

PRESS REPORT
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WEST SURREY WINE SOCIETY JUNE MEETING – “Confessions of a Wine-fuelled Entrepreneur”



“The most stimulating talk we have ever had” and “the best and most consistent selection of wines we have had in many tastings” were just two of the comments from members after West Surrey Wine Society’s June meeting where Cecilia Muldoon told the story of how she has set up her own start-up company – VeriVin – and presented an eclectic selection of her favourite wines.

Cecilia is from Mexico where she started life wanting to be a ballerina – and she still performs – then travelled to the US for her degree, onwards to Oxford University where she did a doctorate in Nuclear and Laser Physics and finally to a job in Switzerland where boredom inspired her to return to Oxford to start her own company based on the work she had done for her doctorate.

Her company VeriVin is very high tech but also very simple – shine a light through a bottle of wine and find out what it will taste like, where it was grown and other important factors – all without opening the bottle. Wine, she told members, is on average 85% water, 14% ethanol and up to 1,000 molecules that give each wine its specific odours and flavours. Her technology uses a spectrometer which passes light through a bottle which these molecules reflect back and as each molecule has a unique ‘optical fingerprint’ identifies them and their characteristics. So it will tell you what the wine will taste like and where it comes from.

Both of these are hugely important for the wine industry. At least 3% of all wine has cork taint which is estimated to cost the industry some \$10 billion a year, and about 20% of all fine wine at auction is believed to be counterfeit – proper wine but not what the label says it is. Cecilia’s technology will enable wine makers to detect tainted bottles before they leave the cellar and wine auctioneers to weed out ‘cheat’ wines.

Her life at Oxford was not all atoms and molecules as she also chaired the University’s Wine Society and captained its Blind Tasting Team. Wine tasting, she said, is cultural and personal – we do not all taste and smell the same thing. She had chosen the first wine, a Riesling from the Mosel in Germany, to demonstrate that the minerally flavours associated with these wines come from the yeasts the wine maker uses, which produces sulphur compounds, and not the slate soils. She then showed two wines from Alsace which she described as a very underrated region; a Pinot Blanc and a lovely aromatic Gewurztraminer. One of Cecilia’s favourite wines came next – an intense and dry Vouvray from the Loire (100% Chenin Blanc) while she had discovered the last white in a restaurant on the advice of the sommelier – a Rousanne from the Santa Maria Valley in California which she said reminded her of a good Mersault but at an affordable price.

Her first red was a Spatburgunder (Pinot Noir) from Baden in southern Germany which though not known as an area for quality reds surprised members by how good it was – a combination she suggested of improving wine making methods and global warming. A wine she finds “hard not to like, it just smells like Spain” is a classic Rioja Reserva (100% Tempranillo) from a bodega established in 1890. Another of her favourite reds, and a favourite of society members, is Chateau Musar from the Lebanon, a very individualistic wine that spends seven years in bottle before being released – the 2009 was excellent. The final red, a Leconfield

Cabernet Sauvignon was a typical Coonawarra from South Australia with the characteristic smell of the local eucalyptus – “is it due to eucalyptus trees planted in the vicinity, with their scent wafting over in the wind and on to the skin of the grapes, or is it once again something to do with the indigenous yeast metabolising a particular clone of Cabernet Sauvignon?” she asked. The jury is still out.

Photo caption – West Surrey Wine Society’s June speaker – Cecilia Muldoon.