quite a firm wine with some creaminess but most people felt it was not worth £10 – though it sells well at Sainsburys.



The first red was the 2003 Max Reserva Merlot – nice up front fruit but a rather tannic finish. We compared this with the 2003 Estate Carmenere, a variety that suits my taste buds well so no apologies for describing it as very drinkably soft and well rounded with spicy chocolate flavours. And I could satisfy this taste at a modest £5.99 a bottle. There is quite a story with these 2 varieties – until the early 1990's all the Carmeneres in Chile were regarded as Merlots, despite the difference in ripening periods. This has now all been sorted out, so the Merlots are far more consistent and we, or at least I, can enjoy the Carmeneres!

Jumping to £15 a bottle and necessitating a trip to Harrods (which also does the Single Vineyard Carmenere – are you listening Father Xmas?) – the 2003 La Cumbre Shiraz slipped down very well and we enjoyed its big clean, ripe fruits and ripe tannins on the finish. Shiraz, said Rob, is the big hope for the future and the style

falls between Australia and the Rhone. Blends are also seen as the way ahead, and we tried the imaginatively named Blend 2003 – 60% Cabernet plus Carmenere, Shiraz and Sangiovese. The flavours were intense and the finish sharper – great with food – but at nearly £14?

Cabernet does well in Chile, said Rob, but is rarely exciting. The 2003 Organic (easy to achieve in their climate) was packed with fruit but still young and green. Finally a big jump to almost £20 and the 2000 Don Maximiano Founders Reserve – 100% Cab and Errazuriz's flagship wine. We really appreciated the opportunity to taste the more expensive wines, though Rob warned us not to expect too much as the year was unusually cool which showed in the wine – quite tannic and with rather faded fruit, though the slower drinkers had the advantage of experiencing it opening out nicely in the glass. We finished, as we like to, with a sticky – the 2004 Late Harvest Sauvignon – light, fresh and a very enjoyable end to a great tasting.

Perhaps the quote of the evening from Rob was his quote of Australian wine maker Grant Burge – “a great winery is one that buggers things up the least” – and from what we tasted Errazuriz is not bugging up very much. Rob certainly confirmed himself as one of our favourite tasters and we will ask him back – hopefully to a bigger audience.

Peter Smith

All contributions and suggestions for the newsletter are very welcome. Please send them to Graham Last date for copy for the next edition is Monday, 2nd January 2006.