Organise your own wine tasting

16 Oct 2007 by JR

I thought you might be interested in a suggestion of how to get together with friends and organise a tasting that is both fun and instructive. The following from Michael Ridler of the Downs Wine Society in Lewes, East Sussex, outlines one possible approach. Note that everyone should feel quite free to disagree with me and each other. See here

for suggestions as to which glasses to use and here

for a reminder of how to taste. One bottle should have quite enough for 15 decent-sized tasting samples. The most instructive measurement at the end of the tasting is to see which bottle empties first.

We have to acknowledge our debt to you for a very convivial evening recently at our wine society in Lewes. As a variant to our normal monthly routine we distributed your *FT* comments on eight approachably priced wines which we had been able to source locally from the more discriminating supermarkets, the Wine Society and the excellent Caves de Pyrène in Guildford.

Collectively we found the wines distinctive, some of them provocative and several remarkable bargains - for these virtues we are particularly grateful to you; to the credit of our own developing oenological confidence, with your comments in hand and the wine in the mouth, increasingly forthright reactions emerged - both for and against - as the evening were on.

Our selection from your pieces – between May and July this summer – was:
1. Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi 2006 Casal dei Cavalieri, Umani Ronchi
2. Sauvignon de Touraine 2006 Jacky Marteau
3. Albariño 2006 Pazo Señorans, Rias Baixas
4. Domaine Ganevat 2002 Grands Teppes, Côtes du Jura
5. Les Pérélentis 2006 Alphonse Mellot, Sancerre
6. Ch du Parc 2005 Coteaux du Languedoc
7. Crozes Hermitage 2005 Cave de Tain/M&S own label
8. Marananga Dam 2005 Barossa Valley, Torbreck

For the record, we much preferred the very agreeable Sauvignon de Touraine to the less assertive Verdicchio. Your - and my own - great enthusiasm for the Albariño was certainly not shared by everyone. The Jura Chardonnay was panned - we felt we needed forewarning that this was in the local semi-oxidised style that you need to sup with your mother's milk to appreciate [the clues were there – 'bone dry, traditional character, most unusual' – but clearly not explicit enough! JR]. We were equally categoric that A Mellot's Pinot Noir had too much body and tannin to be at its best chilled [sounds as though it has put on weight since I tasted it - JR]. M&S's Coteaux du Languedoc was indeed a delicious bargain [so glad you got the 2005 – the 2006 is a pretty dour beast at present – JR]; the Crozes Hermitage ran it close and would be even better in a year or two. But the old vines Barossa Torbreck was the real wine - super at any price and no dissenters.

So a vote of thanks from us all for providing the initial impetus that gave us a challenging and enjoyable evening. The *FT* has I'm sure increased its Saturday readership in mid-Sussex. Your original commentaries should you need a refresher are set out below.

METHOD

Words:

Jancis Robinson - from her *FT* wine columns, summer 2007

Bottles:

Waitrose, Burgess Hill
M&S, Haywards Heath
IEC Wine Society, Stevenage
Caves de Pyrène, Guildford 01483 538820

Cost per bottle:

Price we paid in clear. Where we got a discount quantityon offerfamiwinting – normal retail price in brackets.

Background help
Andrew Jefford – *The New France – a Complete Guide to Contemporary French Wine*
M Alphonse Mellot, domaine owner; Sancerre
John Radford – *The New Spain – a Complete Guide to Contemporary Spanish Wine*
Michael Schuster – *Essential Winetasting*

www.umanironchi.it

www.pazodesenorans.com

www.torbreck.com

and the back labels.

[Here follow the excruciating (for me to read) relevant extracts from articles which already appear in **free for all** on this site.]

1. **Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi 2006 Casal dei Cavalieri, Umani Ronchi** 14%
Grape: Verdicchio; Italy Adriatic coast
Waitrose £7.99
21/7/07 One of the best buys in white wines for entertaining to have come my way recently. Stunning value. Single vineyard wine from Italy's Adriatic coast, made from grapes ripened to the limit. No oak but masses of tangy flavour.

2. **Sauvignon de Touraine 2006 Jacky Marteau** 14%
Grape: Sauvignon Blanc; France mid-Loire
M&S (£5.99) £5.39
19/5/07 I cannot recall a better time to buy French wine. The reason is simple: the outstanding quality of 2005 reds and 2006 whites – the two vintages coming on shelves over the coming months. M&S has noticed a substantial increase in demand for Loire Sauvignon Blanc and has considerably increased its range. Best value by far is its Sauvignon de Touraine 2006 from Jacky Marteau (whose Garnay reds are better than most). This Sauvignon has cracking green fruit flavours, real density of fruit and good tension - a good wine for before meals or on a particularly hot day.

3. **Albariño 2006 Pazo Señorans, Rias Baixas** 12.5%
Grape: Albariño; Spain Galicia
Wine Society (£9.50) £9.25
21/7/07 The Atlantic in a glass - one of Galicia's jewels and just the thing to drink with shellfish. Among the best buys recently in white wines for everyday drinking. Albariño is the grape, and somehow manages to deliver enormous refreshment with great balance and intriguingly marine flavours. Bone dry, unoaked, this wine could also be drunk without food.

4. **Domaine Ganevat 2002 Grands Teppes, Côtes du Jura** 13%
Grape: Chardonnay; France Jura
Caves de Pyrène (£13.10) £12.39
21/7/07 An exceptionally fine answer to top quality burgundy from 85 year-old vines grown at slightly higher altitude in the Jura. Bone dry, traditional character and extremely persistent. Unusual.

5. **Les Pérélentis 2006 Alphonse Mellot, Sancerre** 13%
Grape: Pinot Noir; France Loire
Caves de Pyrène (£12.60) £12.25
30/6/07 Very true pinot flavours. Thoroughly pretty and pure even if very light and perfect for chilling. Tastes like a baby red Sancerre - and much better than most of them. Red wines that taste best when chilled are usually soft and low in tannin with enough fresh fruit or aroma to survive the chilling process that tends to diminish these aspects.

6. **Ch du Parc 2005 Coteaux du Languedoc** 12.5%
Grape: blend of Mourvèdre/Syrah/Grenache; France Midi - Pézenas
M&S (£5.49) £4.94
19/5/07 Outstanding quality of 2005 reds - 2005 is so wonderfully successful practically across the board in every French wine region.
But M&S's real red 2005 bargain is Ch du Parc - this intriguing wine is made of 40% Mourvèdre, the difficult to ripen grape of Bandol, plus Syrah and Grenache. It also comes from vines organically cultivated since 1990.

7. **Crozes Hermitage 2005 Cave de Tain / M&S own label**

Grape: Syrah; France northern Rhône 12.5%
M&S (£7.99) £7.21
19/5/07 2005 is so wonderfully successful practically across the board in every French wine region. M&S's own label Crozes Hermitage 2005 from the admirable Cave de Tain also shows the exceptional combination of ripeness and balance that characterises this vintage. There's none of the burnt rubber and black pepper characters that sometimes mar the perfume of an underripe northern Rhône Syrah. While there is no shortage of tannin, and this wine should keep going for at least another two or three years, it's the sumptuous savoury fruit that dominates a wine that is surely expressly made for drinking with roast beef.

8. **Marananga Dam 2005 Barossa Valley Torbreck** 14.5%
Grape: blend of Grenache/Shiraz/Mourvèdre; South Australia
M&S (£8.99) £8.99
9/6/07 M&S's wine range fills me with frustration, almost rage. This is not because it is bad. If anything it is because it is so good, but M&S seem collectively determined to hide this fact from the consumer. Torbreck is one of Australia's most renowned producers. Some of its Barossa reds from jealously guarded sources of ancient vines sell for well over £100 a bottle. To be able to offer a wine made by Torbreck on a British supermarket shelf one would think would be a badge of honour. But to work out that Marananga Dam comes from this sought-after address, you need a magnifying glass and preferably a diamtaliker too. The T-word appears in dark red letters no higher than a cuticle on black at the bottom of the label.