



News

# WSWS

## WestSurrey WineSociety

October 2005

### Wines of the Loire

For many of you, this month's speaker needs no introduction. We are delighted to welcome back **Neil Sommerfelt MW**, Buying Director at Jeroboams (Laytons Wine Merchants Ltd.) who is to take us through an interesting (and long) list of wines from the Loire valley.

Neil has delighted us on a number of occasions with his witty, knowledgeable and entertaining talks on wines from several different areas. Last time (2003) he covered the wines of Western Australia. This time he is concentrating on the Loire and has a gorgeous looking list that should please everyone. **Not to be missed!**



This month's wines:

Cheverny Blanc 2004 Dom du Salvard

Pouilly-Fumé 2004 Dom du Riaux

Sancerre 2004 Dom Serge Laloue

Menatou-Salon 2004 Clos des  
Blanchais

Savennières 2001 Clos du Papillion

Vouvrey Sec 2002 Dom de la Haute  
Borne, Vincent Careme

Chinon 2003 Cuvée Terroir Dom  
Charles Joguet

Sancerre Rouge 2003 Dom Serge  
Laloue

Menatou-Salon Rouge 2002 Les Cris,  
Dom Henry Pelle

Coteaux du Layon 2003 Clos de Ste  
Catherine

#### Some dates for your diary

17 <sup>th</sup> October	Neil Sommerfelt MW on Loire wines
21 <sup>st</sup> November	Chilean wines are introduced by Rob MacCulloch
19 <sup>th</sup> December	Christmas Party at Blacknest

## August Tasting Report A Blind Date with Waitrose

This was a 'first' for WSWs – a blind tasting – and a highly successful one too. We knew we were tasting a range of wines from Waitrose, but that was all. Any fears that this might over-tax knowledge and memory were quickly dispelled by presenter Julian Brind MW and we enjoyed a relaxed evening with plenty of opportunity for discussion and 'inter-activity'.

Julian has a highly august background and has held a long list of prestigious offices, of which Chairman of the Institute of Masters of Wine stands out, and was head wine buyer at Waitrose until he retired to become a wine consultant in 2002. He first joined the company in 1971 when wines were pretty thin on the ground in supermarkets and limited to old student favourites like Lutomer Riesling. The Waitrose chairman told him he had a free hand and a blank sheet of paper and to go and develop a range of quality wines. With the words 'the buyer is king' ringing in his ears he was the first to ship a full container of New Zealand Chardonnay – and it took other supermarkets years to catch up.

Clearly extremely knowledgeable, and certainly a very engaging speaker, his style was laid back and he imparted fairly minimal information. On reflection a deliberate ploy to make us discuss among ourselves and then ask him questions – and, to quote Emille Hochar from Chateau Musar, 'to let my wines speak for themselves'. And that was his whole point of getting us to taste blind – to make us focus on the wine rather than be influenced by the grower, region, estimated price etc all of which prejudices how we interpret the wine before we taste it. Not many people can prevent themselves from looking at the label and saying – ah, must be twenty quid if it's penny, this will be good. And if its not, probably blaming themselves!

Anyway, to the wines. We tasted 10 wines and were asked to work out the grape, region or country and the price. There no tricks or surprises and all the wines are available in any Waitrose store. The first white, nice and easy to work out – a New Zealand Sauvignon from Montana, very drinkable with good body and flavour but with perhaps a rather 'commercial' style.

The second was tough and after numerous wrong calls Martin Smith correctly identified it as a Verdhello from Spain, Rueda in fact. We all liked this wine – light, fresh and lemony, and good value at £5.99. But few people liked the Viognier from S Australia which cloyed in the mouth and finished with a touch of bitterness – Julian gave the game away with this one by talking about its peach and apricot flavours, though a few plumped for an Albarino from NW Spain.

And then to almost certainly the best value and most liked wine – a Premier Cru Chardonnay from Ruilly. This was a classic Burgundy with a very full flavour that intensified the longer you held it in the mouth. Great value at £10.99, so priced because it is not a big name, and in Julian's opinion better than many at twice the price. (Now this is where it was a bit disappointing that we could not have tasted this to see the difference.) The last white was a Riesling that some people thought was from Australia but the bottle shape said Germany or Alsace and the delicate flavour and slight sweetness said the former – it was from the Saar and softer than one would have expected, but it was from the very hot 2003 vintage. We were also able to taste a very slightly corked bottle of this; and there was a clear difference but as Julian said without the comparison would have just put it down as a disappointing wine.

As he gave us the prices, the question why all supermarket wines have to be priced at something 99p came up. He finds it as illogical as we do but the great public apparently see a £5.99 as a pound cheaper than £6. Ah well! Price point led to discussion on discounts – as someone pointed out - as the grower has to pay for supermarket discounts. Most people buy the special offers and the big wine groups who can afford it are going to dominate the market more and more (if you support Fair Trade, do not buy discounted wine).

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The first red caught us out a bit – most thought it was a Pinot Noir but it was a Gamay, which shows how rarely we drink Beaujolais now, which of course was its source. A simple light wine with no pretensions. Pinot was the right guess for the second red and most people got this right, helped by the early browning the variety often shows. But few of us worked out it was from Chile. Not a great wine and rather unbalanced.

The last 3 reds were all amazingly deep coloured, almost black. The first of these was a Cabernet Sauvignon from Douglas Green in South Africa – big fruit, full of blackberries, rich and soft, though in purists' eyes perhaps a bit commercial again. Pretty good value for £5.99. Then the Malbec which could only have been from Argentina – the 2003 Norton Reserve, serious weight and powerful with flavours of gum trees and leather and well worth the £8.99. Tannins still hard so a wine well worth keeping. There was only really one red variety left as we were going up the weight scale – Shiraz, which it was and again not a surprise from Australia – Peter Lehman's Barossa Valley. Another meaty wine full of peppery leather.

Who scored the most points? Well, it all got a bit confused but through rigorous scrutiny and examination the winner was Graham Cook who received a fine bottle for Fairview Pinotage from South Africa. Graham was also one of several new members we were all delighted to welcome. Both new and old members enjoyed the evening. We liked the format and the speaker, so we hope Julian will come back in a year or so, perhaps setting us a slightly stiffer though no less enjoyable challenge – and Graham the chance to defend his title.

Peter



Graham Cook receiving his prize from Julian

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### Notes

I understand that the wine appreciation courses being run at John's house later in the autumn are now fully subscribed. As the majority of participants are WSWS members, we can expect a very knowledgeable society in future.

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Plans are well under way for your Christmas party which is to be on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> December. The wines and the food (full Xmas menu) are going to be better than ever and the inclusive cost (which also includes coffee and mints) is £27.50. At the October meeting an indication of interest would be appreciated by the organising committee. Detailed menu to be published next month.

A gentle reminder that the annual subs are now due and now is your opportunity to pay your membership fee.

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, 7th November 2005.