

## WEST SURREY WINE SOCIETY MAY MEETING



West Surrey Wine Society members gave top marks to a most enjoyable and interesting presentation of Spanish wines by James Hurd and Andrea Avellaro from Majestic Wines in Farnham at their May meeting. Like many Majestic staff James and Andrea have interesting backgrounds – James started life as a watercress farmer while Andrea is a self-confessed foodie and always like to match wine with food. Members appreciated their relaxed style of presentation and enjoyed the contrast from the more formal approach many speakers take. Majestic Wine warehouses are familiar sights in many towns across the UK, however less well known is that Majestic also owns on-line wine retailer Naked Wines and Lay & Wheeler, one of the oldest and best known wine merchants in the country.

Majestic have always stocked an extensive range of Spanish wines and the speakers had brought a really excellent selection of less well known wines – or niche wines as Andrea described them - for members to taste, rather than the more predictable names people are used to. Rioja is famous for its red wines but white Riojas traditionally had the doubtful reputation for being oxidised and rather dull so the fresh light white Rioja from Lopez de Hara that started the tasting was a pleasant surprise. Rioja is also now producing lovely rosés with more body and flavour than those from southern France – the example from Muga based on Macebo, Garnacha and Tempranillo grapes was most enjoyable. In the top north-west corner of Spain in cooler and wet Galicia lies the Rias Baixas region that has a big reputation for crisp apricot fruit-driven wines based on the Albarino grape – the Martin Codax was a classic example. Andrea's food tips – chicken with the Lopez Haro, grilled sardines with the rosé and oysters with the Albarino.

Bierzo is a region next to Galicia – damp but warmer - where the first red came from – a 2015 Petalos, 100% Mencia grape, made by the ex winemaker from the famous Chateau Petrus and with enough acidity to accompany rich dishes. Garnacha is widely grown in Spain but tends to be overshadowed by Tempranillo and the Papa Luna 2014 (75% Garnacha) from hot dry Calatayud to the east of Barcelona showed what good wines this grape can make, and great value too, maybe because the winemaker is a Scottish master of wine!

Tempranillo dominated the rest of the tasting with three classy examples from different regions. Ribera del Douro was voted the world's top wine region in 2012 and the 2014 Cillar de Silos Crianza did not disappoint – very full bodied for a Crianza with lots of promise and a wine that still has a lot of potential to improve. The Matsu El Viejo 2015 from the Toro region near the Portuguese border was almost black in colour, a big chewy wine with lovely balance despite its young age. Matsu is Japanese for wait and reflects the bodega's organic practices and focus on old vineyards up to 110 years old - the labels depict a man's face at three ages according to the age of the vineyard. At the end members were rewarded with a very special 2009 Gran Reserva Seleccion de Vina Holtonia – a lovely classic Rioja, very complex and full of interest and still tasting young and fresh. (The bodega's top wine retails at over £100!) This wine was from the Lay & Wheeler range and showed how shrewd Majestic were to buy the company and significantly extend their top quality range. Andrea's food choices for the reds included rich casseroles, black pudding, wild boar and roast goose.

West Surrey Wine Society was established 30 years ago and members are celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a special Burgundy Tasting led by Alun Griffiths MW in June.

**Photo caption** – West Surrey Wine Society at the end of their May meeting when the topic was Wines from Spain presented by James Hurd and Andrea Avellaro from Majestic Wine (at far right of picture).