

Oxford regains Pol Roger tasting cup

21 Feb 2012 by Jancis Robinson

At yesterday's 59th Oxbridge wine-tasting competition, Oxford won quite decisively after a run of wins by Cambridge. They fielded the top two tasters of the match, including Ren Lim (pictured as part of the winning team in the recent [Wine Australia university tasting match](#)), who notched up the highest individual score –and still has at least two more years at Oxford. No fewer than three of the Oxford team's six members were graduate physicists and only the reserve was an undergraduate. Fourth highest score was achieved by Cambridge's young reserve taster.

Much to the teams' relief, the 12 wines chosen for this year's competition were very much more straightforward than those I described a year ago in [The trickiest blind tasting ever](#). In fact, with one or two exceptions, the 2012 Varsity tasting wines were kindly chosen.

A Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2010 and a Chablis 2009 eased the students into the competition (no conferring), held at the recently spruced up Oxford & Cambridge Club in London's (gentlemen's) clubland. They were followed by two less obvious whites, a rather atypically muted Rueda and a less-than-obvious Gavi di Gavi from the 2010 vintage, but the last two wines were bankers - so long as you knew how a Hunter Valley Semillon and a Mosel Kabinett should taste. (The J J Prüm estate Riesling Kabinett 2010 Mosel was probably the finest wine in the tasting, and showed none of the much-discussed sulphur/reduction so common in young Prüm wines, nor the particularly high acidity of that vintage.)

The reds were almost as reassuring, although the wine most correctly identified, a Marlborough Pinot Noir 2009, was served last. The first two reds were a Chilean Carmenère and an Achaval Ferrer Argentine Malbec 2010, which I, funnily enough, thought was a Cahors, a Malbec from its homeland. I also thought that Peter Sisseck's PHI Ribera del Duero 2008 was a particularly Frenchified modern Rioja and had the McLaren Vale Shiraz 2006 down as a Barossa Valley Shiraz 2006. The JP Moueix 2005 St-Émilion didn't taste quite as glorious as it looks on paper and was distinctly dusty, as well as sweet and a bit funky.

Whites:

1. Lofthouse Sauvignon Blanc 2010 Giesen, Marlborough, New Zealand
2. Domaine Millet 2009 Chablis
3. Verdejo, Viña Garedo 2010 Rueda, Spain
4. Gavi di Gavi, Fratelli Levis 2010 Piemonte, Italy
5. Pyramid Hill Semillon 2009, Hunter Valley, South Australia
6. Riesling Kabinett, 2010, J J Prüm, Mosel, Germany

Reds:

1. Carmenère, Hacienda Araucano 2010 Central Valley, Chile
2. Malbec 2010, Achaval Ferrer, Mendoza, Argentina
3. Tempranillo 2008, Ribera del Duero, Spain
4. Gatekeeper Shiraz 2009, McLaren Vale, Australia
- 5.

Corney & Barrow St Emilion 2005, Bordeaux, France

6. Pinot Noir 2008, Eradus, Awatere Valley, Marlborough, New Zealand

My role, as usual, was as the judge representing Oxford. Professor Stephen Elliott, himself a past member of the Cambridge wine-tasting team (as was his wife), represented Cambridge. But the papers submitted were identified only by a letter so we had no clue when marking them to which team they belonged.

The teams were pretty close after the white wine papers had been marked, but Oxford drew away, winning a total of 654 marks to Cambridge's 603, thanks to their skill in identifying the red wines. Overall, Oxford has won more often than Cambridge since the competition was first held in 1953. Pol Roger took over as sponsors from Harveys of Bristol in 1991 and are planning to publish a book about this quaint and hard-fought Varsity match to celebrate its 60th anniversary next year. Anyone with memories of it is asked to contact the book's author Jennifer Segal, who can be contacted via [_____](#)

All the wines had been bought from Corney & Barrow this year. It would be too easy if they all came from Pol Roger's portfolio; in the old days all competitors had to do was familiarise themselves with Harveys' list.