

## WEST SURREY WINE SOCIETY SEPTEMBER MEETING

### Fine Wines – Are They Worth the Price?



It is often tempting to splash out on an expensive bottle of wine for a special occasion and then wonder if it would have been better to have bought two or three bottles for the same money. At their September meeting West Surrey Wine Society members put this to the test by comparing wines at around £40 a bottle with wines at about £15 a bottle.

The wines were presented by Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler who is the Buying Director for Private Cellar, the Newmarket based specialist wine importer. Before introducing the wines she talked about what the term 'fine wine' means and why some wines are so much more expensive than others. The term is usually taken to mean an expensive wine but means different things to different people and basically depends on a person's buying power – so it could be £50 for one person or £7 for another. Most people she said splash out on a more expensive wine for a special occasion – it gives them confidence that it will be good quality and a cut above what they normally drink and perhaps to impress people with a prestigious label.

Wine is the same as any product, the better the quality the higher the costs of producing it. Higher quality wines involve a lot more hand labour both in the vineyard and the cellar, for example the grapes are picked by hand rather than by mechanical harvesters, new oak barrels cost £800 each, they are matured for a lot longer before being released for sale and the cost of land in classic wine areas such as Bordeaux is as much as 2 million Euros a hectare. And of course big name chateaux or estates can charge much more just for the name!

Nicola had selected eight red wines in pairs, one each at the higher and lower prices, from four different regions of Bordeaux. Members tasted the wines in pairs so they could compare the two price points from the same region. The first pair from Haut Medoc compared a 2014 Chateau Julia (£16.50) with a 2008 Ch Cantermerle (£38). More expensive wines are made to be matured and kept and the latter was an example of an older wine still not being fully ready to enjoy. At 20 years older still the 1988 Ch Giscours (£40) was mellow and full and still very drinkable however its partner the 2011 Ch Tayet (£14) impressed members with its fruit and 'moreishness' – opinions on value were evenly split on these two wines from the Margaux region.

The most expensive wine at £50 was the Ch Roc de Cambes 2011 from Cotes de Bourg and though still young won a lot of votes with its big structure and fruit. This was paired with a 2014 Ch Camp de la Hire (£12) – very juicy but sharp and tannic and no contest for the Roc de Cambes which is a good example of an expensive wine drinking well at a young age. The last pair were from Pomerol and only a year apart and closer in price than the others – the 2009 Ch de Sales at £19 and the 2010 Ch Bourgneuf at £32. Neither wine shone – the de Sales was full bodied but lacked fruit while the Bourgneuf had a nice spicy start but faded to a weak finish.

So – were the more expensive wines that much better and worth buying one of rather than two or three of the cheaper ones? Well there was no clear answer and it all went down to personal taste – and buying power! Listening to members talking, the most highly rated wines were the £50 Roc de Cambes followed by the £40 Giscours – but the vote for the best all round value went to the £14 Ch Tayet.