



News

WSWS

Our next meeting is held on:
Monday 21st June 2010

NOTE: 7:30pm start

West Surrey Wine Society
<http://www.westsurreywinesociety.org.uk>

June 2010 edition

We will commence our June meeting with the AGM, and afterwards, our monthly tasting will be:

Wines from Washington & Oregon - Andrew Williams, (Arblaster & Clarke)

Arblaster & Clarke is the leading wine tour specialist world-wide and is run by the original owners and founders Lynette Arblaster & Tim Clarke and their team of dedicated and experienced multi-lingual wine travel specialists. Andrew Williams has been leading tours for the past 17 years. A prolific wine writer, he works for publications in the UK and abroad, and is the author of a number of wine books. His style is laid back but incredibly informative. Demonstrating that wine buffs do indeed have other interests, Andrew also writes on rugby and music.

Washington and Oregon are producing world class wines in a dynamic and innovative environment, but because production is limited, and much of it is taken up by demand within the USA, the wines can be difficult to obtain here in the UK. This can in turn make the wines mysterious and potentially intimidating as they are less well known. So the March meeting promises to be highly rewarding for attendees.

A&C offer a North West USA tour along the lines of our tasting, scheduled to take place in July 2010, and priced at circa £2,199 – that makes the trip to Blacknest and the June WSWS meeting a real bargain!

Members planning to attend are requested to contact Sallie to confirm in advance of the meeting – this ensures we open the right number of bottles, and allow them to breathe, thereby not disappointing members by presenting “unprepared” wines. Equally, we are able to better manage the number of bottles opened and thereby the cost.

Summer party news!!

This years summer party will kindly be hosted by Mary and Les Parker at their home - The Garden House, 1 Cherry Tree Walk, Rowledge, GU10 4AD. The ticket price is £20. Members wishing to attend should please send a cheque to Graham Cook by 21st July or give money/cheques to him at the tasting and AGM on 21st June.

Sallie is holding a “party catering committee” meeting at her home on Wednesday 19th June at 11am. If any members are happy and willing to help out, please get in touch with Sallie.

Who's who in the Committee?

Graham - The money man

Peter - Events co-ordinator

Sallie - Committee Chair

Kim & David - Editors (retiring from Committee in June 2010)

Geoffrey - Secretary & all things snail

2 (or more) Vacancies - go on, fill these gaps!

Diary notes

Make a note of the following dates, (WSWS meets on 3rd Monday of the month unless stated)

Monday 21st June 2010 AGM starts at 7:30pm	AGM and Wines from Washington & Oregon - Andrew Williams, (Arblaster & Clarke), rescheduled from March
July	No meeting
August 14th (Saturday 6.30pm)	Summer party at Les & Mary's See above for initial details & help required
September 20th 7:30 for 8:00 start	Small independent wine producers from Bordeaux Tony Hill - Bordeaux and Beyond
October 18th	"Cool climate-v-Classic Australia" Sarah Ahmed
November 15th	"What is quality in wine?" Richard Bampfield
December 13th	Christmas party !

A Day or 2 at The 2010 London International Wine Fair – Peter

The first buzz of the LIWF hits you as you join the crush of people on the Docklands Light Railway at Canning Town and tune in to the mix of languages. Free croissants from a pretty girl at the entrance (courtesy of one of the French exhibitors) was a nice touch on the Wednesday. Here I must own up to spending two days at the Fair – but I had missed it last year.

Deciding where to start takes a bit of planning but less so this year as the economic gloom of the last two years was all too apparent – lots less people and exhibitions down at least 25% - where once they filled the huge hall wall to wall there were now closed off spaces and lecture theatre areas to fill the spaces left by several big name absentees and any number of smaller exhibitors.

But it was by no means gloom and doom. So the Australian and New Zealand stands and a few other national generics may have been smaller – and, surprise, no Greek stand this year – but Argentina had a massive display and France and Italy as usual were not going to be outnumbered. And there were some surprising newcomers – India, Egypt (yes – vines grown in the desert but the wines were crisp and cool) and Brazil – as well as growing presences for Croatia, Slovenia and Uruguay.

Washington and Oregon had their own stand with 20 growers showing their wines. With our June meeting in mind I did a bit of homework. They really do make some great wines, but are so overlooked in the UK – the Alsace syndrome. I spent a pleasant half hour with Butch Millbrandt, co-owner of Millbrandt Vinyards in the Columbia Valley, Washington (as you will hear in June this is desert country despite being just a few hours from wet and windy Seattle) – tasted through the 3 ranges of wines finishing with the Sentinel. And then back over the Cascade Mountains to Firesteed Cellars from the Willamette Valley in Oregon – not so keen on the entry level but otherwise excellent.

The usual scrum at Liberty's stand where wines and punters are always stacked deep, but they are Fairview's agent - impressed with the Goats Shiraz/Pinotage so give me a ring for special prices. They are also the Seghesio agent – sadly no Camille this year but we met Andy Robinson - their associate wine maker who was making his first visit to the Fair with his charming wife of just a week – Kirsten. I guess there are worse place to spend your honeymoon than a wine fair - but I gather their next stop was Amalfi for some proper mooning.

The friendly David Sonnenberg owner of Diemersfontein Estate in Wellington, South Africa tried to sell me his red wines which are most distinctive as they have strong overtones of coffee and mocha – but I think I prefer the coffee after the wine. Falling back on the lame excuse of having to discuss with my boss – Frances, who was not there on the Wednesday – we then literally ran into David on the Thursday. We escaped via Austria and a memorable visit to Willi Opitz's stand where we had a tasting of 8 really sticky wines - sticky heaven – Beerenausleses, Trockenbeerenausleses (TBA) and Eisweins – and with each wine we had a spoonful of blue cheese or fruit etc - sip, cheese, sip- to see how it changed the wines. The star in this heaven – the 2007 Scheurebe TBA, a mere £27.35 for a half bottle stated as a very special show price. Yes – they do tastings, but sadly the agent is in Essex, still if WSWS fancies a seriously sticky evening I will ask them.

After our Massaya meeting I hoped to taste some different Lebanese wines, but only Ch Musar were there. But then Musar are always there in exactly the same spot. This year though was special as it is Musar's 80th anniversary. Considering all of Lebanon's upheavals and conflicts of these 80 years it is unbelievable that they have produced wine in all but 2 years. Musar have led the way for Lebanese wines and still do so – without them few if any of the newer wineries would exist. I managed to get a place at one of their celebratory master classes (along with 100 others) led by Ronald Hochar who entertained us with his usual Mid East philosophy – question, *which do you consider your best vintage in the last 5 years?* RH answer – *if you had 5 children.*

We were led through the wines by Marc and Ralph Hochar and wine maker Tareq – from the new entry level range launched at the Fair, Musar Jeune – fruity modern style easy to drink wines, through the Hochar et Fils mid range to the legendary Ch Musar wines which are only released after 7 years of which 4 are in bottle. So the 2003 is the latest release. Then to the 2002, 2001, 2000, 1997, 1980 and 1977. The star was 1980, fresh but wonderfully mellow. The 1977 was still drinking well, lighter but complex and long. But then Musar keeps for 50 years and time has another meaning in Lebanon.

Two great days and who cares if the Fair was smaller – there were still over 8,000 wines there – more than I could taste in 2 days! So – see you there in 2011.

Sampling notes (from the editor)

With our working lives holding us more in Northampton (some 100 miles away), Kim & I had little option but to relinquish our role on the WSWS Committee. This follows on from the decision by Peter Godwin to balance pressures in his life, (at which point Sallie Payne stepped up to the Chairmanship) and the decision by David Rathmell that "it was time" for him too to hand over to a new treasurer (and what a good replacement Graham makes). At the time of writing, nobody has taken the bold step to help in the management of our Society, and cover the 2 places vacated by Kim and myself.

Some members may fear that committee membership is too time consuming – not so. Yes, there is some commitment, but with that comes fellowship and fun. Others may feel that it requires "expertise" – again, not so. It does require the committee member to have an opinion, and be willing to contribute ideas.

Without new committee members, the responsibilities fall on fewer people, 3 out of 4 of whom have been on the committee for some years (Sallie, Peter, Geoffrey). There will reach a point in the not too distant future when they too may feel that they are unable to continue. What then?

Members, the choice is yours.

WSWS Meeting 17 May 2010 Alsace Wines – Geoffrey

Christopher Fielden gave full value in presenting Alsace wines. He is a somewhat larger than life character with an ample waist line testifying to his love of wine. He has a deeply creased face and a very cheery and informal manner. He has a strong voice and tells a good story. Christopher is a much published wine author with fifty years experience and love of Alsatian wines. He gave us a quick run-

down on Alsace and its wines and then a tasting of nine examples in ascending order of price and sugar content, ending with a simply superb £45 Vendage Tardive wine.

Christopher placed the Alsace for us in a rift valley between the shelter of the Vosges mountains and the Rhine in a consequently very dry region, as dry as the South of France. The region is at the Eastern side of France and borders Germany and Switzerland. There is a long history of conflict and changes of ownership with Germany, but a distinctive French/ Alsatian character has survived.

Alsatian wines are also distinctive in that they are bottled only in the Alsace and sold by varietal name only. They are unblended and 90% white and not influenced by wood. They are stored in large barrels apparently with a massive build up of tartrate that gives a glass-like impenetrable lining to the barrels so that there is no wood influence, just the pure wine. There are eight varietal wines, as follows: Reisling, Gewurtztraminer, Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc, Muscat, Chasselas and Sylvaner. The growers are evidently at pains to emphasize the primary grape flavours.

We started with an example of red Pinot Noir 2008 DB Sick-Dreyer. This is a pretty cherry-coloured wine, some strawberries on the nose and with a dry finish. The consensus was that this was not a good Pinot Noir and made members (including Christopher) long for a decent Burgundy example. This was the only red wine tasted. We went on to an exciting Methode-Champenoise Sparkling white Cremant d'Alsace DB Sick-Dreyer. A real party wine. Fresh and with an apple bouquet. Apparently an excellent selling wine. This was followed by Clevner-Pinot Blanc 2008 Sick-Dreyer. This proved to be an easy drinking, attractive wine with plenty of fruit, a bouquet of Spring flowers, quite soft to the taste but held together by some acidity. The price of these wines was in a reasonable £8-10 bracket.

Then followed Sylvaner-Signature 2007 DB Rene Mure, apparently from a 'Grand Cru' vineyard but rules do permit the actual wine to have the same designation. The wine itself had a full-bodied character. Inter alia, Christopher recommended this wine to drink with cold meats and Thai food. Now followed a Reisling, apparently the Alsations love Reisling. This example was Riesling Kaefferkopf Grand Cru Cuvee 2008 DB Sick-Dreyer, very fresh and of good minerality. Some fuller wines now followed, first a Pinot Gris 2007 DB Sick-Dreyer, fruity, full bodied and high alcohol and apparently very good with smoked salmon and popular with Society members. Next a Muscat 2009 DB Sick-Dreyer which was sweeter but not cloying.

Two more to go, both induced comments such as "delicious" and "amazing". We were now to be given a treat, a Gewurtztraminer and then the £45 example! The Gewurtztraminer Cotes de Rouffach 2004 DB Rene Mure was admirable. As Christopher pointed out there was a lovely, mouth-watering Barley Sugar taste. Finally the superb Zind Humbrecht Clos Windsbuhl Vendage Tardives an exquisite 'noble-rot' wine with enormous 'length', a real pleasure to sample and a great example of the best that Alsatian wines could achieve.

Christopher's presentation was much appreciated. He is a talented wine lover, a past president of the Wine & Spirit Association and a sometime Trustee of the Wine & Spirit Education Trust. Society members much appreciated his efforts and some hopes were expressed that he may return one day to give us another exhibition of his undoubted wine knowledge and expertise.
