

Enira 2004 Pazarjik, Bulgaria

8 Nov 2005 by JR

As someone who, like many British wine lovers, can remember a time when Bulgaria produced oceans of incredibly cheap, ripe, attractive Cabernet Sauvignon, I have a keen interest in the fortunes of that bedraggled wine-producing country, whose citizens could do with the economic fillip of a successful wine exporting business.

As you can see from the articles listed at the bottom of this page, I have been following closely the development of a Bulgarian fine wine project by Stephan von Neipperg of **Ch Canon La Gaffelière** in St-Emilion. I tasted the results for the first time at the primeurs tastings in Bordeaux last April and now finally the wine is on the market. I'm not surprised to see Waitrose (or 39 top branches thereof) having the first consignment to hit the UK for this retailer has long championed the wines of von Neipperg. Remember when they sold his Côtes de Castillon **Ch d'Aiguilhe** for well under £10 a bottle? I suspect the price of Enira will similarly inflate after this first commercial vintage of 2004.

Enira is a blend of Merlot with some Cabernet Sauvignon and a little Syrah grown on the Bessa Valley brand new wine estate near Plovdiv in the south of the country. Marc Dworkin of Ch Bellefont Belcier is also involved along with some German interests.

The wine is big and bumptious and for my taste just a little too ripe (the label says 14.5 per cent) but I'm sure that future vintages will be more refined. There is certainly no shortage of fruit from these young, three and four year-old vines and the wine had nine months in barrel. A superior Reserva version tasted en primeur last April seemed a little rustic and jammy (though I suspect it was a rather tired sample). In bottle this regular Enira is sweet and dense but is all singing and dancing and thoroughly exuberant while exuding health and bonhomie. There is certainly tannin there and I would serve this happily (especially blind, to bordeaux enthusiasts) any time over the next three years. It strikes me as excellent value at Waitrose's price of £8.99 a bottle.

Quantities produced are as yet too small to find their way to the US but this is expected next year (they are already talking to Southern Wines & Spirits). For the moment Hawesko import it in to Germany and they hope to export to Austria and Switzerland soon.

I hope very much that we will be seeing more wines of this calibre from Bulgaria, and elsewhere in eastern Europe where wines at present seem to be stuck in an uncomfortable rut. The big retailers expect them to be cheap so they cannot afford to invest to make them better. This applies as much to basic Hungarian and Romanian wines as to Bulgarian.