

Food and Drink

Many white wines age well



Michael Tabone

Contrary to popular belief, most white wines do not have to be drunk as young as possible. Many whites can gain a third dimension after a few years in bottle and, they don't have to be French, Grand Cru or expensive.

Verdicchio is one of the many European white wines that can age, and indeed improve, after a few years in bottle. So don't be afraid of white wines that are a few years old. If they were stored properly the chances are that they would be even better than the year of bottling. I know what you are thinking: How will we know in what conditions they have been stored? Ah... that's another story.

I like a broad range of whites, but if I had to narrow down my favourite type I would probably opt for wines that have a mineral content, with lively acidity, and a solid backbone, which are quality criteria for aging potential.

Here are some mature whites that I drank over the past few weeks:

At The Palace, Sliema, Wands Ltd recently hosted a casual dinner and tasting of Umani Ronchi wines, whose Verdicchio riserva, which is called Plenio, is highly regarded.

The 1999 vintage can be described as having a golden colour, a stewed apple, nutty aroma, a well integrated oak flavour, quite full bodied and complex, with a long but linear finish.

The 2000 vintage is ripe but very mineral and lively in flavour, having a long, elegant, multi-dimensional finish. It is a wonderful food wine. For example, it can be used instead of squeezing lemon on grilled fish.

The 2004 vintage on the other hand proves my point on white wine's ability to age. Its aroma is of lime rind and it is firm on the palette but rather closed compared with the previous two vintages.

Incidentally, I was disappointed with the service and in particular the food provided by the hotel. I suppose that the sushi served with the aperitif was 'ok' but the buffet was really quite poor.

Wine events such as these are becoming more frequent and chefs and catering managers must understand that where fine wine is involved the standard of the food has to equal that of the wine.

There were several other occasions recently when I enjoyed other old whites. These included a 2001 Sancerre by Domaine André Dezat.

Its appearance is golden yellow, it has a citrusy and nutty aroma, it is smooth but lively on the palate and is very complex; a fantastic Pernard Vergelesse 1999 by Rollin. It is a very elegant, fine wine that goes very well with food. We had it with a tartare of salmon accompanied with salmon and fried chicken eggs; and a beautiful bottle of Chablis 1983 by Montmain.

I also enjoyed a few bottles of aged non-vintage Champagne bottles including a Pol Roger (with the white foil), which had been in a cellar for at least five years but was still fantastically fresh and complex; and a bottle of Barancour's Bouzy Grand Cru, which I have had in my cellar at least since 1986, was the star on the bubbly front.

Other old(ish) whites that I enjoyed in recent days included Livio Felluga's 'Illivio' 1999 vintage from Friuli, a few 2001 and 2004 vintages of Gavis, including La Gustiniana's Montessoro, Michele Chiarlo's Rovereto and Pieropan's Soave La Rocca.

I also enjoyed the excellent Clos Foridene 1999 and Domaine du Chevallier 1998 from Bordeaux. mike@michaeltabone.com



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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Gozo Supplement

Out on August 10

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