



News

WSWS

WestSurreyWineSociety

February 2006

PORTUGAL

Our host on February 20th is **Charles Metcalfe** one of the great and important characters of the wine world.

Among his many achievements are –

*Associate Editor of Wine International – one of the two main wine publications in UK

*Co-Chairman of the International Wine Challenge – the annual and largest blind wine tasting competition in the world. In 2005, over 9000 wines were tasted by 465 judges.

*Honorary President of the Association of Wine Educators – an organisation which has provided a number of our speakers at West Surrey.



Over a four issue period, October, November and December in 2005 and January 2006, Charles wrote, in Wine International, one of the best recent reviews of Portuguese wines entitled '**Portugal A to Z**'. A definitive work which included highlighting the best producers and their wines. He is therefore well qualified to present Portuguese wines to us.

We will certainly be tasting more than our usual 8 wines. Included are wines from Bairrada, Alentejo, Palmela and Dao; grape varieties such as Trincadiera, Aragonez and Touriga National; wines from great producers like Herdade do Esporao, Casa de Saima and Bacalhoa and one of the worlds great dessert wines – a Setubal Moscatel.

Charles Metcalfe is one of the best-known, most spontaneous and amusing wine critics in Britain. He presented drinks and occasionally food items for 12 years on the ITV programme, 'This Morning', and was the drinks expert for 'Taste Today' on the Taste TV CFW channel. He has also presented many wine and food programmes on Granada Breeze (satellite channel), as well as appearing occasionally on BBC TV.

Charles is in great demand to talk about wine. His friendly, relaxed style and abundant store of winey anecdotes wins any audience, and makes the sometimes pompous and intimidating subject of wine easy and fun. He prefers his audiences to have a glass in hand. An evening of 'Wine Options' is one of his specialities - tables (of total amateurs, wine enthusiasts or anywhere in between) compete with each other to guess the identity of a series of wines.

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You can read Charles regularly in WINE magazine. 'The Wines of WINE magazine. 'The Wines of Spain & Portugal', which he wrote jointly with his wife, Kathryn McWhirter, won the 1989 Glenfiddich Drinks Book of the Year Award. Their 'Sainsbury's Pocket Food & Wine Guide', a guide to which wines to drink with which food, was published in October 1995. They also co-authored the Wine Guide on the tesco.com web-site. Charles writes on wine in the Tesco Clubcard Magazine, Tesco Recipe Magazine and Tesco Vegetarian Magazine.

THIS IS AN EVENING YOU MUST NOT MISS. Put it in your diary now and bring your friends – remember it's only £10 for members and £12 for non-members, a snip for the evening of the year!

**October Tasting Report
Lesser Known South Africa with Brian
Davis**

Definitely one of the most entertaining evenings we have enjoyed for a long time! Brian retired from one of the 'little' German chemical companies 6 years ago, enthusiastically took to the world of wine and is now a member of the Association of Wine Educators. And enthusiasm he has in buckets – as well as welcome local knowledge of many of the estates and growers whose wines we tasted, based on a very recent visit to South Africa – all of which made for a lively evening with plenty of discussion and exchange of knowledge.

Brian had been struck by the quality of wines he had experienced on the estates he had visited outside the big name areas of the Paarl – Stellenbosch – Franschoek triangle and had selected wines from 4 areas – Elgin/Walker Bay, Helderberg, Robertson, Swartland and Olifants River. He reminded us that South Africa has a long history of wine production, dating back to the first harvest in 1655. Wines were initially grown in the Cape Peninsular around Constantia, but as the European settlers moved north from the Cape so did their vineyards. The area around Stellenbosch was the chosen area for new vineyards – the early growers certainly knew when the conditions were right because Stellenbosch is still the country's wine capital and the centre of quality production.

The regions outside the classic areas had produced a lot of wine for many years but nearly all of it was for distillation for brandy. Quality table wine was almost exclusively produced in Stellenbosch and Paarl and even there growers were severely constrained by the restrictive policies of the KWV and could only watch in frustration as Australia, California and New Zealand forged ahead by leaps and bounds. However when the KWV's monopoly of every single aspect of growing and production was broken in the early 1990's they proved very fast learners. Whole new areas of vineyards were established, especially on the west Coast. The progress and transformation was almost greater in the new and non-classic areas because they were starting from so far back and one of the

most interesting aspects of this tasting was to see how far they had come.

The striking thing about all the whites was they were very different from mainstream Cape whites - very modern style with clean, light refreshing flavours and finish. The reds were quite an eclectic mix ranging from a great blend at £4.99 to a rather questionable 'boutiquey' Shiraz at £26. Taint reared its head again in 2 of the reds – 2 out of the 3 bottles of the latter were well off.

Brian started in the Elgin/Walker Bay area which is near the south coast just over Sir Lowry's pass east of Cape Town. The cool sea breezes suit Sauvignons and the 2003 Iona was very clean with light lime and gooseberry flavours.

Just before reaching the Pass is Somerset West in the Helderberg area. From here we tasted 2 reds. The 2002 Longitude Red is made in a cellar converted from a gunpowder factory - a blend of 4 varieties with Cabernet and Shiraz predominating – dark colour, chunky blackberry flavours and at only £4.99 a great braai wine (barbecue to the uninitiated). However most the grapes were sourced from other areas. The Shiraz came from Swartland on the hot west coast and the Cab from Elim, near Cape Agulhas the most southerly point of Africa (though this conjures up visions of missionary stations, it is now the latest hot spot for new planting and everyone is trying to buy land that you couldn't give away a few years ago.) The Lammershoek Roulette Rouge 2003, another 4 way blend based heavily on Shiraz, was also made from Swartland grapes– however here we had the first taint problems. The good bottle had soft textures and warm fruity flavours with a slight pepperiness. Moving inland and east away from any cooling breezes to Robertson in the Breede River Valley we tasted 3 wines. 2 were from the Springfield Estate. First a Chardonnay which has generally proved more successful in South Africa than Sauv as it performs well in hot conditions.

The Springfield Wild Yeast 2003 was unwooded – quite honeyed on the nose, mellow tropical fruit flavours and a dry sharpish finish. But to most of us, £11.25 was a bit steep. Their 2003 Whole Berry Cabernet was also well liked. The berries are fermented whole which gives a softer style of wine – this was the best of the reds, supple with blackberry flavours. The third Robertson wine

was the Bon Cap Organic Pinotage 2004 - no South African tasting is complete without a Pinotage, its own indigenous variety. Despite the quality of the year, the wine, though soft and fruity lacked oomph and character.

Moving to the dry west coast, the Ollifants River Valley is some 250 kms north of Cape Town (yes – there once were vast herds of elephants there). We tried the 2005 Cederburg Chenin Blanc. Chenin Blanc (or Steen) is the best known of all Cape whites and comes in a wide range of styles from sweet to the dry fruity barrel fermented heavyweights that last for years. This one was unwooded, had lots of grapefruity flavours and with more body and length than the Sauv was the most liked of the whites.

Then we went back to Cape Town for the heavyweight, at least in price terms at £26. The 2002 Observatory Shiraz is made in a cellar in the city from grapes grown in Swartland – very boutiquey! Maybe the grapes don't like the long trip to the winery, but though the wine was spicy and tasted powerful it lacked weight and fruit and had what one of us described as a 'manufactured feel to it' - and that was the good bottle! The other 2 were distinctly off with a strange tingle that numbed the tongue and medicinal flavours! However it is unfair to be churlish because this very interesting to taste, and to be fair 2002 was a poor year. Though none of the wines were made in Swartland, it was interesting that many of reds had been sourced

from there. Swartland is on the west coast and is dry and hot with many traditional bush vines grown around Darling and Malmesbury. The hot dry conditions produces low yields of small fruit with concentrated flavours which are becoming increasingly popular with wine makers.

So – we tasted some mainly very drinkable wines that opened our eyes to a lot of good things that are happening in South Africa, and we enjoyed a great presentation thanks to Brian's own enthusiasm. And we enjoyed guessing the prices of the wines against Brian's chart. If you want to buy the wines – Stone, Vine and Sun stock 7 of them.



Party Time last December

Make a note of the following dates, (normally 3rd Monday of the month at 8pm)

20th February	Charles Metcalfe on Portugal
20th March	Philip Tuck MW on Wine Making
24th April NB 4th Monday of month	Languedoc wines by Simon Evans, The Naked Grape
15th May	Australia, Wots new mate? Angela Reddin
19th June	AGM plus "Call my bluff"
17th July	Hotel wines
12th August NB, a Saturday	Summer Party at Hazel's
18th September	Italy
16th October	TBA
20th November	Lesser known Europe