

## What I drank on my holiday

30 Aug 2012 by Jancis Robinson/FT

For most people I know, holidays are a time to relax. And in the English language, 'relaxing' is becoming ever more synonymous with drinking. But for us wine writers, things are different. Outside holiday time, our diaries are stuffed with back to back tastings. I certainly don't ask for pity, just incredulity at the number of wine tastings we might be invited to in one day – between one and six from September to June with just two or three weeks off for Christmas.

So, I must admit, I positively relish the holidays as a time when any exposure to alcohol – and I do realise it's a potential toxin - is voluntary. For me, relaxation is not having to take the [milk thistle extract](#) that I have persuaded myself protects my liver from occupational hazard.

As a result, by the end of our first week this year in our holiday house in the Languedoc my husband was complaining rather peevisly about the short rations he felt the cellarmistress of the household was administering compared with his generous output from the kitchen. I suppose his disappointment at a relatively empty wine glass must have been all the more bittersweet because our house happens to be surrounded by vineyards.

It did seem a bit mean to deprive my husband, recuperating from surgery, of one of life's great pleasures so from then on, I opened more of our own bottles, and when a wine producer contacted me asking me to taste their wines, I suggested they send them to our Languedoc address. As a result, over the next three weeks our postwoman and the local couriers became thoroughly bemused by the quantity of bottles, from all over the world, they were asked to deliver to this particular address in a wine village.

One aristocratic Italian wine producer (admittedly a rather large subset of all Italian wine producers) sent no fewer than 39 bottles of different vintages of his beloved [San Leonardo](#), a particularly refined Bordeaux blend from the shores of Lake Garda, apologising profusely that there was one vintage of which he had no double in case of a spoilt cork. And all 39 bottles were carefully packed in cartons into a single giant box whose weight must surely have set some new record.

Another set of wines arrived from Austrian wine producer [Pfaffl](#), including two screwcapped, super-fruity marvels, a red and white made within the city limits of Vienna, so very far in every way from the culture and sensibilities of our Languedoc village. The Austrian wines were very well made but if anything a little too heady for casual sipping in what has been a pretty torrid summer in the Languedoc.

We keep a small cellar there and this year I dipped with delight into the stocks of refreshing German Riesling that I ship in regularly from the Mosel. This is the sort of wine that can and should be aged and the 2004 vintage of my usual choice Dr Loosen, Wehlen Sonnenuhr Kabinett (still available commercially in Napa, I see) is just the job at eight years old. Though while for me its low alcoholic strength, just 8%, was an advantage, my husband may disagree.

The sturdier Turkish reds that remained from a consignment of doubles I had to taste this time last year were more to his taste, more than 13%, if definitely esoteric in a Languedoc context, and I was most impressed by how well Kavaklidere's 2008 examples of the indigenous [Bo?azkere](#) and even the supposedly less serious [Öküzgözü](#) grapes had lasted. As it happened, I needed to taste younger vintages of the same wines this year and, preceded by notice of a DHL tracking number sent from Ankara, they dutifully turned up on our doorstep.

Much more difficult was the consignment of a dozen new California and Oregon releases from a producer called [Evening Land](#) without, according to a telephone call from Fedex at Roissy airport, the requisite details of exactly what the alcoholic strength of each wine was. Could I help? If not, the bottles would have to be sent back across the Atlantic. Since the name of the sender bore no relation to Evening Land, it took considerable detective work to unravel this puzzle but in the end, just a day or two before we had to leave, these particular bottles were delivered by our long-suffering local courier. I had to scramble to taste them in time and hope that our daughter and her 10 friends enjoyed the leftovers.

There were one or two plums in our little wine cellar and the first time we invited friends round our table under the chestnut tree (pictured, at breakfast time), I pulled out two of them: Dom Pérignon 2003 and the 2008 top bottling Garrus from the celebrated Provençal rosé specialist Château d'Esclans. This luxurious champagne from an unusually hot year was ageing a little faster than I expected, while the four-year-old rosé, which I half-suspected would be over the hill, was

still drinking beautifully – and was much livelier than its stablemate bottling called, a mite confusingly, Les Clans.

Towards the end of our month in the Languedoc we invited a young British wine merchant and his three friends staying nearby for another lunch. He'd promised to bring something special to drink and what was it? Dom Pérignon 2003 and Château d'Esclans, Garrus 2008.

Most of what we drank of course had been grown locally, for the wines of the Languedoc-Roussillon nowadays are some of the world's most interesting, individual and well priced. Fortunately for me, wine producers there are not aggressive self-promoters and relatively few of them have found their way to my front door. But the British online retailer Naked Wines made sure that I received a consignment from their pet Coteaux du Languedoc winemaker Virgile Joly (whose latest offerings for them seemed much more commercially anodyne than his earlier bottlings). A handful of producers delivered their latest wines and, thanks to an assignation at Narbonne railway station with an old Cumbrian friend Richard Neville who now champions his [Languedoc neighbour's wines](#), I also tasted the current Les Terrasses de Gabrielle range of mainly St-Chinians.

There is a world of difference between tasting and drinking. Tasting is what I associate with work and brainpower, with having every sense keenly honed while trying to draw on memories of other, related wines tasted before. Drinking is – well, as I said in the beginning – a much more relaxed activity. I do very occasionally get tired of tasting, but that never spoils my enjoyment of drinking.

See tasting notes on what I tasted this summer in our tasting notes database.

### Some summer high points

#### WHITE

Dr Loosen, Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett 2010\* Mosel  
£16.15 Philglas & Swiggot

#### PINK

Ch d'Esclans, Garrus 2009\* Provence  
£59.18 The Sampler

#### REDS

Laroche, Punto Alto Casablanca Pinot Noir 2009 Chile  
£9.07 Formula Wine, East Sussex

Treloar, Three Peaks 2009 Roussillon  
£11.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants

Hegarty Chamans, Cuvée No 2 2009 Minervois  
£11.99 Adhams

Dom de Cébène, Ex Arena 2010\* Languedoc  
£14.99 Leon Stolarski, Cambridge Wine Merchants

Les Clos Perdus, Prioundo 2010 Corbières  
£15.95 Green & Blue

Pfaffl, Altenberg St Laurent 2009 Austria  
£28.99 Corks of Cotham

San Leonardo 2004 IGT  
£25.99 a half Handford Wines

*\*Vintage different from the one I enjoyed*

