



LAST MONTH a number of very prestigious wine events were held in Malta, evidence, if any were needed, of the growing interest in wine and its various aspects.

Donatella Cinelli Colombini (Montekristo Wines)

At the beginning of the month Montekristo Wines hosted Donatella Cinelli Colombini. The visit was the inspiration behind a Tuscan food and wine week at Quadro of the Westin Dragonara. Signora Colombini, whose family still own the famous Fattoria dei Barbi, set off on her own in 1998 and today is the owner of two inherited estates, Fattoria del Colle in Trequanda and Casato Prime Donne in Montalcino.

Rather revolutionary in the Italian wine industry, Donatella's employees are all female. That includes the wine makers. If that does not make her a feminist, what about this? She has blended and bottled a 'Brunello Prime Donne', the first red wine of this calibre chosen by and directed in style and flavour for women.

I attended the Saturday function where four wines were being shown. The first was Chianti Superiore 2002. Normally, when I see Superiore on a bottle of Italian wine I think of Del Boy, but this one was truly superior to many Chiantis that I can think of. Very fresh and clean with smooth ripe tannins, very good length and a cherry/dark chocolate aftertaste. Very good value for money. This was followed by Leone Rosso 2001, a rather boring blend of Sangiovese and Merlot in the modern trend. Quite good to start with but very one-dimensional after a few minutes in the glass.

As expected, the Brunellos were not disappointing. Although not the greatest Brunello ever made the Donatella's 2000 is a good effort from this rather difficult vintage. Rich and perfumed, maybe a bit over extracted, with a lot of oak showing. The Riserva 1999 is in a class of its own. Much more Brunello in style and character. Fresher and livelier with better balance and riper tannins. Tight on the palette which requires a few years in a dark, cool storage space to open up.

Especially for Italian wine

WINE TALK

by Michael Tabone

lovers, Donatella's are wines to watch!

John Kolasa (Wands Ltd)

WANDS Ltd kicked off their Grand Bordeaux Week with the visit of my very good friend John Kolasa. John has had an illustrious 35-year career in this part of France which included eight years at the helm of Chateau Latour. Since 1994 he has been managing Chateau Rauzan Segla in Margaux complimented by Ch Canon in St Emilion in 1996. Both properties belong to Chanel Inc.

The event took place in the newly opened Radisson Golden Sands Resort. John delighted the 85-strong audience with an erudite and animated tutored tasting of five wines showing both the qualities and the differences between the two estates and *terroirs*.

Starting in St Emilion with the 'baby' Canon 2000. Rich, and spicy with a solid structure. Tight with a mineral and tannic backbone, definitely one for the long haul. Moving on to Margaux and Rauzan 1996, showing the splendour of the Cabernet Sauvignon in this year with a fresh plummy/cassis nose. Herby hints, rounded tannins and a velvety structure.

Staying at Rauzan, the 1995 has an intense nose with tobacco and eucalyptus hints with a big tannic structure that will reward cellaring for another 10-15 years.

The highlight of the tasting were the 1983s from both estates. The Canon served from magnums was waving its identity card at us. Typical, unmistakably Southern Plateau St Emilion. Fruitcake and spice on the nose with fully developed mineral

and summer fruit flavours, elegant and still quite fresh – ready to drink. Rauzan, on the other hand, has a few more years to go. Gamey with still very apparent tannins, it is a bigger, denser wine altogether.

To accompany dinner we were served the second wines from both properties. Clos Canon 1998 is showing all the opulence of the Merlot and the appellation's vintage while Segla 1995 is a bit more intriguing and leaner. This wine marathon came to an end with the sweet, Sauternes 1ère Cru Classe, Chateau Guiraud 1995. Rather overdeveloped but still quite nice with lots of 'nobly rotten' flavours.

The only disappointing aspect to an otherwise fantastic evening was the quality of the food, which when served with such fine and classic wines appear to be worse than it really is. Except for the dessert (which was too sweet for the wine) I honestly could not find a redeeming feature during the five-course meal. Rock-hard bread, dry duck terrine, undercooked and salty risotto and a haphazardly plated 'stewed', supposedly roast, fillet of beef which at least on my table was rather dull and void of any fresh or juicy flavours.

I suppose this could have been attributed to the fact that we sat down for dinner later than expected as well as having a new kitchen and equipment to work in. But still, let's just hope things improve as time goes on.

Jean Marie Winter (Paolo Bonnici Ltd)

Mr Winter is the sales director of Schlumberger, the biggest vineyard owners in Alsace, in northeast France. I love Alsatian wines. Besides their



JOHN KOLASA and (left) Donatella Cinelli Colombini

give the impression of sweetness although more than likely dry or with very little residual sugar.

Forty per cent of the world's Gewurztraminer is planted in Alsace. This variety is capable of producing some of the most sublime white wines and especially in Alsace it often reaches high degrees of alcohol. Its aromatic nature with strong flowery and spicy flavours is not to everyone's liking, but I must admit I love it in all its shapes and forms – from dry to very sweet. It is so versatile that it can be served with a large range of foods, including red meats or poultry. Schlumberger's effort with this grape in the Grand Cru site of Kessler in 2001 provided fine wines, very rich and concentrated but equally balanced.

Maybe a bit too young but never the less it stood its ground with the rich and heavy textured roast quail that was served with it.

To finish we had one of Alsace's great specialties. The rare Selection de Grains Nobles are sweet wines that are only made in years where specific weather conditions in late autumn permit the development of 'noble rot'.

At Schlumberger only 10 vintages were produced since 1945 and this time we were treated to the Cuvée Anné 1976. Six bottles were made available for this tasting and I found a lot of bottle variation. The first serving that I tasted was very fragile with slight oxidation, which got worse in the glass. Eventually a better bottle came my way, showing classical honey and apricot nose with a nutty, caramelised palette. Still, a bit light and not as concentrated as one would expect with a slight bitter aftertaste.

Having tasted the Cuvée Anné 1971 on a visit to Alsace a couple of years ago, my conclusion was that the 71 is holding better. Maybe it was the fact that the six bottles have only just recently travelled to Malta or that the vintage is drying up. I will let you know after my next visit to Alsace!

To finish off I can only congratulate the people involved in organising these visits and functions which can only serve to increase wine knowledge and appreciation in Malta.

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