



News

WSWS

WestSurreyWineSociety

February 2007

Organic Wines -Vintage Roots

these will include:-

This month we are trying our first totally organic and biodynamic evening with the emphasis on quality.

We welcome **Sarah McCleery** who works on a freelance basis for Vintage Roots, the UK's leading organic wine merchant.

Sarah has spent the last ten years working in the wine trade, 6 1/2 of which were spent copywriting and buying for Vintage Roots. She has several other wine-related interests, mostly in writing, consulting and lecturing.

This looks like another super evening with some outstanding wines:-

- Pinot Noir Frizzante, Meinklang, Austria
- DO Penedes Xarel.lo Classic Albet I Noya, Spain
- VDT Castilla y Leon Viura / Verdejo Garmendia, Spain
- Te Arai Chenin Blanc, Millton, New Zealand
- DOC Langhe Nebbiolo, Viberti, Italy
- AOC Bordeaux Superieur, Couronneau, France
- Malbec, Bousquet, Argentina
- Syrah / Mourvedres, Tulbagh Mountain, South Africa

NB

NB

Please remember that this month's talk is being preceded by an EGM (see last Newsletter for details). This starts at **7.30pm**. and we hope to finish at around 7.50 allowing a few minutes before Sarah McCleery's talk starts.

Following January's format, you will be given a welcome glass of wine at 7.30 - but if you cannot get to Blacknest at that time, please help yourself as you come in.

John sends the following:

'A Taste of Denbies' on Saturday 17th March to include:

- **Denbies Cellar Wine Tasting at 6.30pm**
 - **Denbies comparison tasting hosted by Denbies wine maker Marcus Sharp**
 - **The Gallery Restaurant Dinner 7.30pm., a 3 course dinner paired with Denbies wine**
- £48.00 per person - *Special introductory offer: £40.00*

DENBIES WINE ESTATE • LONDON ROAD • DORKING • SURREY RH5 6AA
www.denbieswineestate.com T. 01306 876616

For reservations please contact
Group Bookings 01306 742002/kwalsh@denbiesvineyard.co.uk
Quote Reference Number GD 2007 when booking.

January Tasting Report

Chateau Musar, Lebanon with Jane Sowter

The 2006 harvest report – “We would summarise 2006 as a year of great character, everything was safely gathered in against all the odds” – could probably have been heard in most vineyards in the world, but for Chateau Musar it holds a special significance because much of the harvest took place when Lebanon was under constant attack and siege from their less than friendly Israeli neighbours.

Jane Sowter, European Marketing Director for Musar and making a welcome return to WSWS, graphically described how the normal migrant workers from Syria were unable to cross the border and the harvest was saved by local Bedouin villagers and children from the Bekaa Valley where the grapes are grown who bravely volunteered to pick the grapes at great personal risk. And yes – even they were attacked on several occasions! The grapes then had to be driven over the mountains to the winery at Ghazir on the Mediterranean coast north of Beirut. To reduce the risk of being spotted by Israeli aircraft and attacked (any vehicle that moved was attacked – even Musar staff driving into the office car park), they used small old pick-ups which added to the tension by frequent breakdowns! But we should not be surprised by this fortitude – Chateau Musar amazingly only missed 2 vintages through 20 years of civil war in Lebanon – and grapes have been grown for over 4,000 years in the Bekaa – probably before the Pyramids and Stonehenge were built which puts a little trouble with the neighbours in perspective!

Chateau Musar was founded in 1930 by Gaston Hochar, and is now run by his sons Serge and Ronald with increasing input from their sons. Historically there has for long been a major French influence in Lebanon so it is not surprising to find it produces high quality wine. There are now

3 Musar ‘brands’ – entry level Musar Cuvee which is mainly sold on the domestic market and to Lebanese expat markets around the world, Hochar Pere et Fils (HPF) and the flagship Ch Musar most of which is exported especially to the UK, Scandinavia and Canada.

Jane started traditionally with the rosé, but then went straight to the reds, presenting the whites last. For those familiar with Musar, this is de rigour and when we tasted them it became apparent why. ‘Wine is alive, let it sing to you’ she said as she entertained us with her enthusiasm and passion for Musar, the Hochars and Lebanon with such success that time, in true Middle Eastern style, passed unnoticed (we were in Beirut after all, albeit fleetingly) and suddenly taxis were arriving!

The Musar Rosé 2001, the latest release, is unlike any other rosé – to start with it is a blend of Cinsault and the local white Obeideh variety, the colour of onion skin this was no ‘pretty little thing’ but a powerful wine and dry with round, creamy flavours. The first of the 5 reds we tasted, the 2003 Cuvée, was as it is intended to be, very much a wine bar wine – unoaked and quite fruity and supple. And of course shaded for character by the Rosé.

All Musar reds are blends of Cinsault, Cab Sauvignon and Carrignan, with Cinsault normally the predominant. Cinsault is the most important variety in Lebanon where it grows very well in the Bekaa Valley which is really a mountain-ringed plateau 3,000 feet above sea level. Wines are made traditionally with minimum intervention and allowed to develop their own character – certainly no recipe approach here.

The HPF Red 2001 was altogether different. Made from a single vineyard and kept in a

mix of new and old oak, the wine was soft and rich with ripe berry flavours – “my favourite” said Jane and many of us agreed. Apart from the Cuvee, Musar reds are aged for up to 15 months in oak, however the Hochars hate to taste the oak so the oak always supports and never leads.

And so we moved to the heart of the tasting – the 3 Musar reds – 1999, 1998 and 1993. The reds are normally bottled in their third year after blending and then spend up to 4 years in cellar before release. These are all wines with genuine age and development - no quick fruity fix to keep the accountants happy!

The 1999 was seriously yummy – rich, powerful with big ripe juicy flavours. This has the makings of a classic Musar on a level, said Jane, with the 1988, the 3 varieties combining to perfection. Now ‘ok’ Jane said this but it was Serge talking – the 3 varieties are like the essential parts of a body (of a beautiful woman doubtless) - the Cab provides the backbone or skeleton, the Carrignan the vital organs and the Cinsault the sensuous skin – Jane went no further but Serge would have!

Back to wine – the 1998, served from a Magnum, was quite different. A more scented nose and more complex than the 1999 and with more finesse, very long but with less fruit perhaps because it had more Cinsault in the blend. Jane used this to illustrate how wine reflects the mood and surroundings – having tasted the 1998 in the warmth of the room she took us outside where in the cold and wet the

wine took on more minerally and herby flavours (which is why the wine you fall in love with on holiday can taste horrible when you get it home). Finally, the 1993 showed excellent maturity – a more farmyardy nose and lighter in colour and weight - intense, and complex with tobacco flavours.

And so to the whites which use the Obeideh (believed to be an ancestor of Chardonnay) and Merwah (related to Semillon) grapes. Nobody, said Jane, makes whites like these, and you love them or hate them. The 1999 – yes, the latest release because the whites are managed as the reds in both barrel and cellar – is mainly Obeideh and was the lighter colour and had a nutty nose but in the mouth was intense and dry with loads of body but also quite oily in texture. The older 1993, almost impossible to find now, was bright gold in colour with a buttery nose which belied the much lighter and cleaner flavours. White wines yes, but in Serge Hochar’s words ‘the only thing white about them is their colour’.

A fascinating end to a fascinating evening – enthralling stories, timeless history, political mayhem and rising above all this the art of the wine maker and his wines which, the Hochars love to tell you, always speak for themselves.

Peter Smith

(I understand that it is still possible to order Ch Musar wines from last time – see Peter on the 19th. Ed.)

Make a note of the following dates, (normally 3 rd Monday of the month at 8pm)	
19th February 2007	Organic Wines - Sarah McCleery Vintage Roots Also, EGM - The Society’s Constitution - at 7.30 pm.
19th March 2007	Wines of Bordeaux, Adrian Harvey, Corney and Barrow
16th April 2007	'Unusual wines of the world' tasting by a Harrods wine buyer