



NEXT MEETING IS ON:

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup> May**

**7:30pm for 8:00pm start**

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

**May 2010 edition**

## Alsace wines - Christopher Fielden

Our May meeting features the wines of the Alsace region, and will be presented by Christopher Fielden.



Christopher is past president of Wine & Spirit Association, and was Trustee of Wine & Spirit Education Trust for two periods. Amongst his varied "specialities" is the topic of wine fraud!

Christopher joins us for our may meeting and will provide illumination on the Alsace region of France on which he co-authored "Alsace Wines and Spirits" with Pamela Vandyke Price

Christopher is an accomplished author, and with over forty-five years in the wine-trade, has introduced such well-known brands to British market as Jacobs Creek, Marqués de Cáceres, and Sutter Home.

Alsace is of course that bit of the great French "hexagon" that juts into Germany, so politics, conflicting wine allegiances and styles are all "in the mix".

Christopher has had regular wine spots on Radio 2 and has lectured all around the world and for Christies and Sotheby's. This meeting is one not to be missed and should be an Alsace lover's paradise!

Christopher's choice of wines include a Pinot Noir, a Cremant d'Alsace, a Clevner-Pinot Blanc, a Muscat and a first class Reisling Grand Cru Cuvee from the Sick-Dreyer domaine. There's also a Pinot Gris, Sylvaner and an excellent Gewurztraminer from the Rene Mure domaine. Finally we end the evening with a £45 wine! - the amazing Zind-Humbrecht Clos Windsbuhl.

Christopher is travelling some distance to be with us, and it is important that we deliver another good attendance (39 at the April meeting for Massaya was excellent). In addition, we need to have accurate numbers so the right number of bottles can be transported.

**IMPORTANT!!**

**Members are requested to confirm attendance to Sallie Payne  
BEFORE FRIDAY 14<sup>th</sup> even if they are unable to attend.**

**([payne1@talktalk.net](mailto:payne1@talktalk.net))**

## Diary notes

Make a note of the following dates, (WSWS **always** meets on 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month unless stated) mystery pre-meeting wine at 7:30 onward; meeting commences at 8pm

Monday 17 <sup>th</sup> May 2010	Alsace wines - Christopher Fielden
Monday 21 <sup>st</sup> June 2010	AGM and Wines from Washington & Oregon - Andrew Williams, (Arblaster & Clarke), rescheduled from March
July	No meeting
August ( date to be agreed)	Summer party

### April Meeting Report

#### A Taste of Lebanon (and France) Mark Bedford of Caviste Wines ([www.caviste.co.uk](http://www.caviste.co.uk))

Peter Smith

Lebanon has been a special place for me ever since I used to visit it in the 1970's and lay awake at night listening to the Israelis bombing Palestinian camps on the edge of Beirut. Its wines are about as Old World as you can get with a tradition of wine production dating back at least 2,000 years before Alexander the Great. The modern industry dates from 1857 when Jesuit monks re-introduced grape vines and it is now in the news again with the announcement of a new generic campaign by Wines of Lebanon to promote the country's wines in the UK. Today there are an increasing number of number of wineries, all based in the Beqaa Valley (the northernmost extension of the Great Rift Valley) – the best known in this country is probably Ch Musar – together producing 9 million bottles a year. How the industry survived 15 years of civil war and then the Israeli bombing campaign of just a couple of years ago is a story in its own right!

This tasting featured Massaya, a boutique winery of about 50 hectares on the Damascus road due east of Beirut. Masaya (means twilight) was bought by the Ghosn family in the early 1970's who briefly started to make Arak before being driven out by the civil war. Brothers Sami and Ramzi returned in 1992 when the war was over to reclaim their parents' property, which was occupied by squatters. "Some we were able to buy off, and some were less accommodating, so we brought in a bulldozer," said Ramzi. They revived Arak production and in 1998 went into partnership with Dominique Hebrard, of Chateau Belfont Belcier in Bordeaux and Daniel Brunier of Vieux Telegraphe in Chateaufort-du-Pape. Massaya's Tanail Estate is situated on mostly clay and limestone soils where the 1,000 meter altitude keeps the vines disease free and the Beqaa's climate of long summers, wet winters and an average temperature of 25 degrees is perfect for viticulture.

Mark had lots more information about the Ghosn family (and even took a phone call from one of them which was novel!), and Lebanese food and culture but rather disappointingly offered little technical information on the wines, their making or growing. Maybe that's what his previous audiences were more interested in. For the more technically interested WSWS members I suggest a visit to [www.massya.com](http://www.massya.com) which is quite informative.

His easy personal style led him into a few interesting debates – notably Lebanon's diverse religious mix (Wikipedia says there are 18 officially recognised sects and an overall 60% Muslim and 40% Christian population).

Mark had brought along 6 Massaya wines and 2 French from the Ghosns' French partners. He told us that Massaya's aim was to produce world class wines in the modern style. Though I thought his denial when asked if they were aiming to produce French style wines was not too convincing as he had also brought 2 wines from the French partners which I at least assumed was to show their similarities. All the Massaya were characterised by alcohol levels of around 15% though none of them suffered from that hot alcohol taste. Which led to another vigorous debate on high alcohol wines and I had to admire Mark's final word on this – just drink less! Another feature of the wines was that they were mainly based on French varieties – personally I think it is a huge opportunity missed not to show what the local varieties – of which there are many - are capable of.

The Rose (Cinsault, Syrah, Cab) and the Classic White (a 4-way blend according to Mark and a 2-way according to the web site!) were crisp and fruity with some weight and provided a pleasant introduction to the serious business of

the reds. The 2007 Classic Red (mainly Cinsault with some Cab and Syrah) proved very drinkable with lots of fruitiness from the Cinsault and it held up well in the glass compared the more expensive ones. At “only” £11.95 it was the best on a value for money basis. £4 more got you the 2005 Silver Selection (Cin, Grenache, Cab, Mouvedre) – smoother and a bit more body than the Classic but it did not last so well in the glass.

From Silver to the Gold Reserve 2005 (mainly Cab and Mouvedre with a touch Syrah) – a richer wine than the Silver with softer tannins – but it’s £26.95. The older 2000 vintage should have given us an interesting vertical comparison but the variations between the bottles made this difficult. Mine was not so good but it did improve in the glass after a while, but had lots of sulphury smells and flavours to start with. Those who claimed to have the good bottle said it was mellower but lighter – as would be expected. Anyway, it gave us all lots more to talk about!

The two French wines - Ch Trianon St Emillion Grand Cru 2004 was quite vanillary and elegant – and the lower 13% alcohol will have pleased some though the price of £29.95 probably did not. The Le Telegramme 2007 from Chateaufeuf (14.5% - even the French are upping the alcohol but certainly not due to global warming that year) is Telegraph’s second label, but still £21.50, and was the roundest smoothest wine of the evening and very drinkable. Which brought us to the Arak (which is made from the local Obeidi grape) – fantastically smooth, clear and pure and no hint of burn as you sipped down its 53% alcohol. “Arak is the most refined version of the anise spirits range including, raki, ouzo, pastis, absinthe, pernod, ricard...” says Ramzi Ghosn and invites you to email them (sami.ghosn@massaya.com) him if you disagree!

So what did we think – are they achieving their aim of producing world class wines? The wines were well made, certainly, but quite a few of you commented afterwards that they were all rather lacking in character and complexity especially at those prices. Take the Gold range – at over £25 I really do want that to be memorable and it wasn’t. If any members are going to the London Wine Fair (18-20 May at the ExCel Centre) then do try Ch Musar. Ksara and Kefraya – the first is always there and the others should be.

Editors comment: While we may rightly challenge the value proposition of these wines, this is part of the reason why we come to a wine society – so we have the opportunity to taste relatively expensive wines and comment accordingly.

### 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!**

## Continuing request for committee members

Following a number of requests for members to volunteer for the Committee, we thought it might be useful to advise everyone that to date, nobody has volunteered.

This society only exists because members are willing to put themselves forward and take an active part. An active committee is the lifeblood of WSWS. Without the committee, WSWS dies.

Kim & David have enjoyed their time on the WSWS committee, and are only retiring because other pressures mean they are spending less time in the Farnham area.

So in a nut shell, it’s up to you (the members) to volunteer.

