

February's wine events

WINE TALK

by Michael Tabone

Rhone wines

A NUMBER of lucky wine lovers were recently treated to a tasting of very fine Rhone wines. Philippe Martinet organised one of his usual tastings at Chez Philippe in Gzira, highlighting wines from some top Rhone producers.

From Michel Tardieu we tasted Chateauf du Pape (Blanc) 2004 made from parcels of very old vines. This had nice minerality and crispness but will need a few years in bottle to round off and splash out.

The second white was the excellent, rather impressive Condrieu 2004. Also from the Tardieu stable but this time from the Viognier variety in northern Rhone, this wine has 'terroir' written all over it. Dense and concentrated but at the same time emphasising balance and freshness. Very intriguing, with an exciting peachy, exotic finish. Promise of things to come.

Philip Tonna, Marsovin's highly qualified winemaker, who was present for the tasting told me that Viognier, with its resistance to wind and ability to keep acidity even in hot climates is a grape variety that could do very well here in Malta. I tend to agree and as I know a few vineyard owners who are experimenting with this variety we shall soon find out.

The tasting continued with four Chateauf du Pape reds. The first was the very approachable Les Cailloux 2000 with a spicy, pruny aroma and a rich long mouth feel. The earthy Domaine du Vieux Telegraphe 2000 followed - heady and full-bodied with a very typical smoky aroma. Very sweet, ripe tannins and a spicy long finish.

The Perrin family and their Chateau de Beaucastel have long been regarded as the foremost producers of Chateauf du Pape. They are also firm believers in using as many varieties as possible out of the 13 permitted for the appellation, depending on the vintage, of course.

These are wines that can reward patience, as is evident from a recent tasting of the 1990. Philippe by comparison had the baby 2000 and the very approachable 1997 for us to taste. A very interesting comparison, highlighting the very different weather patterns during the two vintages. 2000, with its dense and tannic structure is for the long-term cellaring while the rather soft 1997 is pleasant to drink now and maybe over the next two or three years.

Last month the Perrin family were invited to join the PFV, a very influential group of family-owned wine companies. These include Hugel, Torres, Rothschild, Antinori, etc. The invitation was instigated by the sale of Jaboulet, the legendary producers from the Rhone, to a multinational company due to the infamous French inheritance laws.

A superb evening

A FRIEND celebrated his 45th birthday at the beginning of February. It has now become a



legendary year for most French wine areas alongside the equally brilliant 1921, 1947, 1955 and more recently 1982. It is not easy to find bottles from any of these years, however, using some very influential contacts we did manage to get hold of three wines from 1961, all from Bordeaux. These were Ch. Pavie, Ch. Carnes Haut Brion and the sweet Dauphin Rondillon.

Building up to these wines we tasted a number of other bottles. Yes it was a mammoth evening. As aperitif we started with the very refreshing and appetising Chablis 2004 by William Fevre. The quality of Fevre's wines since the company's acquisition by Joseph Henriot has shot up providing more typical Chablis without the use of any oak. For those who preferred red, Patrimo by Feudi di San Gregorio provided a nice, rich mouth-filling glass of wine. A bit too in the face for my liking.

At table, the first big name bottle was the still very young, rather closed Lafite 1996. Still on the oak and fruit side with very evident cassis, cedar and eucalyptus. Rather tannic but fresh, showing a huge aging potential.

This was followed by Latour 1992. The books tell you that 1992 was rather poor in Bordeaux but Latour's magic works even in such years. Wonderfully solid and extravagant, just beginning to open up with complex, spicy flavours. Not for the long haul but definitely can withstand another five-eight years. Unfortunately the next bottle, a Ch. La Serre 1989, was not right. It was thin and hollow. Nothing to do the usual La Serres.

Straight up was the Pavie 1983. Quite evolved but continuing to evolve in the glass. Wonderfully mineral on the nose, fresh and lively on the palette, generous and forthcoming with an intriguing, long lasting finish.

Now was the moment we had been waiting for - tasting the three 1961s. As wines of this age are likely to be very fragile it was decided to open and decant them 30 minutes before we were going to drink them.

Carnes Haut Brion was in rather a bad state. Ullage at just under shoulder level and the cork disintegrated during the pulling. Sniffing the wine while decanting, it has a really disgusting smell of very old mouldy blue cheese mixed with very sour vinegar. It was clearly off. Good for the sink.

On the other hand Pavie was very well preserved with a much more solid cork. The first sniff was promising - strawberry jam. Pouring it in the glass showed a still vibrant, tawny red colour. Huge minerality on the nose, in character similar to the 1983. In the mouth it was generous and elegant, with great complexity and evolution. Very ripe, quite strong (still) tannins and a nice, fresh finish. Quite an experience!

The Dauphin Rondillon was in an excellent condition. Golden yellow, full of apricot, honey flavours with a nutty undertone. Still lively with good fresh acidity.

We sort of finished the evening with the superb, excellent Taylor's Port 1955.

I know what you are thinking. What? Just those wines? Well, actually no. At the end we tasted an excellent La Serre 1988, a very

badly corked Solaia 1997 and the exuberantly fruity, luscious Opus One 1998.

Yep... I had a very good head the following morning.

Muscadet's revival

THERE was a time when everyone was drinking Muscadet. The light, fresh white wine from the Atlantic coast of the Loire valley around Nantes. In the Eighties, especially in Britain, the popularity for this wine was so huge that many producers could not keep up with demand. As this demand was mainly fuelled by the explosion of wine supplies in supermarkets, instead of pushing prices up, it encouraged producers for more production which evidently lead to lesser quality.

When the killer frosts of 1991 destroyed a large number of vines in the area, Muscadet's supply and popularity in the export markets diminished and years of hardship followed for the region's wine growers. Very much the same thing as happened in Frascati and what could possibly happen to Gavi.

Happily the situation today is changing and although a lot of mediocre Muscadet is still produced a number of producers have got together to put quality back in their wines. Among these there is Chateau du Clercy-Sauvion, whose marketing manager, the charming Ms Valerie Dussaud, was in Malta courtesy of Wands Ltd.

Two events were held. One at Wands' Cash and Carry in Qormi and the other at Pjazza Latina in Valletta. A number of wines were shown, including ones from other regions of the Loire but their forte by far is their Muscadets. The basic Muscadet Sauvion 2003 is quite pleasing, lemony for early and easy drinking.

Cardinal Richard 2003 - Sur Lie is in a class of its own. Grown on clay and sand soils with a yield of about 45 hectolitres per hectare, it is quite concentrated with a very intriguing palate of minerals and other earth derived flavours. Not your typical Muscadet. More intellectual, yeasty and an aging potential.

I truly believe that Muscadet deserves revisiting. Try these wines with any fish dish; as they cannot be more than 12% alcohol, they are fantastic lunchtime wines.

Chamber of Commerce wine course

A VERY successful basic wine course was held at the Chamber of Commerce at the end of January. The five-day course highlighted the history, cultural, technical and service aspects of wine.

I would like to thank the Chamber for taking this initiative and the main sponsors - Living Interiors, Paolo Bonnici Ltd, Wands Ltd, N.M. Arrigo, Carnaby Wines, Attard & Co, Albert F.S. Manduca, Camilleri Wines; Anthony Farrugia and Meridiana.

Universal
IMPORT & EXPORT LTD.

Universal Bldgs, Athlone Street, Paola. Tel: 21 666 771, Fax: 21 667 816. Email: info@uiel.com.mt

Solutions with
Quality Products

Food packaging solutions
for confectioneries, bakeries and the food industry

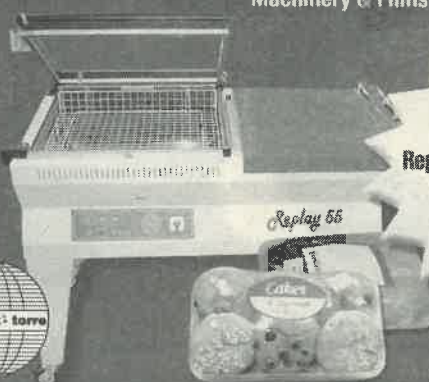
Visit our showroom (Opposite the Addolorata Cemetery)
Open on Monday to Friday from 8am. till 4pm.

Vacuum pouches in various sizes
Available in printed and custom designs



allfo
Vakuumverpackungen

Shrink Packaging
Machinery & Films



SPECIAL OFFER
Replay 55 Shrink Wrapping Machine
+ 2 FREE Shrink Film Rolls
@ Lm995+VAT

Food Containers



AMERICA

Packaging consumables and solutions • **Food Packaging** • Health and Safety • Labels and Printers
Clothing and Accessories • Graphics • Traffic and Marine • Paper and Board • Electronics • Adhesives, Silicones and Abrasives