

THE WINETASTERS

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At Last

Yes, at last we have been able to get together and enjoy company and taste some interesting wines again. As my geography teacher used to say, "*Much water has gone under the bridge and many Woodbines have gone up in smoke since ...*"; or, more usually, "*Chapman, even the cats on the wall know that!*" (Surprising, what one remembers from school days: my teacher's long gone but I'm still in touch with his daughter, now a widow in Wells). So what has been happening since the last **Bulletin**?

This offering serves as a brief review of recent tastings and lays out a plan for the next few months.

Freedom Tasting

Freedom Tasting: that's what we called our first venture back to our home at St Peters last September. The theme was straightforward: several Committee members each selected and presented a couple of wines. 23 members took the plunge to come in person, to taste the eclectic mix of nine wines on offer:

Champagne 1er Cru N/V, Duval-Leroy Fleur de Champagne
Dog Point Section 94 Sauvignon Blanc 2018 (Marlborough, NZ)
Quinta do Crasto Tinto 2019 (DOC Douro, Portugal)
Anciano Tempranillo Gran Reserva 2013 (DOP Valdepeñas, Spain)
Crozes-Hermitage les Meysonniers 2015, M. Chapoutier
Cabernet Sauvignon 2018, Frei Bros., Alexander Valley (Sonoma, California)
Château La Serre, St Emilion Grand Cru Classé 2000
Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Spätlese 2003, J.J. Prüm
Wehlener Sonnenuhr Riesling Auslese 2003, J.J. Prüm

The wines were supplied by David, John, Richard, Ruth and Stephen. No particular theme was involved, or if there was one, the raconteur has forgotten it. What was clear was that without exception these were a cracking bunch of wines. The starter Champagne may have been N/V but it had been cellared for ten years, and that makes all the difference. Don't be in a hurry with a good wine: the same could be said for the Prüm Rieslings, and of course the St Emilion. They had all benefited in length, depth and complexity from time spent quietly in cellar.

New Zealand Wines

Opening the new year, our tasting in January had to be relocated at short notice due to a disruptive water leak at St Peter's. We found a welcome in a back room of the Boot and Flogger, deep in the back streets of Southwark. It proved a challenge for some, with trains playing games and various Bulletin 255 Winetasters orientation problems. Notwithstanding, we kicked off almost on time with David Morgan presenting the whites, while Stephen Chapman followed on with the reds.



With 26 tasters, we focused on two grapes that do well in NZ; Chardonnay for whites and Pinot Noir for reds. The wines presented were:

The Society's Exhibition New Zealand Chardonnay 2018
Kumeu River Estate, Auckland Chardonnay 2017
Kumeu River, Coddington Vineyard Chardonnay 2017
Kumeu River, Maté's Vineyard Chardonnay 2017
Martinborough Vineyard, Te Tera 2018
Folium Reserve, Marlborough 2017
Pinot Noir Pegasus Bay, Waipara Valley 2019
Kumeu River Hunting Hill, Auckland 2014
Prophet's Rock 2016, Central Otago
Seresin, Sun and Moon, Marlborough 2012

New Zealand's two islands cover a big distance from north to south (as often quoted in wine books, if the country was in the northern hemisphere, it would stretch from North Africa to Paris). The maritime climate is influenced by the strong prevailing winds of the Pacific Ocean and the striking mountainous terrain. All of these factors combine to give the islands a wide range of growing conditions.

Our tasting list was a cocktail of price and age ranges; entry level to boutique. In the whites the Kumeu River Estate firmly ticked the VFM (value for money) box, as did the same wine makers' Hunting Hill Pinot Noir. The concluding Seresin mature wine showed complexity, depth and balance.

Exotic Grapes

Mindful that not all members can get to a London tasting, in February Ken Buckle kindly organized another Zoom tasting with samples of eight wines mailed to subscribing members. This tasting led by David Morgan attracted a sellout audience of over 40 tasters. All wines were drawn from The Wine Society's cellars, from France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, some with almost unpronounceable names like Assyrtiko and Xinomavro. The wines presented were:

Cour-Cheverny Moelleux 2018, Le Petit Chambord Cuvée Renaissance, François Cazin
The Society's Exhibition Santorini Assyrtiko 2020, Artemis Karamolegos
Quinta do Escudial, Encruzado 2019, DOC Dão
Eruzione 1614 Carricante 2018, DOC Sicilia, Aziende Agricole Planeta
Valtuille Bierzo 2018, Raúl Pérez (Mencia)
Pietradolce Etna Rosso 2019 (Nerello Mascalese)
Aglianico del Vulture 'Alvolo' 2019, Alovini
Xinomavro Naoussea 2016, PDO Naoussa, Ktima Foundi

Our tasting covered whites and reds equally. Personally I found the white *Encruzado* - an unoaked Dão wine - full bodied, well balanced and a very enjoyable mouthful. (A 2020 offering of this grape is available from The Society.) Among the reds, again a personal choice was the *Aglianico* grape. A dense ruby colour, concentrated by some addition of sun-dried fruit. In this region the soils are volcanic, the grapes late-ripening and arguably southern Italy's finest:

this wine really exemplified that. Full-bodied with damson and Black Forest flavours, good minerality and acidity, and a touch of balancing oak spice with leather characters on the finish. Another good VFM wine and one with ten years of life ahead.

The tasting, full of surprises and barely-heard-of grapes, was judged a great success. Our thanks go to Ken once again for preparing and dispatching the tasting samples.

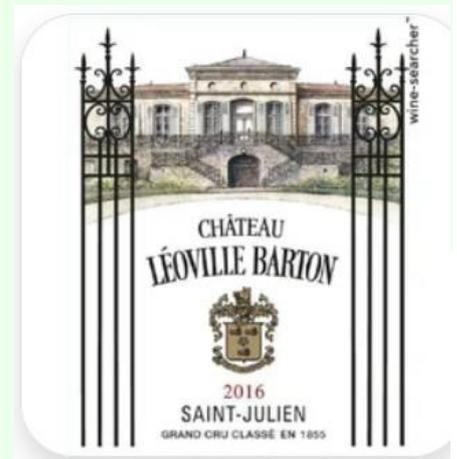


20th Century Wines from Bordeaux

What's special and different about Bordeaux wines? Among several other factors, one outstanding point is that the best can be extremely long-lived, developing and improving over decades. The key lies in the balance between acidity and tannins, with the dark fruit flavors of Cabernet Sauvignon and softer Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot uniting over time to yield wines of great elegance and finesse.

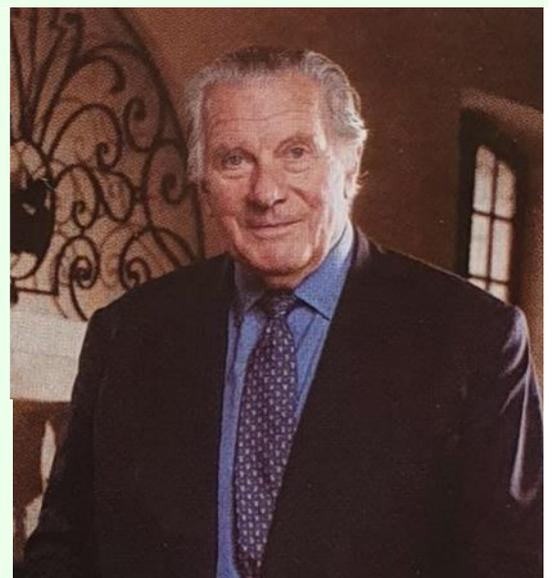
For this April tasting, presented by Stephen Chapman, we were fortunate to have a selection of mature and well-cellared wines dating from 1992 back to 1964. They were presented not simply by date – young comes before old in comparative tastings – but also by right bank (north side of the Gironde / Garonne rivers) and left bank, progressing generally from the south to the north. The wines were:

Château de Ricaud 1987, Cadillac-Côtes de Bordeaux
Château Fournay 1992, Saint-Emilion Grand Cru
Château Durand Moreau 1982, Puisseguin Saint-Emilion
Château d'Agassac 1985, Haut-Médoc, now Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel
Château Puy Castera 1982, Haut-Médoc
La Rose Pauillac 1970, Pauillac
Château Lascombes 1979, Margaux, 2^{ème} Cru
Château du Glana 1975, Saint-Julien
Château Léoville-Barton 1966, Saint-Julien, 2^{ème} Cru
Château Pontet-Canet 1964, Pauillac 5^{ème} Cru



The wines showed really well, with just one 'corked' bottle. We were grateful for the time and effort that David put into sourcing and preparing the wines, purchased in a bin-end sale from wine broker John Davis. Unanimously, it was agreed that the tasting was exceptional, and outstanding. Liz again rounded off the evening with a tasty buffet.

Wondering about buying a bottle or two of the star wine of the evening – if not all time – the Léoville-Barton '66, I checked out Fortnum's wine department. *Yes, it's in stock, Sir.* But the millennium year only. £220 for a bottle.



This just served to underscore what a wonderful wine we had enjoyed: full of fruit and poise at over 50 years old, and for a considerably lower price. My favourite reference source, Michael Broadbent, notes tasting this vintage several times and, writing in 1980, he advised drinking up to 1996.

Well, we proved that it stood the test of considerably more time! Here is the late Anthony Barton (1931-2022), the man behind the wine.

Diary Dates

The proposed tasting of Stephen Plaistow's Burgundies has been postponed to a future date. Stephen has not been in good health lately, and we wish him a speedy recovery.

The postponed tasting of **Blackbook and other English wines**, as a memorial for our past president Charles Gibson, is now scheduled to be held at St Peters on **Friday 24th June** at 7pm. David will lead us through the wines. For details on Blackbook and **Sergio Verillo**, the wine maker behind these wines see, Bulletin 254.

Museum Release: the outstanding 2015 vintage: a tranche of 2015 wines offered by the Wine Society has been purchased and cellared. Darrel Rosander, an American wine expert, will join us to present a 2015 Cabernet Franc from the Finger Lakes, New York State. This tasting will be at St Peter's on **Tuesday 11th October** at 7pm, after the AGM.

Stephen Chapman