

Food & Wine



International Wine & Food Society Europe & Africa Committee - issue 98

MARCH 2009

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The Noble Hare

Winemaking in Veneto

The Ubiquitous Rat

Tony Bates©



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear Members

It is an honour to be addressing you as Chairman of The International Council of Management, having taken over as such from Jeff Deeths of the BGA just prior to the Society's 75th Anniversary celebrations in London on 14 November 2008.

It was a privilege to preside over the London celebrations at Claridge's and the Mandarin Oriental, Hyde Park. Both the dinner and the lunch were memorable meals with wines to match. I am sure you will have read about these well organised events in your Area magazines but I should like to pass on my personal thanks to all our corporate and private sponsors who made the occasion at Claridge's so memorable with their generous donation of the wines. Both events were excellent and a tribute to the wonderful cuisine and exemplary service achievable in England but sadly not always demonstrated. Both hotels are to be congratulated on their high standard of excellence.

I am indebted to my predecessor, Jeff Deeths, for championing the strategic plan for the Society during his term as Chairman. It is now my task with the assistance of Council and the International Secretariat to conclude the plan, disseminate it to Branches and members and to take steps to implement it. I intend this to be my focus in my two year term as your Chairman.

I am particularly keen to see our website redesigned and thereafter updated and maintained so that it can meet not only the needs of our existing membership but also act as an aid to recruitment of future members.

I should also like to see the re-establishment of the educational focus of the Society as I believe it is this that does and continues to differentiate us from other wine tasting clubs, dining clubs and commercial entities. To this end I very much hope Council will be able to commission a series of Monographs on food and wine subjects which will enhance the benefits of membership of the Society.

In addition I should like to establish opportunities to improve the impact of the André Simon lectures. In this connection John Avery MW, our new President, delivered one on the subject of climate change and its impact on the wine industry as part of the 75th Anniversary celebrations. It is intended to have a summary of his lecture published shortly. The next André Simon lecture will take place at the Cape Town International Festival in March 2009 and this will be followed by one to be delivered at the Regional Festival to be organised under the auspices of the APZ in Sydney in October 2010. Festivals are, in my view, very much part of the life and soul of the Society as they provide an opportunity for like minded members from around the world to meet each other in convivial surroundings and develop camaraderie, which is the essence of the Society.

Finally, I wish to see programmes formulated to protect the Society's intellectual property assets, to exploit the Vintage Card and Charts so as to generate a source of income for the Society and to address the funding and currency issues faced by the Society.

These are ambitious aims for my two year term but with the establishment and implementation of the Society's strategic plan in the near future and with the continued hard work and support of Council, The International Secretariat, Area and Branch committees and you, the membership, I trust the great majority of them will be achievable. It is after all your Society and thus up to us all to make it work for all of us.

Chris Bonsall

CONTRIBUTORS



Rodney Hale

Rodney was born into a Somerset farming family in 1944. His father and grandfather were keen shooting men and he remembers relishing jugged hare cooked by his grandmother. The tide turned when he witnessed a shot hare crying like a human baby. That haunting sound has remained with him and made him realise that there are far better ways for man to treat his brother creatures. Five years ago he decided to found the British Brown Hare Preservation Society - since re-named the Hare Preservation Trust.



Chris Graham

A birthday gift of a row of vines sparked Chris's latent interest in wine. Since retiring from the IT industry he has developed contacts in vineyards across France, Germany and recently Italy. He writes articles for the Berkshire Branch of the IWFS and has recently published his first book .



Tom Scott

Tom Scott is a professor at St Andrews University and is an authority on German wine. He has contributed to the magazine in the past as a member of Ron Barker's tasting panel.



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The International Wine
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Editor Pam Brunning
Brunsden Farm
Heath Ride
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 3QJ
Tel +44 (0)118 9733287
E mail
editor@sidpam.waitrose.com

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Judds Farmhouse
97, London Road
Stanway, Colchester
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The Society welcomes
application for Membership

For information please contact
Katie Wilkins
EAC Membership Registrar
14 Highbury, Jesmond,
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 3DX, UK
+44 (0) 191 239 9630
E mail
eacmembership@talktalk.net

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please contact the Editor

www.iwfs.org
For members password
e mail: andrew@brodie.cc

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Editorial

Hares are synonymous with March, so while looking on line for a cover picture I found The Hare Preservation Trust, an organisation I had never heard of, despite 40 years in farming. When I contacted them to ask if I could use one of their photos they were very apprehensive about my putting a hare on the cover of a food magazine. I explained to their founder and chairman, Rodney Hale, that part of the Society's remit is to educate, so suggested he put the case for the hare to our members and explain why we shouldn't be eating these majestic creatures. Even the young lady from the trust who sent the photo was amazed with it, 'You can even see the frost on his whiskers,' she enthused.

Berkshire Branch member Chris Graham has contributed a very interesting article on the wines of the Veneto region of Northern Italy and we have some fascinating, if not a little worrying, insight into the perception of taste. For those feeling deprived of hare I have included an article on an alternative delicacy for all to try.

Many wonderful lunches and dinners have been savoured in memory of André, and Sid and I enjoyed joining the Hereford Branch celebrations in the beautiful Wye Valley. Most branches have sent details of their events and I found the report of the London Branch festivities at the Café Royal extremely interesting. Julian Jeffs spoke of his memories of André and of his time as editor when he took over the job from André. Evidently during the war André had a shortage of contributors and, 'not wanting to appear to write the whole thing himself, he wrote under a number of pseudonyms'. Nothing changes!

The branch reports are a little sparse this time, I think many of our organisers were 'resting' after the Herculean task of organising 75th events. I hope I will have a lot more reports and contributions for the June issue.

As you will read the Capital Branch went to Little Bay in London for its AGM. While I was putting the report together owner Peter Ilic was making headlines by removing the prices from his menu and asking punters to pay only what they thought the food was worth. "Anything between a penny and £50 will make me happy, it's entirely up to the customer to decide," said Ilic. As we went to press it was reported that customers had already paid 20% more than the original menu price. What a wonderful challenge, in these beleaguered times, to all restaurateurs - if you are confident of your food, ask your customers to give what they think it is worth. That would prove if the guides have their ratings right.

As I write there is snow all around but I am looking forward to a lovely summer, as we have been promised, and to seeing many of you on the Thames for Sherry & Tapas in June, details of which are on page four.

Pam Brunning

30 January 2009

Dear Members

Since the flurry of IWFS 75th events in November it has been a more "low key" time focusing on general house-keeping of the International Secretariat (IS). Immediately before the 75th Gala Dinner at Claridge's the Council of Management met at the home of the IS, the In & Out Club. The minutes from this day-and-a-half meeting have been prepared summarising the key discussion points, a number of which were looking at how the Society can provide more value for its members. More details about this will follow.

Please watch out for these updates and new additions to the International Secretariat page of the website, which will be posted in due course.

- **2009 discounted accommodation rates in London** – these are available for members planning a trip to the capital. The In & Out Club, which is ideally situated in the centre of London and just a short walk from Piccadilly Square, offers IWFS members an Affiliate Rate.
- **Minutes of the Society's 45th AGM** – if you missed my summary in the last edition of Food & Wine you can log on and find out the points discussed.
- A copy of the **André Simon Lecture** presented by your new Honorary President, John Avery MW, at the IWFS luncheon held after the AGM at the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London on 15th November. A very relevant issue to the world of wine was John's chosen topic – "The Effects of Climate Change on Viticulture and Wine Production".
- A copy of the new **Articles of Association** will also be posted as passed at the last AGM.

This was also a busy time dispatching the orders for the Vintage Cards to members, and also non-members, wishing to purchase this invaluable publication. I trust you are now in receipt of yours and putting it to good use! Please do let me know if you would like to order further copies as gifts for friends. We also have a good stock of the new Silk IWFS tie which are available for members to purchase (for £20 cheque payment, or £20.60 for credit card purchases).

With two new appointments John Avery MW as your new Honorary President and Chris Bonsall your Chairman and the beginning of my first new year with the IWFS I am looking forward to continuing to work for you and your Society.

Best wishes

Andrea Warren, Administrator



After the bleak winter weather, join fellow members on a 3½ hour Summer Cruise through London along the Thames to see both the historic and the new buildings from a unique viewpoint; the twin decks of the river boat Salient.

Sample a selection of quality Sherries the Spanish way; as an accompaniment to a four course Spanish type tapas meal. The menu will be made available on the Society's web site and will be sent out to all applicants. The sherries will include examples of the many styles to compare and contrast; Fino, Manzanilla, Amontillado, Palo Cortado, and Dry Oloroso as well as Moscatel, Sweet Oloroso and Pedro Ximenez. They will be supplied and introduced by the Lustau Company, probably the most reliable producer of sherry around.

This event is being organised by the EAC. We hope that the timings will allow members to participate without the expense of an overnight stay in London, but of course you may decide to extend your stay and enjoy the other pleasures (theatres, restaurants, museums) that are available. Full details including place of embarkation will be sent out to participants in May.

The boat is licensed to carry 180 passengers but to ensure our comfort we are limiting places.

Sherry and Tapas on the Thames

Wednesday 24th June 2009

11:30am to 3:30pm.

Members £55 per person Guests £58

Booking Details

To book send your name, address, contact e mail address & phone number to:

EAC Treasurer, John Legg,

The Dene, 7 Harrop Road,

Hale, Altrincham,

Cheshire, UK, WA15 9BU

Enclosing your cheque for £55 per person payable to **IWFS-EAC**.

If you need to pay by Mastercard or Visa (surcharge applies) please contact John Legg: johnlegg@talktalk.net who will send you a form to complete.

Places will be allocated to those members who apply first. Applications will be acknowledged.

For more details please contact

Ron Barker on 0151 929 2991

E mail ronbarker@hotmail.co.uk

THE NOBLE HARE

The hare is the fastest and most agile of European animals, capable of speeds of 70kph and can turn on a sixpence while in full flight. Ironically it is said that this wildest of all animals can be easily tamed. Legend has it that Boadicea had a hare that accompanied her on all her campaigns against the Romans, contradicting the theory that the brown hare was brought to Britain by the Romans. No other creature is surrounded by so many myths and legends. Oestre, the pagan Goddess of dawn, fertility and rebirth whose festival was held at the vestal equinox - the start of spring fecundity - had a hare as her favourite animal, light bearer and attendant spirit. It was early Christian monks that turned this pagan festival into today's Easter.

Under Norman Forest Law hares became one of the five Noble Beasts of Venery joining the hart, hind, boar and wolf. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, due to improved agriculture and higher yields the hare population increased dramatically and farmers began to lobby parliament for a change in the law which restricted the shooting of these noble beasts to the landlords. In 1880 the Ground Game Act was passed, demoting hares to vermin and giving tenant farmers the right to protect their crops and shoot hares at any time of year. Because numbers fell so dramatically after the act was passed in 1892 the Hare Preservation Act was passed making it illegal to sell hares between March and July but they can still be shot for the pot. This law still stands today.

I always think of the hare as symbolizing March so when I decided that this splendid animal would grace our front cover I contacted the Hare Preservation Trust for permission to use one of their photos. Rodney Hale the Chairman of the Trust willingly gave his permission when I asked him to put his case for the conservation of the species.

Rodney Hale, Chairman - Hare Preservation Trust:

"Boxing "mad March hares" are symbolic of spring's advent, but behind the joy they bring to the human spirit after the long winter months, lurks a cruel and shocking reality.

Around 300,000 hares are shot annually out of a national population estimated at 730,000 during the late 1990s. To put that into perspective the wild rabbit population is currently estimated at 40 million. The brown hare is the only game species which does not have the basic legal protection of a close season, so at least 37,000 orphaned leverets die of starvation. Cleanly shot adults are the "lucky" ones, for around 30,000 wounded escape to an uncertain fate annually.



Tony Bates©

Most of the big hare shoots are staged during February and March in East Anglia where hares are relatively abundant and the slaughter begins as pheasant shooting closes on 1 February. Research in 1974 showed that by February 65% of hares are pregnant and by the end of the month half the females had given birth to their first litter. These figures are likely to have increased since 1974 owing to global warming. The brown hare has suffered at least an 80% population decline during the past century and in some parts of the South-West it is already extinct. In the mid 1990's a government Species Action Plan was set up to double numbers by the year 2010,

but research has shown that since 1995 the population has only just remained stable .

The Hare Preservation Trust receives many messages from the public saying how much they enjoy seeing hares and several have described the experience as "a privilege." These days, where cameras and camcorders are available to all there are so many ways to enjoy hares and other wildlife in the peace and tranquillity of the countryside.

And those boxing antics? Not normally a contest between rival males, but a female nearing oestrus but not quite ready to accept the male and rebuffing his over-amorous advances."

Please remember next time you see hare on the menu spare a thought for this noble creature, there is plenty of other game to eat that is reared for the purpose and protected by our game laws.

Editor

The Concepts of Taste

by Chris Long



Are you sure what you taste is what you think it is?

For many years, when tasting wine, we have been taught the hypothesis that each area of the tongue detects a single, different taste. It wasn't until the mid nineties that this assertion began to be disproved.

It was Aristotle who first cited our two basic taste senses, 'sweet' and 'bitter'. From these developed the concept of 'salt' 'pungent' 'harsh' and 'sour'. Ancient Chinese philosophy lists slightly different five basic tastes: bitter, salty, sour, sweet, spicy and the sixth sense 'umami', which was discovered a hundred years ago. The human body is trained to love the sweet, savoury and salty foods which provide the energy and proteins we need. Today, with so much mass produced food laden with sugar, salt and electrolytes* available our natural tendency to crave these foods can be a major cause of obesity.

In 1996 Professor Charles Zuker of the University of California realised that the literature on the biology of taste was potentially flawed when it was found that taste buds embedded in the papilla (bumps) on the tongue sense all flavours and respond accordingly. He could accept that taste buds right across the tongue responded to all tastes but he questioned that a single bud would respond to opposites such as sweet and sour. He argued that it did not make sense that a taste bud responsible for detecting something good like sugar would also detect something bad like bitter. After extensive experimenting Zuker discovered that it is the elongated taste cells in each bud that responds to a different taste. Working with laboratory mice Zuker and his colleagues isolated the actual taste receptors, something no one had ever done before. With more research he revealed the structure and function of the sweet and savoury taste receptors. For example receptors on the surface of sweet cells bind to sugar molecules, if there are only a few sugars present the bud sends a weak signal to the brain, if it detects a lot of sugars present the signal to the brain will be much stronger. Having unlocked the mystery of taste receptors Zuker found that he could introduce a minute amount of taste enhancer molecules to the mouth, these molecules did not prompt a signal of their own in the brain but when introduced with a small amount of sugar they sent an intensely sweet sensation, thus satisfying a craving for sugary foods.

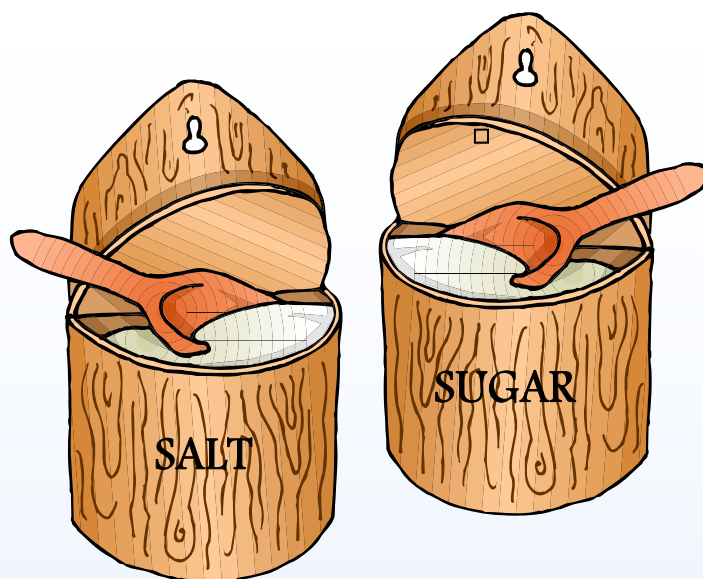
The now outdated concept of taste on the palate.

*Electrolytes help to control fluid levels in the body, maintain normal pH levels, and ensure the correct electric potential between nerve cells that enables the transmission of nerve signals.



Zuker realised the huge potential of finding molecules that did not have any flavour of their own but interacted with other flavours. “We thought, my God, if we have the receptors, maybe we can find clever ways to make a little bit of sugar taste as if you have a lot.” They screened 200,000 compounds before they identified the one that makes sucrose taste four times sweeter.

Up until this time food companies had to identify new flavour compounds by trial and error with humans tasting the results. Using Zuker’s taste-receptor structure made it possible to rapidly identify new flavour modulators. In 1998 Zuker and his colleagues set up a company that was to become Senomyx. Having unlocked the mystery of taste biology these new taste perceptions are revolutionising the way processed foods are produced. Senomyx, a San Diego based company is developing inexpensive compounds that make foods taste sweeter, saltier and more savoury than they really are. By adding minute amounts of these ‘modulators’ to traditional foods manufacturers can reduce the amount of sugar, salt or monosodium glutamate (MSG) needed to satisfy, thereby producing a healthier product. Nestlé started incorporating Senomyx’s savoury flavour modulators in its bouillon products last year and Coca-Cola and Cadburys started using the company’s modulators earlier this year. Because these compounds are used in such small amounts they do not have to undergo the rigorous US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) safety process usually applied to food additives. Senomyx just submits information regarding a new compound and a panel of independent scientists reviews the chemical content and decides if it is safe to consume. Even this process can take two years but some critics do question the soundness of this system.



Improving the quality of artificial sweeteners is one of Senomyx’s main aims. Today’s low-calorie alternatives to sugar often have a bitter aftertaste in the high concentrations used in fizzy drinks etc. The market potential is huge, it is estimated that over 5,000 products currently contain sucralose a no-calorie artificial sweetener which is approximately 600 times as sweet as sucrose (table sugar).

The company is also working on bitter blockers to make less palatable foods taste better. These could expand the use of soy proteins which have a bitter aftertaste and also reduce the amount of sugar added to cocoa based products to block bitterness. There is also great potential for ‘pharmaceutical crops’ such as rice and soybean that contain oral vaccines which are practical in developing countries but are not very palatable.

As well as researching the six basic tastes Senomyx is experimenting with compounds that feel cold on the tongue like menthol and the sensations of ‘fatty’ and ‘creamy’ flavours. “This is really brand new science,” says vice president Gwen Rosenberg. “That is part of the excitement - nobody really has done this before.”

It is still early days but if tiny quantities of these compounds can change the way we taste food there are infinite possibilities for manufacturers to produce healthier meals. The question is will people consume less calories if the scientists ‘doctor’ our fare so that it appeals to our palates without containing large quantities of sugar and salt, the essentials that are today considered the scourge of modern processed foodstuffs.

Further reading: The Receptors and Cells for Mammalian Taste. Jayaram Chandrashekar, Mark A. Hoon, Nicholas J. p. Ryba and Charles S. Zuker in *Nature* Vol 444, pages 288-294 - November 16th 2006

NEW WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHIES IN VENETO by Chris Graham

Traditional views about the wine from the Veneto region of Northern Italy are not encouraging. Custoza & Lugana whites are thin and Valpolicella and Bardolino reds are produced in volume for the lowest price. However a visit in October 2008 to two small family-run vineyards in the region, with young winemakers in charge, showed precisely how wrong this perception is today.

Veneto, stretching between Lake Garda and Venice in the North East of the country, is Italy's largest wine producing area, producing 2.8 million hectolitres of wine, not including Prosecco, compared with 1.55 million from Tuscany. The region has over 20 DOC zones and a variety of sub-categories. Many of its wines, both dry and sparkling, are internationally known and appreciated. The three most well known DOCs are Bardolino, Valpolicella, and Soave. Other indigenous wines produced here are the white Bianco di Custoza and Lugana and many producers are making very palatable wines from international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot.



Valerio Zenato

My first visit was to Valerio Zenato which has 20 hectares in the part of Veneto from Peschiera del Garda to Brescia where there are 102 vine growers and 52 wineries in 780 hectares. This area has the most local varieties of grapes in the whole of Italy. Zenato produces 110,000 bottles of wine annually from 140,000 litres; the rest of the wine is sold on for other uses.

The vineyards are on a 1.5km wide strip of land between Lake Garda and the moraine of the glacier to the South – the soil is therefore mainly alluvial and constitutes 30-50% clay. The typical age of the vines is 15 to 20 years and the vines are trained vertically with a North – South orientation. This positioning takes advantage of the light winds which run from the lake to the moraine and help to keep the vineyard dry as there is a high risk of mildew from early morning mist in August. Cabernet Sauvignon and most other international varieties produce the bunch on the 2nd bud. However, Corvina and local grape varieties produce the bunch from the 4th bud, and so they use pergola training with leaf removal in summer to allow for better ventilation. The high clay content in the soil means that they cannot harvest in wet conditions because of sinking into the mud. Consequently Zenato always hand picks but lack of available labour in this area is an ongoing issue and some vineyards are trying machinery for picking.

Fabio Zenato, their 3rd generation winemaker, likes to make organic wines, however *“it is difficult not to use chemicals occasionally when there are problems”*. His philosophy is to make the best use of natural methods, to, *“try to conserve what is brought in from the fields”*.

The old wooden antique grape press as used by Fabio's father when he was the winemaker, applied 6 - 8 Bar (atmospheres) of pressure to the must whereas the modern grape press uses only 0.7 to 0.8 Bar. Fabio believes strongly in taking great care of the crop. *“Man can make it worse but not better,”* says Fabio.

Another example of “natural” processes at Zenato is the use of temperatures of minus 4° for tartrate stabilisation and a lower than normal temperature of 15° to 17° for their white wine fermentation. In 2008 they fermented at just 13° using a yeast from New Zealand, a process which yields particular aromas.

The white grape harvest takes just 2 days. The bunches are de-stalked before pressing, as the stalks add too much tannin, before maceration and barrel fermentation. They cool the grapes & skins before adding them to the pressed juice in tanks, normally used for red wines. This process gives a distinctive personality to their white wines. Fabio says, *“What is in the bottle represents the terroir, the climate and the grape”*. The DOC production limit is 12.5 tonnes/ha with a 70% conversion rate but Zenato use 11 tonnes/ha with 70% conversion as part of the drive to increase the quality.

At 40,000 bottles, red wine represents only a part of Valerio Zenato's production but it includes Bardolino Classico, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in Reserva style. Fabio attempts to trap polyphenols which makes young reds smooth even with high tannins – like the amarone process, rather than relying on oak maturation. *“Wine is alive, it is an evolution.”* explains Fabio. Where oak barrels are used at Zenato they are 50% new and 50% one year old. They have two suppliers of oak, one Austrian and one French – both chosen because they offer wood which has been seasoned for at least 36 months – Fabio has found that by specifying this length of seasoning hard tannins and oils are washed out.



Fabio with his fathers wine press

Ca' La Bionda

My second stop was at Ca' La Bionda with 29 Hectares in the classic area for Valpolicella (VP) and Amarone. Production is 130,000 bottles with 60 to 70% being Valpolicella and 30 to 40% Amarone.

Classic Valpolicella only comes from 5 villages situated in 3 valleys in the foot-hills of the mountain area to the South West of Lake Garda. Valpolicella grape types, principally Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara all ripen at the same time. Valpolicella Classico is made directly from grapes after harvesting, while the sweet Recioto and dryer Amarone wines are produced from grapes left to dry for 3-6 months, on racks in open ended drying sheds.

Ca' La Bionda has some vines on limestone, giving the best wine with higher initial acid and elegance, and some on clay - giving more colour but a sweeter and softer wine. Here I met Alessandro Castellani, a 4th generation winemaker and someone who has very clear ideas on how to make his wine better. *"Wine has to help you eat, not make you full,"* says Alessandro.

At Ca' La Bionda two or three teams are used for hand harvesting. The Amarone team is generally older and the most experienced, they select the grapes in the fields first. The next team just pick everything that is left. Whilst the cost of grape production in the hills is twice that of in the valleys – the hill wines keep, whilst the valley wines do not.

Amarone grapes are selected and dried on the stems from October to January. However, Alessandro separates them and keeps the stems out of the must as they add tannins which are not "noble".

Selection is a skilled process requiring knowledge about vines. Alessandro has a Polish worker who has been coming for the harvest for 4 years and only now can he select the grapes for drying. One needs to understand the way the bunch has grown, how compact it is and how ripe it is – any hint of botrytis in a bunch can cause the fungus to be spread across the whole crop by the drying fans located at one end of the building.

Like Fabio at Zenato, Alessandro also believes in gentle handling of the grapes. His conical stainless steel fermentation tanks, specially made to his own design, ensure that the cap is always under the must. Cross tubes cut the cap into 4 pieces allowing them to sink, thus delivering better oxygen to skins, more extract and more phenols. The alternative methods of pumping over (remontage) or pushing the cap under by hand (pigeage) involves too much mechanical handling of the grapes for Alessandro's liking.

Although against technology for technology's sake, Alessandro will use it if there is a definite advantage. For example, his high pressure barrel cleaning system, which rotates 360 degrees, removes all the tartrate deposit in wooden barrels much more effectively than carrying out the same process by hand using low pressure water, as in the past.

He is a believer in the biodynamic principle to some degree, for example, he only does certain things when the moon is right. One example is bottling sweet wine with the old moon. This is the experience gained from his grandfather – Alessandro doesn't necessarily understand why it should make a difference, but he maintains it does. His approach tries to capture the phenols and as these are anti-oxidants, they help to reduce the amount of sulphur required.

Alessandro at Ca' La Bionda matures VP Superiore and Amarone in 30 Hectolitre barrels which cost 12,000€ each – top quality wood with at least 4 years' seasoning is the key. Barriques come from France produced by Taransand (Cognac region coopers) and 30 hectolitre big barrels from Italy by Garbellotto (master coopers in the Veneto region). Big barrels are changed every 7 – 10 years.

"Aging is 30% of the quality" explains Alessandro and every three to four months they mix the wine in stainless steel tanks to "give the wine oxygen". Oxygen makes a bridge between tannins and anti-oxidants and the colour is more established.

Both producers are strongly in favour of cork closures but they are finding that the UK and other markets are demanding screw-cap and some markets even want silicon corks. However, Alessandro says that real cork allows oxygen into the bottle and the way that wine develops in the bottle with cork closures is well established. He acknowledges that cork can be variable but considers this the only way to close quality wines.

What is impressive is not only the passion which these young winemakers have for their chosen career but also the very detailed knowledge that they now possess enabling them to develop their winemaking skills to deliver wine of the highest standards.

What also impressed me are the results: Zenato's white Benedictus 2007, made from late harvested Trebbiano is complex, exhibiting fruit and honey with multiple aromas. Their Bardolino, made from the traditional cepage, is smooth with a rich front of mouth flavour, long and full, with raspberry notes.

At Ca' La Bionda their Valpolicella Superiore 2006 is fresh, with some acid, oranges, and very smooth. Their Amarone 2004, Ravazzol, is deep ruby in colour with a deep earth and soil nose, delivering a slightly sweet front of mouth, very full body, and some acid to give balance and is long in the mouth. The Recioto 2004, Le Tordare, has a rich sweet nose with a bitter edge and full complex fruit flavour with great length.

With families such as Zenato and Castellani at Ca' La Bionda investing in vineyards and modern equipment the passion and expertise of their young winemakers is inspiring. The best wines of Veneto, already impressive in comparison with fine wines from other areas, will compete successfully in today's global wine markets.

"Our best advertisement is opening the bottle!" says Fabio Zenato.



Alessandro in Bionda's drying room

THE UBIQUITOUS RAT

BY PAM BRUNNING

WHICH DO YOU FANCY THE BLACK RAT (*RATTUS RATTUS*) OR THE BROWN RAT (*RATTUS NORVEGICUS*)



In November 2008 the Daily Telegraph reported that ‘Hamelin needs the piper again’. The north German town, famous for the legend of the Pied Piper, has once again been invaded by rats.

Britain's rat population is soaring to record levels. The abolition of weekly bin collections, a succession of mild winters and the summer floods are to blame for the rising numbers say rat catchers. Despite the threat to public health, a growing number of town halls are discouraging households from complaining about rats by charging up to £80 a visit for pest controllers. There are no official figures for the UK's rat population but estimates vary from 15 million to 100 million.

The 1996 edition of Larousse Gastronomique says of rats:

‘**Rat** – Rodent which was elevated to the rank of comestible during the siege of Paris in 1870, and which is eaten in certain regions. The flesh of well-nourished rats can be, it seems, of good quality but sometimes of a musky taste. Rats nourished in the wine stores of the Gironde were at one time highly esteemed by the coopers, who grilled them, after having cleaned them out and skinned them, on a fire of broken barrels, and seasoned them with a little oil and plenty of shallot. This dish, which was then called Cooper's Entrecôte, would be the origin of the Entrecôte à la Bordelaise.’ This section has been erased from later versions of Larousse, maybe it is time it was reinstated.

“Rat meat is a healthy alternative to rice and grains,” Vijay Prakash of the Bihar state welfare department told a press conference in Patna, “and should be eaten by one and all. Rat and chicken have equal food values, not only in protein but throughout the entire spectrum of nutrition. I haven't tried it myself, but my mother has and she finds it delicious. In fact, whoever has eaten rat says it is more spongy and better than even chicken meat.”

The welfare secretary's words were greeted with dismay by listeners. “Indian culture is based on vegetarianism,” said chef P. Soundararajan of the Mahindra resort chain. “Our culture and customs are based on not harming any living beings. And besides rats are dirty creatures that only the very poor would eat.”

But Prakash was unrepentant about his government campaign. “Almost 50% of India's grain stocks are eaten away by rodents in fields or warehouses. Increased human consumption of rodents will ease soaring food prices and provide increased employment for rat catchers. Rat has almost no bones but many people do not know this simple cuisine fact. We will have a massive media campaign to persuade people to try it. Some of the hotels here in Bihar have started selling rat meat, as a starter. If you order patal-bageri at one of our roadside hotels, that's what you'll get. Roasted Rat.”

The above passage is taken from the *Express India*, 18th August 2008. In Aizawl, one of the 11 districts of Mizoram State in India, smoked rat is a highly prized delicacy. The rodent is much in demand in kitchens in this northeastern state. Hundreds of smoked rats come in to the city from nearby villages every morning. Rats caught by traps in paddy fields sell like the proverbial hot cakes. “I don't keep records of my sales, but I normally sell about 200 smoked rats daily,” Lalvenpuii, a New Market shopkeeper, told the Indo-Asian News Service. “They don't come cheap either, with one smoked rat costing anywhere between Rs.15-20.” (rupees)

A recently published book by Jerry Langton *Rat: How the World's Most Notorious Rodent Clawed its Way to the Top* could change your whole outlook on this most fascinating of rodents. Mr Langton tells the difference between the original Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*) which is smaller and can climb higher than the Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*). Today this larger animal has supplanted the Black rat in most areas of the world. Langton tells us that rats can leap 4 feet straight into the air and can hold their breath for 3 minutes underwater.



In the 1980's the University of Reading ran a summer school for Rat Catchers. Students from around the globe spent twelve weeks learning the basics of rodent control in the classroom and visiting farms around the district baiting, catching and trapping the rodents. They then returned home to pass on their skills to the locals. Today their talents for catching them live are in much demand. In late 2008, Reuters reported that the price of rat meat had quadrupled in Cam-

They have a membrane behind their teeth to prevent swallowing when they are chewing inedible items such as concrete. Incredibly they have a collapsible rib cage that allows them to squeeze through very small spaces. Evidently it has been found that they prefer scrambled eggs to all other food.

Rat catchers in all parts of the world have a great respect for the intelligence of rats. Because of their finely tuned sense of smell, the bristly giant Gambian pouched rat is being trained to sniff out landmines. They are taken out by their handlers in a harness on a long lead and when they smell a mine they scratch the ground. Their handler then presses a clicker which makes a noise that the rat has been trained to associate with food. He scampers back to his handler and snatches his prize, a piece of banana. Two rats can clear a 200-square-meter area in one hour, it takes one human de-miner two weeks to do the same area. Thirty-six rats trained in Tanzania are working on a project in Mozambique and have already cleared thousands of mines across the country.

When food is scarce rats are often a more-readily available source of protein than other fauna. African slaves in the American South hunted wood rats to supplement their food rations. The Aborigines along the coast in Southern Queensland, Australia regularly included rats in their diet. In the Mishmi culture of India, rats are essential to the traditional diet, as the women may eat no meat except fish, pork, wild birds and rats. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that rat meat makes up half the locally produced meat consumed in Ghana, where cane rats are farmed and hunted for their meat.

bodia creating a hardship for the poor who could no longer afford it. Cambodia also exports about a metric ton of rats daily to Vietnam as food. Flooding in the Mekong Delta is forcing rats to higher ground making them easier to catch. The rise in price has encouraged a return to rat catching, children are entering the labour market for rat catchers and are offering rat meat in the local markets.

With the credit crunch biting harder people are considering trying alternative forms of protein. Observer columnists Caroline Davies wrote last year, "It's low in fat, low in food miles and completely free range." "In fact, some claim that it is about as ethical a dish as it is possible to serve on a dinner plate." No, this time she was not talking of rats but *Sciurus carolinensis* - the grey squirrel, often known in the country as 'tree rats'. Butcher David Simpson in Cornwall, whose game counter began selling 'tree rats' last year, is struggling to keep up with demand, "We put it on the shelf and it sells."

Game shop owner David Ridley in Corbridge, Northumberland says he has sold 1,000 - at £3.50 each since he tested the market at the beginning of 2008. "I wasn't sure at first, and wondered would people really eat it. Now I take every squirrel I can get my hands on." How long before our ecofriendly green brigade start to consider eating rat as an alternative to planet polluting beef. Keep an eye open in your local Farmers Market. Anyone for *Rattus norvegicus* lightly smoked?



A RECIPE WITH A STORY TO TELL

I find it interesting to try and interpret recipes from the past and the recipe below intrigued me as it's written as a poem with charm and wit. It's from *'The Wit and Wisdom of the Reverend Sydney Smith'* (1771-1845). Receipt was the old word for recipe – hence the title.

Receipt for a Salad

*To make this condiment, your poet begs
The pounded yellow of two hard-boil'd eggs ;
Two boil'd potatoes, pass'd through kitchen sieve,
Smoothness and softness to the salad give.
Let onion atoms lurk within the bowl,
And, half suspected, animate the whole.
Of mordant mustard add a single spoon,
Distrust the condiment that bites so soon ;
But deem it not, thou man of herbs, a fault,
To add a double quantity of salt ;
Four times the spoon with oil from Lucca brown,
And twice with vinegar procured from town ;
And, lastly, o'er the flavoured compound toss
A magic soupçon of anchovy sauce.
Oh, green and glorious! Oh, herbaceous treat!
'Twould tempt the dying anchorite to eat :
Back to the world he'd turn his fleeting soul,
And plunge his fingers in the salad-bowl !
Serenely full, the epicure would say,
Fate cannot harm me, I have dined today.*

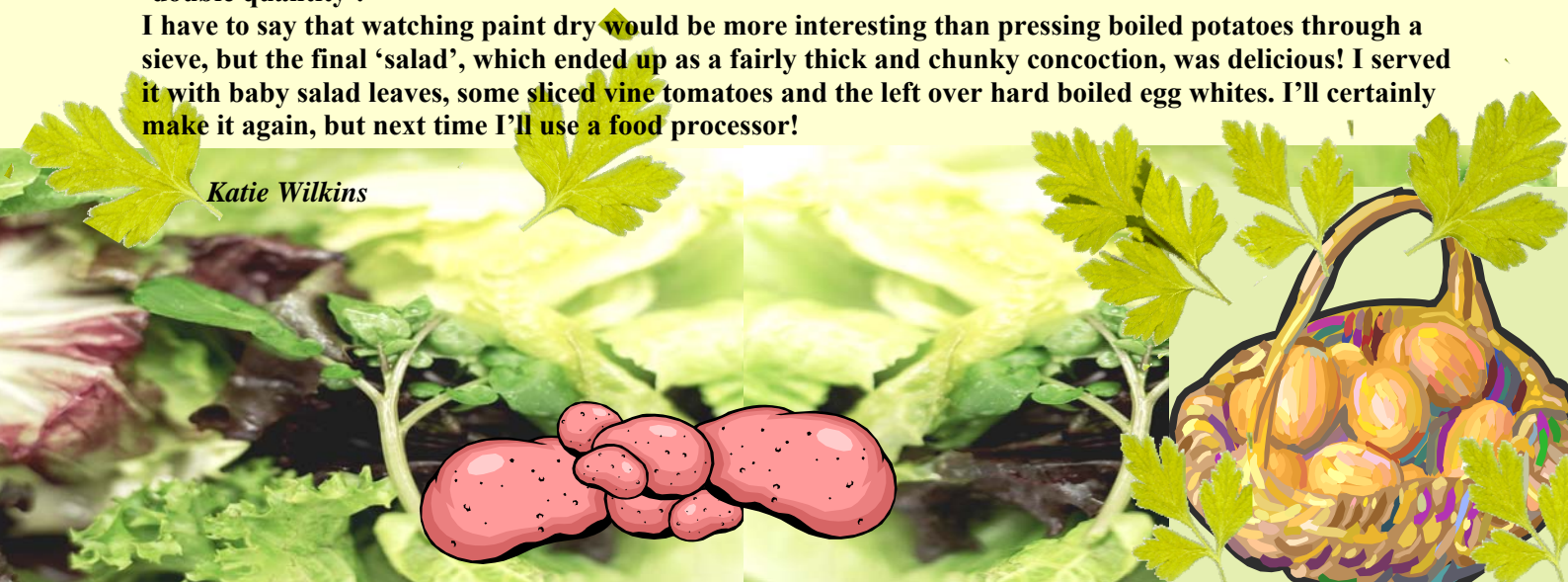


Interpreting recipes from the past is always tricky. Measures for ingredients won't be the same size as they are today and the ingredients themselves may not have the same flavour as they did then.

Anyway, I had a go and doubled it up for 2 of us. I boiled 4 eggs, used the yolks and kept the whites. I used 4 new potatoes which I boiled and then skinned and finely chopped a small portion of onion which I blanched. I made up some English mustard and used extra virgin olive oil and white wine vinegar, with a teaspoon as the measure for all three. I used anchovy paste and I added salt to taste – it didn't need a 'double quantity'.

I have to say that watching paint dry would be more interesting than pressing boiled potatoes through a sieve, but the final 'salad', which ended up as a fairly thick and chunky concoction, was delicious! I served it with baby salad leaves, some sliced vine tomatoes and the left over hard boiled egg whites. I'll certainly make it again, but next time I'll use a food processor!

Katie Wilkins



AN ITALIAN PASTA DIET -- IT REALLY WORKS !!

- 1... You walka pasta da bakery.
- 2... You walka pasta da candy store.
- 3... You walka pasta da Ice Cream shop.
- 4... You walka pasta da table and fridge.

You will lose weight!

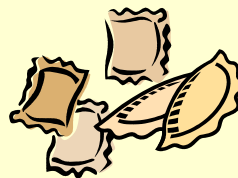


Courtesy of Private Eye

Quote:

'The trouble with eating Italian food is that five or six days later you are hungry again.'

George Miller



Just remember this.

For those of you who watch what you eat, here's the final word on nutrition and health.

1. The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the English.
2. The Mexicans eat a lot of fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the English.
4. The Italians drink a lot of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the English.
3. The Chinese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the English.
5. The Germans drink a lot of beers and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than the English.



CONCLUSION

Eat and drink what you like.

Speaking English is apparently what kills you.

Pop Goes the Champagne Market

Due to the world credit crunch the bubble has finally burst in the champagne market. Since the Millennium Champagne sales have risen steadily with sales in 2007 up by 50%, but in 2008 sales declined 10%. Only Moët et Chandon who include Veuve Clicquot, Mercier, Ruinart and Krug maintained its revenues in the third quarter of 2008. Rémy, who include Piper & Charles Heidsieck, also Vranken Pommery, Boizel (Lanson) and Laurent Perrier have seen their sales plunge. Worst hit being Laurent Perrier where sales have fallen 30% over the same period as last year. Trevor Stirling, an analyst, at world business consultants Sanford Bernstein, said, "Wholesalers will be sitting on a lot of stock so we will be seeing big price cuts." Shades of the economic climate in 1933 when André was forced to leave the Champagne trade and set up the Wine & Food Society.

Maybe cheap fizz is what we all need just now. To quote Napoleon, "In victory you deserve it, in defeat you need it."

Roquefort Rage

The French are fuming at a massive hike from 100% to 300% in the tax on Roquefort cheese imported into the United States. Rumour has it that it was a parting shot at the French from George Bush. The 100% levy was imposed in 1999 on many French products, truffles, ham, chocolate, sausages, to name but a few, in retaliation for the ban on hormone treated American beef. This new tax, on France's noblest of cheeses, is said to epitomise Mr Bush's contemptuous attitude towards France. French Agricultural minister Michel Barnier who was outraged at the situation said, "We hope friendly dialogue with the new Obama administration will help resolve the problem."

Everything but the Squeal

It seems John Barlow, a British expatriate living in Galicia in north-west Spain has done what the Berkshire Branch of the IWFS did 33 years ago - eaten every part of the pig. The difference being that Mr Barlow has now written a book about his experience. *Everything but the Squeal: Eating the Whole Hog in Northern Spain* is more of a travel volume than a foodie book. It tells of his wanderings through the Galician countryside and of the many fascinating characters he met. It seems John Barlow's episode was a much more leisurely experience than producing fourteen courses for 36 members on the hottest night of the century! (See The Society Journal November 1976)

Feral Hogs

If anyone in the US has ideas of eating the whole hog it may be easier than you think. Evidently a growing number of feral hogs are stalking the woods. In 2000 Missouri adopted a shoot-on-sight policy as the woods were becoming dangerous areas. A hog shot in Georgia in 2004 was claimed to be almost four meters long and weighed about 450kg. Not the type of pinky and perky you would want to disturb on a Sunday afternoon walk.



Facts & Figures

£40 million - the cost of Diageo's new whisky distillery, the first to open in Scotland for 30 years.

£5,000 - the amount of public money spent by the Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs on a one day course for wildlife inspectors on how to 'undertake inspections of those trading commercially in caviar or roe'.

12% - the amount baked bean sales are up due to the Credit Crunch

£5 - the cost of a pint at Marco Pierre White's pub The Yew Tree at Highclere.

Labels seen in the fruit aisle of a Californian grocer:

'Cherries - Pleasant aroma of Merlot with hints of Cabernet.'

'Raspberries - Fruity nose of Pinot Noir with chocolaty overtones of Zinfandel.'

'Pears - Subtle wisps of Riesling with a distinct flavour of Chardonnay.'

Maybe the store manager was a moonlighting wine grower.

Quote from The Sunday Telegraph:

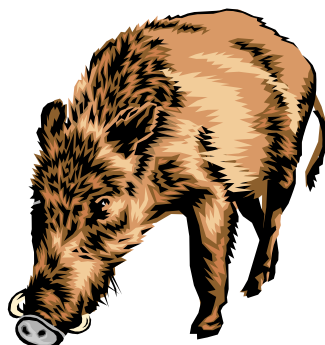
"I remember being told not to mention we only buy gin one bottle at a time." 'Yo! Sushi' founder Simon Woodroffe, talking about his parents' embarrassment at being the poor relation.

Pomegranate Peacekeeper?

The Koran lists pomegranates as one of the fruits in paradise and medical research tells us that it is rich in antioxidants and a good defence against many of the diseases of the Western world.

With this in mind the Afghan agricultural ministry in conjunction with the US Agency for International Development held a World Pomegranate Fair at a model farm on the edge of Kabul. A collection of somewhat bemused Afghan farmers were told that as pomegranate prices have quadrupled in the last five years they

were now more profitable to grow than opium poppies. Kandahar, in the south of the country, produces some of the finest pomegranates in the world but it lies in the heart of the Taliban and opium country. A lack of fertiliser and pesticides combined with poor infrastructure all combine to make Afghan 'poppy-watchers' sceptical about the chances of promoting the alternative crop. Mint, saffron and cotton have all been tried but have failed to rival Afghanistan's main lucrative export.



75 th Anniversary Events from Around the Branches

East Anglian Branch Celebrate at The Broadhouse Hotel, Wroxham

We were all set for our Annual Black Tie dinner on 24th October 2008, Taxis were booked, dresses were chosen and hair do's done!

We all arrived at the Broadhouse Hotel, which was built in 1700 and was a private residence until Phillip Search and his wife Caroline bought it last year. Although they have refurbished it throughout, with an emphasis on quality and comfort, it still exudes the relaxed, easy ambience of a traditional family home. Phillip and his team had their work cut out to provide a menu and wines to match our branch advertised price per person.

Needless to say we were treated to home grown produce and seasonal freshly cooked food with wines to compliment the dishes.

Velouté curried garden butternut squash and Norfolk Honey
Warm Smoked Salmon with puy lentils and quails egg
Melon, stem ginger and chilli granita
Poached breast Norfolk pheasant, braised cabbage and roast parsnips
Lemon syllabub
Banana financier with caramel cream sauce
Coffee and petit fours

During the evening Kate gave a review of the 2008 events and a picture collage was also placed on the tables.

The 2009 committee was voted in and Mel thanked those who worked effortlessly in 2008.

After coffee, we held our annual auction and raffle in aid of club funds with a donation to the Norwich Branch 'Red Balloon Learner Centres'. Dan Kelly – spokesperson and IWFS member, gave a speech on behalf of the Red Balloon charity.

We were very lucky to have prizes donated from past reviewed restaurants including:

Dinner for 2 at '18' Bedford Street, Norwich

Francis Guilda – General Manager, Adnams Hotels donated four nights at the Brewers House Southwold worth £500.

Mike & Josie of the 'BIG K' fame also donated a bottle ALTO EGO.....

Kate Sharp



15



Estonian Branch Celebrate at The Bonaparte Restaurant, Old Town Tallinn

On November 6th 2008 the Estonian Branch held their 75th anniversary dinner at the Bonaparte restaurant, in the Old Town of Tallinn, where we have held many successful and memorable events.

The guests were greeted with a glass of Mumm's Cordon Rouge NV Champagne and canapés before being seated and treated to a brief presentation by Martin Dungay. He talked not only about Andre Simon and 75 years of IW&FS, but also gave a summary of events from the 7½ years that the Estonian branch has been in existence. Events have been very different, ranging from a study of the art of BBQ, with instructions how to properly prepare the meat with tips such as 'if, your Granny needs her teeth then its still undercooked', to Sashimi demonstrations by Japanese chefs. Weekend retreats with London chefs flying over and bringing us pounds of fresh truffles and soft shell crabs, with the party successfully draining every last bottle of champagne in the hotel, while singing songs late into the night around the fireplace. Sleigh rides through the snow and country dancing to classic Estonian food and drinks. We have had traditional crayfish parties, wine tastings and the sampling of foods from many different kitchens and cultures.

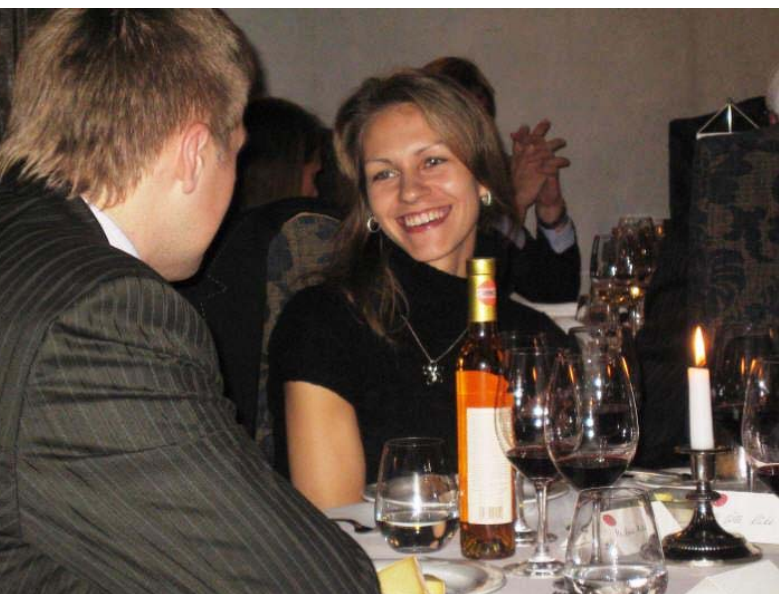
We then commenced the meal and in the tradition of the branch, all wines were served blind and during the meal individual guests were called upon to comment on the wines and to guess what they were drinking. Our first course a Monkfish carpaccio with lobster sa-bayon, spinach sauté and tomato chips was served with a Pinot Blanc Les Princes Abbé 2006 Domaines Schlumberger, Alsace, France and a Spanish Albarino 2006 Adegas Valminor O Rosal Rias Baixas. This was followed with a Jerusalem artichoke purée soup with dark brioche meant to be enjoyed with the same wines.

Then we found ourselves cleansing our palettes with a Lingonberry and vanilla granite. Chef Artur Ovchinnikov was particularly thanked for his deer course - a lightly smoked deer carré and baby deer fillet with vegetable and spinach strudel and berry sauce with herbs. He was both the successful hunter who brought the deer from the forest as well as the master, who had spent many hours preparing the sauces. This meat feast was accompanied by two red wines, a Zinfandel Old Vine by Seghesio family, vintage 2003, Sonoma County California, United States and a Castiglione Barolo DOCG, 1999 Vietti from Piemonte, Italy. The first was so wonderfully old world style that nobody even thought about placing it as Californian. The Vietti's Barolo was a compliment to the meat. To enjoy the last sips of the red wine we had a selection of Belgian Abbey style cheese with homemade cumin bread.

Finally came a dessert of Mille feuille with creme chiboust and caramelized nuts which was served with an East India Solera Sherry Emilio Lustau Jerez de la Frontera Spain, followed by coffee and tea and chocolate truffles by Piero Marcolini specially brought from Brussels by the chairman.

We then conducted a small lottery with prizes of wines and accessories donated by members and partners. The aim of which was to aid the development of a functional web site for the branch. It is hoped that this site will allow members to learn more about events and to better pass on comments about what is happening locally within the wine and food scene. Also to take advantage of local trade offers as well as creating a society wine register and database which would be accessible to the wider community of wine and food lovers.

Kadri Kroon



Moscow Branch Celebrate at the Armenia Pavilion , Moscow

On November 20th Moscow Branch held a very special dinner, devoted to the 75th Birthday of the International Wine & Food Society at the Armenia Pavilion at the Exhibition of the Achievements of National Economy in Moscow.

That evening we planned to discuss the previous events, share our thoughts for the next year and of course, celebrate the wonderful date.

To do all that, we chose this small cozy restaurant with Armenian cuisine that is thought to be an oasis of sun & hospitality in the Moscow winter. We had a chance to taste a lot of interesting Caucasian specialties, like “Kavurma” (meat, baked & preserved in a special way), “Aveluke” (cooked with wild-growing herbs), “Achar” (a typical Caucasian dish, similar to braised meat prepared with vegetables and mushrooms) and many-many others.

The dinner was accompanied by dry red wines from “Areni” (different sorts of grapes, growing in different regions of Armenia), white dessert wine “Idjevan” & aromatic Armenian brandy “Akhtamar”.

With national music and plenty of conversation the dinner finished rather late in the evening and left a lot of wonderful impressions.

Svetlana Kazakova, Coordinator of the Moscow Branch

Sussex Branch Celebrate at the The Gallery Restaurant, City College, Brighton.

On Thursday 13 November 2008, thirty eight members and guests of the Sussex Branch celebrated the 75th anniversary of the IWFS at The Gallery Restaurant, City College in Brighton. The branch, formerly known as Brighton and Hove was amongst the first to be established and some of our more mature members had met André Simon (who lived in Sussex near East Grinstead) on a number of occasions.

Since the branch had enjoyed an Alsatian dinner for its October event we could not mimic the dinner that André had organized as the first ever meeting of the IWFS on 14th November 1933; instead we asked the College to devise a 5 course French based dinner with accompanying wines. The menu on the night was:- Consommé Mikado, Fillet of Sole Veronique, and Cailles Richelieu, followed by Soufflé Surprise Jubilee (baked ice cream in meringue with a black cherry compote) which completed the meal. The dinner was accompanied by some excellent wines and following a Charles Mignon Premier Grand Cru Champagne aperitif, the group enjoyed a Rive Haue St Mont Blanc from Languedoc, Chartron Les Fleur Blanc from Bordeaux, an outstanding Chapoutier St Joseph and finally a Pyrenees D’Atlantique, St Albert Pachernc De Vin Bilh 2001 to accompany the dessert.

As the meal progressed, the kitchen brigade (level 2 & 3 students under the guidance of tutor Andy MacGlennon) displayed their skills in producing these dishes, all of which were delicious and attractively presented.

The front of house was under the watchful eye of lecturer Mike Cleaver and consisted of level 2 & some volunteer level 1 students with Maitre d’ Charlotte (level 3) in control since this event was her practical examination. The waiting students were extremely professional and attentive serving us all with a smile despite the fact that they had experienced a long working day. Our members and guests from the Berkshire branch thoroughly enjoyed the meal and it is a great credit to the College that such a high standard of catering was achieved.

This was a truly fitting way to celebrate the anniversary and we urge all IWFS members to visit this restaurant should the opportunity arise.

David Berry

Jacqueline Godfrey

The Sussex Branch is sad to announce the passing of Jackie Godfrey one of our longest standing members who gave constant and loyal support to the branch until her death at the end of December. She was passionate about food and wine and joined the Society, we believe, in the early to mid 1960’s along with her husband Ken. She met Andre Simon on at least one occasion and attended the Great Weekend in Manchester in 2006 where some of you may have met her. She was a popular, unassuming and caring person who was a good friend to many and through the years she introduced a lot of new members to the IWFS. Jackie was also pivotal in the survival of our branch when six years ago our secretary (who ran the branch single handed) passed away suddenly. Jackie called an EGM, a committee was organised and without her the Sussex Branch would not be in existence today. She approached her many commitments with enthusiasm and dedication and was particularly involved with the MacMillan Nurses as well as sponsoring a child in Africa. Her energy, looks and general zest for life belied her years and she will be greatly missed by her many friends and family. Jackie was an exceptional lady and it was a privilege to have known her.



Students hard at work



Zürich Branch Celebrate at Belvoirpark Restaurant and Hospitality Institute, Zürich

The Zürich Branch held their 75th Anniversary luncheon on November 22nd at the Belvoirpark Restaurant and Hospitality Institute in Zürich. Twenty-one members and guests met at the restaurant at 11:00AM for a tour of the school, which offers a two-year course that covers all aspects of the hospitality industry from the kitchen to the front of house including wine education. Students must have already had an 18 month apprentice course in a hotel or restaurant and be recommended by the establishment. The 24 month course which costs in the region of 30,000 Swiss Francs allows the students, generally aged between 20 and 30 years old, to learn in a modern up to date facility and then to put their learning to practice by working next door in the Belvoirpark Restaurant, a four star establishment that also caters to private functions of up to 100 people.

The restaurant/school took on the original 1933 menu as a challenge. The students, overseen by the chef de cuisine Daniel Walser, produced a spectacular feast. The Belvoirpark was able to source all the Alsatian wines from Doppf au Moulin. We also attempted to have the wines with the same age relationship as were served in the original meal, fortunately we were blessed with a good year that was ready for drinking, the 2004 vintage. Students also presented and served all the courses.

The luncheon began with an Aperitif of Cremant d'Alsace Blanc de Blanc Brut Cuvée Julien with Feuilletés. Before the meal Peter Bennett-Keenan gave the André Simon grace both in French and English. We then sat down to a first course of three small starters on one dish, Terrine de Foie Gras, Filet de Lapin à la Gelée au Riesling, and a Poché de Saumon sur Choucroute à la Champagne, this latter part was warm. A delicious 2004 Pinot Gris accompanied this. Members by now were well into the spirit of the afternoon and lively discussions and much oing and ahing were going on over the first course.

A formal presentation of the main course of free range Partridge (Perdreau Poêle aux Petites Saucisses de Porc Rotie sur Chou Blanc aux Carottes, Pommes de Terre Dorées) brought a round of more oing and ahing. The main course was accompanied by a Riesling Schoenenburg Grand Cru, a spectacular wine that was the wine of the day for many people. Rich but with good acidity, a classic petrol aroma that is the signature of so many great rieslings, an excellent foil to the food. A range of Eastern French cheeses, Comté, Munster and Monsault followed, with which we polished off the Riesling and the Pinot Gris.

The dessert (Kougloff de Colmar(en tranche) à la Compote de Quetsches avec Sauerrahm Sorbet) was revised from the original menu, Mirabelles were unavailable so were replaced by quetsches (a purple plum native to Alsace). We had seen the students preparing this course. Desserts like this require a lot of care, precision and a certain artistic flair and it all came together in this presentation. The wine pairing was a 2004 Gewurtztraminer Brand de Turkheim Grand Cru, a rich yellow gold colour, intense bouquet of lychees and tropical flowers, It went superbly with the various tropical fruits as well as the sour cream sorbet and gugelhopf. Gewurtztraminer flowed until late in the afternoon when everyone went out into the chilly late afternoon gloom with fond memories of a wonderful meal with good wine and good friends. Chef de Cuisine was Daniel Walser.

John Macdonald



Dick Asjes and Peter Bennett-Keenan

Leicester Branch Celebrate at Hambleton Hall, Rutland

Dr. Keith Wood arranged for Hambleton Hall to produce a 75th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon for us on Tuesday November 25th 2008. Chef Aaron Paterson said it would be difficult to reproduce the original Alsatian menu as used for the first meeting featuring partridges but instead he chose an excellent luncheon menu for us.

Forty members and guests were welcomed with glasses of Champagne - NV Varichon & Clerc Blanc de Blanc Méthode Traditionnelle - and canapés served in the very comfortable country house sitting room overlooking Rutland Water and Tim Hart's delightful garden. We moved into the elegant dining room to be seated at four round tables.

We started with Pan Fried Fillet of Seabream with a tomato and artichoke risotto or a Terrine of Chicken, Artichoke and Field Mushrooms with tarragon oil. The main course was Pan Fried Fillet of Plaice with butternut squash and soused fennel or Braised Shoulder of Lamb with Mediterranean Vegetables and rosemary jus. For pudding we enjoyed Passion Fruit Tart with a passion fruit and banana sorbet or Apple Crumble Soufflé with vanilla ice cream.

The service was amazing - the staff served everyone at the table simultaneously and somehow knew which of the alternatives we had chosen. We drank 2007 Tour des Gendres Bergerac sec and 2004 Le Ciste Eric Laguerre. We lingered over our coffee and petit fours. John Hind, our Chairman, toasted the Society and Sous chef, Mark Beastall, left the kitchen to talk about the menu. The dishes all beautifully presented and as delicious as they looked had delighted us.

Mary Jewell



Malmö Branch Celebrate at Atmosfär Restaurant, Malmö

We did not officially announce the last dinner for this year as a 75th anniversary event but the occasion was celebrated on the 7th of November at one of the top restaurants in Malmö, Atmosfär with a five course meal including fois gras, pike-perch, wild duck, cheeses and dessert. The following wines were served; 2006 Chenin blanc, Daneel (SA) 2007 Gewurztraminer Cuvée Theo, Weinbach (Alsace), 2004 Riesling grand cru Geisberg, Kientzler (Alsace) 2005 Savigny les Beaune, 1er cru Les Lavieres, Tollot-Beaut (Burgundy) 2005 Vacqueyras Cuvée Doucinello, Le Sang de Cailloux (Rhône) 2005 Bosquet des Papes Traditionel, Chateauneuf-du-Pape (Rhône) and 2006 Recioto di Soave La Perlada, Rugate, Veneto (Italy).

Rolf Fransson

Herefordshire Branch Celebrate at Glewstone Court, Ross-on-Wye.



On December 12th Herefordshire Branch celebrated the 75th anniversary with a very special dinner at Glewstone Court. The Branch adhere exactly to the menu served at the first meeting of the Society held at the Café Royal in November 1933, and even the wines were from the same vineyard as that original lunch!

Amongst the guests the Society was very pleased to welcome Jon Hurley, President of Herefordshire Fine Wine Society and Pam Brunning, editor of the Food & Wine magazine. Members and guests were greeted with a Cremant d'Alsace Cuvee Julien and shown to the extremely comfortable drawing room at Glewstone Court where a wonderful log fire awaited. Dinner was served in the Court's private dining room and commenced with Alsacienne Hors d'oeuvre Platter comprising Charcuterie, Smoked Bacon, Potato Salad, Smoked Trout Fillet, Marinated Anchovy Fillets and Mushroom and white Truffle scented Frittata. This was accompanied by a Riesling Grand Cru Schoenenbourg 2004.



The main dish of the evening was fresh Partridge with cabbage, kasselbach potatoes and baby carrots, with chef, Christine Reeve-Tucker, making a spectacular attempt at following the original dish of 1933. Gewurztraminer Moulin Blanc 2006 was served, but for those who preferred red, a magnificent Leoville Barton 1997 was very kindly donated by Ian Rushton. This was certainly a wine to be savoured.

Munster cheese with cumin seeds followed, then Gougloff Pudding, again wonderfully prepared by Christine, with a compote of Mirabelle plums together with the Chairman's Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas 1998. All this concluded with coffee and mince pies (a little deviation from the original lunch, but in the spirit of Christmas).

The Chairman paid fond tribute to André Simon and it indeed seemed he was with us in spirit. All agreed the meal was particularly special and will be remembered as one of the highlights of the Branch.

Sue Davidson



London Branch Celebrate at The Café Royal, London



The Café Royal was where it all started 75 years ago and where the IWFS was conceived at that historic luncheon. So it was the logical and *only* venue for the London Branch to choose to celebrate its 75th event.

However given the economic climate, Carole Goldberg, London Branch Events Manager, was presented with a tough challenge from her Committee:- to provide a four course dinner with wine and a pre-dinner reception for under £100 per head at this prestigious venue. Never a one to be daunted, she rose to the occasion and even brought back the sparkling wine for the reception from France! This was NV Roger de Vermont, which all agreed was the equivalent of “a pretty decent in-house champagne” at a fraction of the cost. Certainly the quantities downed supported this evaluation!

On the night, members and guests from several Branches, London, St James, Capital, Berkshire, Sussex and Manchester, plus a sizeable contingent from the City Livery Wine Circle thanks to our newly elected Branch Chairman, Judy Tayler-Smith, who is also the Chairman of this prestigious City Organisation, joined together to celebrate the founding of our Society and the London Branch, which we proudly claim as synonymous!

We were able to use the beautiful Pompadour Room which has such historical significance that it is listed by English Heritage. This huge, opulently lavish room is dominated by mirror panels, gold leafing and bronze chandeliers. The celebrated Pompadour ceiling is decorated with intricate gold leafing and painted antique frescos and fortunately has a preservation order on it to protect it from the developers who were soon to move in.

Our Founder would have indeed been proud of the Café Royal who really did us proud! Our menu was excellent. It was faultlessly cooked and beautifully presented. Our starter of “Kiln Roasted Salmon and Crayfish Tart Served with Lobster Cream” was visually superb as well as very tasty. Our next course of “Summer Squash and Apple Soup with Chive Crème Fraîche” had been criticised by a few before-hand as more English than French but, as many agreed on the night, was absolutely delicious and so very “more-ish”. Our main course of a specially created signature dish “Fricassée of Chicken Café Royal with Port Glaze, Garnished with Button Mushrooms, Onions and Pancetta, and served with Herb Potatoes” was delicious. A special mention must be made here of Helen, one of the serving staff, who took it upon herself to check discreetly that our Muslim guests had been served their main course without pancetta. We finished with a well presented selection of cheeses served with celery, walnuts, grapes and apricots.

At this point our special guest, the renowned Julian Jeffs, addressed us with his personal reminiscences of André. Julian, a QC, deputy High Court Judge and President of the Circle of Wine Writers, is considered one of the foremost writers on European wine and has written several books solely on the topic of Spanish and Portuguese wine. He had first met André when as an undergraduate at Cambridge in 1952 and one of the founder members of the University Wine & Food Society. André had attended their inaugural dinner in the University Arms where Julian pronounced the white Burgundy too young. André announced it would never be better, so Julian admitted that he was “well and truly squashed”. Julian knew “Wine and Food” from an early age as his father had subscribed ever since the first issue and it was his favourite reading. As a small boy Julian never imagined he would one day become its editor. But he did, at one remove from André, who edited it himself during the war. André had a shortage of contributors for obvious reasons and, not wanting to appear to write the whole thing himself, he wrote under a number of pseudonyms! Whilst editor, Julian saw a lot of André who remained a regular contributor as well as being exceptionally kind when writing his magnum opus on Sherry.

Following this, Judy Tayler-Smith addressed everyone saying how proud she was to have been elected Chairman of the London Branch in this celebratory year and that she was particularly delighted that so many from other Branches had joined us at our special event.

Sadly the evening came to an end but given that this was our last chance to use the Café Royal, many people were reluctant to leave this wonderful venue where IWFS history had been created and had now come full circle for The London Branch.



Bath & Bristol Branch Celebrate at Ston Easton Park, Bath



The Bath & Bristol Branch held a joint celebration of 12th Night and the 75th Anniversary of the Society with a Dinner on 6th January 2009 at the Ston Easton Park Hotel, near Bath, and were rewarded by the service of exceptional food and wine:

Reception – Champagne Morize Pere et Fils Brut Reserve 2004, with all too tempting canapés

A first course of Gravadlax of Home cured Salmon with Horseradish Cream & Dill Blinis was accompanied by a Puligny Montrachet 2005.

The main course was Roast Crown of local Partridge with Confit Leg Ravioli & Madeira juice. This in passing acknowledgement of the dish served to the founding members of the Society at their meeting on the 14th November 1933, but without the cabbage! The wines were Chateau Gloria St Julien 2003 and Chateau Talbot 2003 Grand Cru Classe St Julien

A Trio of Ston Easton Desserts were served with a Pinot Gris 2003 Vendange Tardive, Sick Dreyer, Alsace.

This was followed by a Selection of West Country Cheeses with Celery, Grapes and Homemade Chutney, coffee and petit fours.

The Chairman, Neville Bagot, welcomed everyone, and congratulated, in absentia, John Avery MW, and Chris Bonsall, who had respectively been elected President and Chairman of the Society in November 2008, both of whom are valued members of the Bath & Bristol Branch.

The formal part of the evening concluded with a short commentary by the Chairman on the life and aims of André Simon, followed by a toast to our Founder proposed by the former Chairman of the EAC, Ian Rushton.

All members attending were enthusiastic about the standards of service and comfort at this delightful hotel (part of the Von Essen Group), and would continue to recommend it to others unreservedly. IWFS members with helicopters would find it particularly accommodating.

Neville Bagot



around the branches - Bath & Bristol

FRENCH GASTRONOMIC CRUISE

You can eat and drink well in France, and take many a river cruise, but there is a special magic in enjoying both at the same time. Hence an opportunity for the more hedonistic members of the Bath & Bristol Branch in November 2008 to savour for three days the top quality cuisine and wines of the Burgundy, Beaujolais, and Cotes du Rhone regions.



An added attraction was embarking on Eurostar at the architecturally impressive St Pancras International Station mid-morning, with a very short transfer onto the TGV at Lille, and arriving at the gastronomic capital of France, Lyon, nearly 600 miles south, by mid afternoon.



Our party of eighteen members were transferred by coach from the Gare de Lyon the short distance to the quayside of the River Saone where the MS Mistral was berthed. This was a fully air-conditioned vessel with a total of 76 en-suite cabins, a large saloon bar together with a large and attractive restaurant. The British contingent on board were heavily outnumbered by French, but the entente cordiale prevailed on all occasions.

After a complimentary aperitif on board, the same evening we sailed three miles North up the River Saone where we disembarked to dine at the Collonges au Mont d'Or Restaurant, owned by Paul Bocuse, one of the most prestigious names in 20th-century cuisine, and a sumptuous shrine to haute-cuisine. A somewhat overwhelming experience – pure theatre. After service of generous aperitifs, and irresistible canapés, in a

large anteroom, red velvet curtains were drawn and we were ushered into a large dining room to the accompaniment of loud music played on a large restored fairground Wurlitzer organ. This was the setting for a splendid six course Dinner, each course introduced with a fanfare on the organ, and copious complimentary servings of wine from the Coteaux du Tricastin.



Paul Bocuse

Abbaye de Collonges
Lundi 3 NOVEMBRE 2008

Feuilleté d'escalope de foie gras chaud SAUCE PÉRIGOURDINE

•

Velouté de Homard ARMORICAINE

•

Granité des Vignerons du Beaujolais

•

Suprême de volaille aux morilles, sauce ivoire

•

Saint-Marcellin affiné de la Mère Richard
& Baratte de chèvre frais

•

Délices et Gourmandises
Petits Fours & Chocolats

~

Apéritif Maison

Coteaux du Tricastin «Les Dames Blanches du Sud»
Domaines Bour

Coteaux du Tricastin «Domaine de Grangeneuve»
Cuvée Tradition - Domaines Bour

Café



The next day the itinerary provided for disembarking at Tournus, with a coach tour through the Pommard, Volnay and Puligny-Montrachet areas en route to Beaune, and a degustation in the Hotel Dieu. The weather was against us however. The river Rhone, an alpine river, meets the Saone its principal tributary, at Lyon, and both, having travelled great distances from the mountains in the North, had been swelled by recent excessive rains in central France. Our boat could not get under the bridges north of Lyon.

around the branches - Bath & Bristol

Changes in river levels are a constant in European rivers, so the Captain merely shrugged, and announced we would sail south on the Rhone to Vienne. Beforehand however we were coached through the Beaujolais, past well known vineyards in Chiroubles, Fleurie, Chenas and Julienas, including a visit to Le Hameau du Vin, a state of the art wine museum created by the local wine king George Duboeuf, and another wine tasting.

The following day we sailed further south passing famous sources of the northern Cote du Rhone Crus, such as Cote Rotie, Condrieu, the exquisite Chateau Grillet, St Joseph, and Crozes Hermitage. We could only sample these products of course in the boat's restaurant (at our own, sometimes considerable, cost), but we eventually moored alongside Tain l'Hermitage where we were able to satisfy our craving for some of the Hermitage wines in the cellars of a local winemaker. We also managed a visit to the local internationally known Chocolatier, Valrhona, with inevitable sampling and purchases.

Overnight we sailed back north ready for disembarkation in Lyon and the return journey home by train.

With the exception of the Collonges d'Or, all meals were served on board, and without exception fulfilled the claims of gastronomy. Some of the members found the daily combination of attractive buffet breakfasts, four course lunches, and seven course dinners, a trifle hard to digest, particularly as there was a lack of greens or salad options, and little opportunity for exercise (except for arm and jaw). An example of the final evening menu is as follows:

Wine Suggestions		MENU
	<u>By the glass</u>	<i>Gaspacho</i>
RIESLING GRAND CRU « SCHLOSSBERG »	5.50 €	*****
<i>FALLER à Kaysersberg</i>		<i>Small Prawns Ravioli</i>
(32 € The Bottle)		<i>With its Fish Soup</i>

CONDRIEU	7.50 €	<i>Yellow hake in a butter and pepper pastry</i>
<i>CHAPOUTIER à TAIN L'HERMITAGE</i>		<i>Espelette Red Pepper</i>
(42 € The Bottle)		*****
		<i>Wild Mint Sorbet</i>

CHÂTEAU LACOSTE BORIE	6.00 €	<i>Purse of Lamb</i>
<i>PAUILLAC</i>		<i>Mediterranean Vegetables</i>
(33 € The Bottle)		*****
		<i>Fourme d'Ambert</i>

<i>Gewurztraminer Vendanges Tardives</i>	7.00 €	<i>Pistachio Mousse</i>
<i>LEON BEYER à Eguisheim</i>		<i>Chocolate biscuit « Cuba »</i>
(37€ The Bottle)		<i>Black Cherry Sauce</i>
	<hr/>	
	26.00 €	

Overall an enjoyable experience, with the opportunity to taste many varied fine quality wines, and view in comfort from the vessel and coach the attractive vineyards and topography of the Beaujolais and Cotes du Rhone regions.

On return to St Pancras International there was still time for those with iron constitutions and time to kill, to sample the celebrated Champagne Bar which is, significantly, adjoining the alighting point from the Eurostar, followed by a meal at the recommended St Pancras Grand Restaurant, both on the Upper Concourse. Well, it had been a long time since breakfast!

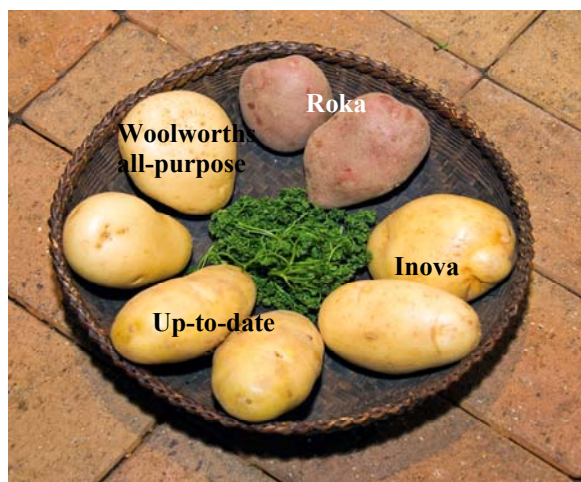
The trips are organised by VFB Holidays Ltd
(01452 716 838)

Neville Bagot



around the branches - Johannesburg

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE POTATO – A BANGERS & MASH EVENT



Two thousand and eight was the 'International year of the Potato'. Fetes, fairs, conventions, exhibitions and celebrations are taking place around the world.

In Johannesburg, the local chapter held a Mashed Potato Tasting – rumored to be the first such event held in South Africa for a sophisticated society of 'tasters'. The purpose was not only to celebrate the Year of the Potato, but also to discern if the variety of potato used for mashing really makes a difference. The lowly spud was put to the test.

Generally, high-starch potatoes are best for mashing and yield a fluffy result. Low starch potatoes are good for boiling, salads and stews and make a thicker, heavier mash.

Four varieties of potatoes were served:

1. Roka, specially flown up from Cape Town,
2. Inova cultivar,
3. Up-to-date potatoes
4. Woolworths All-purpose potatoes.

Each type of potato was peeled, boiled, riced, then mashed, using a limited amount of salt and some of the potato cooking water.

Each mash was judged by colour, texture and taste. The vocabulary for texture included light, fluffy, smooth, silky or, texture could be lumpy, gluey, pasty, or even sticky! The warmed plates held five numbered 'tastes' of mash. Unbeknown to the diners, the fifth 'taste' was a reconstituted dried potato product.

Results

Inova came in tops, with Woolworths (Woolworths SA has no relationship with Woolworth UK – *Ed.*) all-purpose potato second! While the dried potato product didn't win over the majority of people, it did make something of a showing. A number of those present caught on immediately to the fact that it wasn't freshly mashed potato. One member declared, "I lived on that while I was a student, and I knew what it was right away from the texture and taste".

While everyone loves potatoes, a plate of 'mash' might not be too appealing for a complete dining experience, so, included in the event was a tasting of sausages – it was a real 'bangers & mash' event.

Sausages came from Peter James Smith, the accomplished radio journalist and talented 'foodie'. Peter, well-known for his 'Sausages-you-can-trust', presented four different sausages: Lincolnshire, Cumberland, Thai Sai Grog (a type of 'Thai street food pork sausage'), and a well-flavoured Tunisian Lamb Sausage. Each diner tasted all four – along with generous servings of mashed potatoes. No 'mushy peas' were allowed, but the cabbage dish that accompanied the meal was like nothing ever served at boarding school. Sausages were cooked on a Weber Braai - and even the 'sausage master' admitted that they were done to perfection.



Shirley Kilian and Wadson Manda, ricing and mashing potatoes.



Kitchen crew, dishing up 40 tasting plates



Peter James Smith with Sausages-you-can-trust

Shirley Kilian

around the branches - Berkshire

WINES FROM THE AHR VALLEY

It all started with a visit to the Koln Christmas Markets in December 2007. Whilst sitting in a pub in Koln with friends discussing German red wine, the locals on the next table entered the conversation and advised us to visit the Ahr valley, just South West of Bonn, where we would find very good red wine. We stopped in the village of Dernau in the centre of the valley and visited the local co-operative where we met Horst Bertram. His English was very good and we had an excellent tasting resulting in the purchase of several red wines. As we left I asked him if he would be interested in doing a tasting for us in England nearly 12 months later, Horst, accompanied by his wife Michaela, did just that for 48 members of the IWFS Berkshire Branch, the largest attendance at one of our events.

The Dagernova Co-operative began in 1873 and, after amalgamating with others, is now the largest in the valley with 600 members and 151 hectares. Indeed Horst's family own 1.5 Hectares of vineyards outside Dernau and he is a member too. Dagernova specialise in wine made from grapes of the Pinot Noir (Spaetburgunder) family including the rare Fruehburgunder, early ripening variety, although they also make wines from other grapes such as Regent and Portugieser.

The vineyards in the Ahr valley belong to one of the smallest wine-growing regions in Germany. Whilst the area is quite far north, the conditions for vines are perfect. They grow well on the steep slopes and terraces of the valley which require specific knowledge, experience in wine-growing and hand harvesting.

A very interesting tasting began with an excellent Blanc de Noir Sekt with strawberry notes. This was followed by a Fruehburgunder, which was really a rosé, with peaches & wild strawberries on the nose and an easy drinking fruit palate. Next we tasted an unusual Blanc de Noir table wine which was rich & fruity, long in the mouth and very well received by members.

The first reds were drawn from Dagernova's mid-range wines made from Pinot Noir and Regent before moving into their premium range with the Dagernova No. 1 Spaetburgunder Trocken 2007 and No. 2 Spaetburgunder Feinherb 2006. Both of these have a light red appearance and some earth on the nose, however the 1 year's difference in bottle is evident. These wines are made to be drunk fairly young but they do mature significantly in the bottle. The No. 1 was quite dry and young whilst the No. 2 was smooth and just a very little sweet, making the mouth feel soft and fruity.

We then tasted the Cuvee Valerian, a blend of 45% Spaetburgunder, 45% Fruehburgunder and 10% Acolon (a Lemberger/Dornfelder crossing). Rich red colour and distinctive earthy nose led to an amalgamation of fruit and tannin underpinned by 9 months in American and French oak. Finally the 2005 Dagernova "D" Spaetburgunder Trocken which with 15 months in French oak, dark red colour in the glass, earthy nose and rich long flavour, is a match for many a Burgundy! We must remember, of course, that Decanter very recently selected, as the best Pinot Noir in the world, a wine from a producer in this very village, so we should not be surprised.

Alcohol levels in these wines were very reasonable, being in the range 12.5% to 13.5%. Dagernova has won many prizes over the years and their barrique matured 2006 Fruehburgunder Trocken has just won the Sieger 2008 Landesprämierung, the "best of the best" in the Ahr Valley.

These wines are probably best experienced when drunk with food and Charlotte did us proud, matching the wines with a German menu of Bratwurst, red cabbage and plumkuchen.

Horst captivated the IWFS Berkshire branch audience with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the wine industry: did you know that state banquets in Denmark now serve only Danish wine made from grapes grown in Denmark? We also discovered that Horst had made wine in the Margaret River in Western Australia for the Woody Nook vineyard – which is owned by the restaurant we are going to for our Christmas Lunch in December!

The evening was rounded off with an amusing toast to the Society, in recognition of 75 years, given by our President, Julian Jeffs, with a glass of Alfred Gratien Blanc de Blanc champagne. The IWFS Berkshire Branch continues to promulgate the Andre Simons ideal of exploring and enjoying Food and Wine together.

EDITORS NOTE

I questioned Chris on his 'earthiness', this was his reply:-
"As to the 'earthiness' of wines, I find it quite distinctive and attractive on the nose and then sometimes one can take that through into the experience in the mouth too. So I guess that I find wines that are 'earthy' very pleasing to drink. That, of course, will not be true for everyone!"

Chris Graham



around the branches - Manchester

CHRISTMAS LUNCH at ALDERLEY EDGE HOTEL

The Manchester Branch held their Annual Christmas Luncheon on Sunday 14th December 2008 at the Alderley Edge Hotel in Cheshire. Fifty three members were greeted on arrival with a champagne aperitif - G.H. Martel Brut N.V.- & very soon the atmosphere was warm, friendly & very lively.

Moving into the dining room, before partaking of the meal, Committee Member John Hodgkinson conducted a Wine Quiz. Each table competed against each other in a good humoured & sporting fashion. Members were asked to name the grape, country & year of the three white & three red wines presented to them. To add to the spirit of the occasion the restaurant manager and sommelier took part. Everyone entered into the spirit of the event which caused much amusement & entertainment all round. The winning table was presented with a bottle of wine each.

After this successful ice-breaking activity everyone was more than ready to enjoy the lunch which followed.

Salad of Marinated Salmon & Brixham Crab, Cucumber Noodles, Coriander Salad
Chateau Thieuley 2007 Bordeaux Blanc

Traditional Roast Sirloin of Beef, Yorkshire Pudding, Roast Gravy
Chateau Puygueraud 2003 Cotes de Franc

Tarte Tatin of Apples, Cider Creme Fraiche, Vanilla Ice Cream
OR

Various Cheeses & Biscuits

All departed the occasion feeling that this had been a fitting start to the festive season.



STUDENTS THAT ASPIRE

For the 3rd year in succession we returned to Aspire, the South Trafford College Restaurant in Altrincham on Monday 26th January 2009 for our AGM. It was not just because they can accommodate all our members if necessary, but because of the consistently good standard of food and service the students and their Tutors produce.

After last year's AGM meal we had proposed that the College and Chef Tutor Thomas Ludecke should receive one of the Society's Restaurant Awards in recognition of their achievements and to encourage the chefs and catering staff of the future. Having obtained the certificate we learnt that there had been a change of Tutor, and we hoped that the standard of the food would not change. We need not have worried, it hadn't. Our wine connoisseurs on the Committee chose and sourced wines which complemented the food.

Sixty of us started our evening with a glass of Champagne – Bredon Brut NV, P&C Heidsieck and light canapés. The AGM then took place followed by the meal.

The first course was a pot of roasted vegetables and wild mushrooms, served with black olive tapenade, courgette and endive salad, of just the right crispness on the outside and softness on the inside. The 2006 Maycas del Limari, Chardonnay Reserva (Chile) was a well rounded and balanced accompanying wine which enhanced the course.

The fish course, a skin crisp fillet of Sea Bass on Char-grilled asparagus with a cream caviar sauce was delicious and served with 2006 Pirie Sauvignon Blanc (Tasmania), a refreshing wine with good citrus fruits.

A tender and tasty two rib rack of lamb with a herb crust, rosemary jus and dauphinoise potatoes followed as well as discussion on how pink the lamb should be, the answer depended on personal taste. The wine of the night was the 2004 Rioja Reserva, Muga. It was soft, full bodied with complexity and a long finish and went well both with the lamb and the cheese course.

After the selection of Cheeses came an assiette of deserts that delighted the pudding lovers amongst us, the picture speaks much better than me for these. Coffee and chocolates finished the meal.

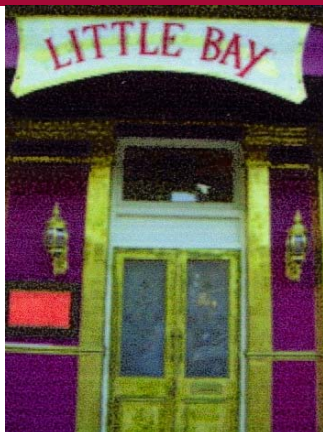
Another well devised meal had been produced and cheerfully served and our Chairman Tricia Fletcher was pleased to present the Society's Restaurant Award to the assembled students and Tutors.

It was a happy occasion and a good start to our year.

Tricia Fletcher



around the branches - Capital



AGM at LITTLE BAY

Capital branch decided to hold their AGM at Little Bay in December. If you have never been to Little Bay I think the expression is 'you haven't lived!' You must not be put off by the outside of this rather run down looking parade shop on York Road Battersea, well it is 'sarf of the river'. Once you walk through the door you enter a different world. Little Bay is always great, the place just has a fantastic atmosphere. Two giant concrete statues flank the entrance as you go in and the whole place is decked out opulently with brightly coloured fabric covering the ceiling, and the walls are painted red and gold with operatic décor. If there is a theme to Little Bay it is gloriously OTT. The entire experience is combined with good quality freshly prepared food at crazy prices, all accompanied by live arias. We all went along to be serenaded. We started early to take advantage of their early bird prices – the same menu but less money.

The restaurant is divided up into lots of different areas with semi-enclosed alcoves for romantic dining and larger rooms all fronting on to the main restaurant. It was in one of these that at 6pm we held the branch AGM. We finished the business at 6.20pm in plenty of time to get our orders in before the 7pm deadline. Starters and main courses rise from £2.25 to £3.80 and £5.25 to £8.80 respectively after 7pm! Members enjoyed a tasty selection of starters which included Choux de Crab served with a lemon hollandaise or Home Cured salmon with orange and beetroot salad with horseradish sauce. Mains included confit of duck with a sultana and red cabbage medley or Little Bay pork fillet filled with mascarpone and served with potato gratin and mushroom sauce. There is a choice of seven starters and seven main courses many dishes are similar to those you can find north of the river at five times the price. We enjoyed a very good St Veran at £17.50 a bottle and a Chilean merlot at £15.50.

Little Bay Battersea is one of four establishments owned by veteran restaurateur Peter Ilic. Peter arrived in England in the mid 70s, having spent three years training at a catering college in his native Yugoslavia. He first worked at Claridge's as a commis chef before working his way through the ranks in a number of renowned London kitchens. He opened his first restaurant in 1982 and has always maintained the same ethos across the Little Bay restaurants - 'to provide good European food with a French influence at fantastic prices, excellent service and the best atmosphere and value for money this side of the Channel'.



Peter Ilic

During February, at his Farringdon Road Little Bay, in the City, Ilic is asking punters to pay only what they think is appropriate for the food. "Anything between a penny and 50 pounds will make me happy, it's entirely up to the customer to decide," Ilic told Martina Fuchs of Reuters UK. "It just seemed the right thing to do with everyone under the cosh and feeling pretty miserable," he said.

Already Ilic has seen evidence that it works, "Customers have already paid 20 per cent more than the original price," he said, he is confident that he will more than cover his expenses for the month. "People want to be polite and would be embarrassed not to pay enough."

The only thing you have to pay for is the drink and if the Credit Crunch is really pinching the juggled water is free and a service charge is not added, you pay what you like.

It is about time other establishments took up the gauntlet in these beleaguered times. As Ilic has proved, if they have the confidence that their food is worth eating, they won't lose out.

Pam Brunning



around the branches - St James's

THE STAFFORD CELLARS

Following the tremendous success of our Branch dinner at The Dorchester last April, we thought it would be nice to hold another black-tie event based on the same principles: superb surroundings, excellent food and exquisite wines made affordable thanks to donations from members. So we could find no better venue for such an event than The Stafford Cellars on 27th January 2009.

Tucked away behind Green Park in the clubland of St James's, The Stafford Hotel has the air of a country house right in the heart of London and has a long history and association with good food and wine. Built in the 18th century to house Lord Godolphin's private wine collection, The Cellars have had many uses over the years, they were even used as air raid shelters! It is reputed that certain doorways led straight to St James's Palace. Today, The Cellars house 20,000 bottles but also provide a unique setting for candlelight dining.

The aperitif was Henriot 1996. The great joy of this vintage is its unusual combination of richness with full acidity – a combination that has assured it a good lifespan. The Henriot was, at 12 years old, perhaps the equivalent in a human of being about 35 years old: it had not lost its youth but it was showing a healthy degree of maturity! Its blend of 45% Chardonnay and 55% Pinot Noir made it a perfect aperitif.

The dinner that followed was notable, amongst other things, for the perfect harmony between the food and the wines. This was achieved thanks to the hard work of executive chef Mark Budd and The Stafford's legendary sommelier Gino, who had received the list of wines well in advance and showed a sure touch in matching them. The first course of seared Orkney scallops in a citrus and saffron broth reflected this. It can be risky to serve a citrus sauce with wine but here, the natural lime character of Josmeyer's Riesling La Kottabe 2007 from Alsace was perfectly mirrored in the sauce. Incidentally, La Kottabe is the French name for an ancient Greek drinking game that often led on to amorous interludes!

The second fish course might have been a challenge to a delicate wine: a slightly textured quenelle of smoked haddock and spinach with a grain mustard sauce. However, the smokiness was very restrained and the lovely Pouilly Fuisse 2006 from Chateau Fuisse again harmonized perfectly. A lesser Pouilly Fuisse might not have done the job but it is not for nothing that Monsieur Vincent's wines are regarded as being more in the style of the Cote d'Or than the Maconnais!

With the main course – roast fillet of Angus beef with braised oxtail, cauliflower florets and truffle sauce – we were privileged to be able to taste two lovely vintages of Chateau Grand Puy Lacoste. The 1995 still had a high level of ripe tannins (perhaps the iron fist in the velvet glove) but also an unmistakable richness. It is an intense wine that is already giving huge pleasure but has even further to go. By contrast, the 1990, although it will hold for many years to come, is already at a glorious stage in its maturity. It is softer, more rounded and more complex than the 1995 and it seems to have achieved an even greater harmony and subtlety than its younger sibling. There was speculation as to whether the '95 would ever reach the same level of harmony and sophistication as the '90 and, overall, it was thought probably not. It is therefore not surprising that Michael Broadbent awarded 5 stars to the Bordeaux 1990 vintage against 4 stars to the 1995.

The final wine of the evening was slightly unusual: Tokaji Aszu 6 Puttonyos 2000, from the Royal Tokaji Wine Company. The UK market normally receives Tokaji between 3 and 5 puttonyos, so this wine at 6 puttonyos was unusually intense and concentrated, very sweet but perfectly balanced with crisp acidity so that it was never cloying. This high level of acidity is one of the secrets of Tokaji's greatness and comes partly from the volcanic soil of the region and partly from the naturally high acidity of the Furmint grape which, together with 25% Harslevelu and 5% Muscat, makes up this wine. Once again, the chef and sommelier clearly showed their understanding of food and wine matching. They produced a pear tatin with an exquisite vanilla ice cream that, despite its levels of sweetness, never overwhelmed the Hungarian nectar.

When it was all over, everyone left with a sense of having experienced gastronomy of the highest order. The food had been impeccable and the wines, thanks to the great generosity of our members, had been superlative. The only worry is, where do we go from here?

Gregory Bowden



The Capital

22 BASIL STREET,

LONDON SW3 1AT

Tel: +44 (0)20 7589 5171

www.capitalhotel.co.uk



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he Capital Hotel was created by its Scottish proprietor David Levin in 1971 and is to this day a family-run hotel.

The Capital Restaurant is renowned, located on Basil Street, in the heart of Knightsbridge, the restaurant holds two coveted Michelin Stars. Eric Chavot, the Head Chef's innovative style of cooking is acclaimed by even the most discriminating of restaurant critics.

To quote Raymond Blanc, "Fabulous and stylish food; definitely some of the best cuisine in any London hotel",

In the words of AA Gill, Sunday Times columnist, "This is as good as you can eat in London....This was three-stars-and-bars cooking; a faultlessly assured, elegant, thoughtful, poignant, intelligent, top-of-the-range, exceedingly-rare handmade dinner". I don't know how long ago that was but they still only have two stars so maybe Mr Gill was a little over the top!

I booked Tuesday evening for Wednesday lunch, 'no problem madam, what time?' On the way into Town we speculated just what the effect the Credit Crunch was having on the London restaurant scene.

There were just two elderly ladies sitting in one corner of the restaurant looking very lonely. I am not an aperitif person at lunch so asked for a jug of water while we studied the impressive wine list and a very unimpressive menu. Duck à l'orange, Daube de Beef (not Boeuf) with mashed potatoes, pave of sole 'Grenobloise' - with brown butter and capers or the omnipresent sea bass with crushed potatoes and chorizo. There was no à la carte on offer so I asked for the dégustation menu, 'Ah, yes madam that will be two small starters and two small main courses from the lunch menu.' No way out there then. By this time himself was muttering about the Mandarin Oriental being only over the road. I told him to concentrate on the wine list, I was in need.

When he ordered a bottle of Marcel Deiss Gewurztraminer 2006, 'You realise that is sweet,' the sommelier snapped with a smirk. We told him we did know the style of wine.

An appetiser of spiced lentil soup was good but the accompanying sea bass goujons were grey and soggy. My starter of 'seared scallops with calf feet and braised cabbage' was well executed and a picture on the plate, the scallops were cooked 'à point'. The succulent cube of 'calf feet' and the fine slivers of crisp bacon giving good texture changes, with a slick of mustard dressing to pique the palate. Tiger prawn and coconut risotto was just that, nothing to get excited about until himself found some fresh coriander in it that was not listed on the menu.

For main course I went retro, it must be thirty years since I have had duck à l'orange. The breast, served on a bed of caramelised chicory, had the tensile strength of a Barbary duck. It was cut in half length ways giving two chunks of meat (see photo) which were difficult to cut up without spraying the sticky orange caramel sauce everywhere. An unidentifiable slick of orange purée turned out to be carrot and ginger. A separate pot of 'pommes pailles' were, unfortunately, under cooked and soggy.





As there was a large pot of daube de boeuf sitting in the fridge at home that was a no, no. Sole with capers was uninspiring, and not being a duckaholic like me, himself decided, reluctantly, to have the 21st century's caterer's friend - sea bass. Served with crushed potatoes on a bed of chorizo with a spicy sauce the fish was completely overwhelmed. A. A. Gill says, 'good food makes him cry, he last sobbed over a sea bass in Rome'. This fish elicited a similar reaction but not of joy!

In the 70's seabass was invariably the centre piece of a Chinese banquet. A large specimen brought to the table steaming, often overcooked, its soggy flesh falling off the bone. The small fillets served in restaurants now, even when cooked correctly as the one today was, are still second rate

fish, lacking in flavour and texture.

We were shown the splendid cheese cart but at £12.50 extra we considered it excessive.

Desserts were the highlight of the day. My strong coffee tart was just slightly bitter, surmounted by a square of chocolate upon which rested a rich chocolate mousse the whole surrounded by a caramel sauce. A well balanced combination.

A creamy coconut mousse, which came wrapped in a tube of soft passion fruit jelly, was accompanied by liquorish ice cream and passion fruit sauce, delicious.

The Gewurztraminer was luscious, its richness cut by a good balance of acidity and, despite the sommeliers protestations, went very well with both the starters and main courses.

By 2pm this beautiful pink hued restaurant with its cascading waterfall chandeliers was softly buzzing and the service, which had been excellent up until then, started to slow down and we had a long wait for the dessert menu to arrive.

Oddly, during dessert, after our wine was long gone, our glasses were refilled. We did point out that we had not ordered a dessert wine, the waiter just waved his hand and disappeared. They seemed to be clearing up bottles that had been opened for glasses - a rather pleasing touch - it put a warm glow into the afternoon.

It is a pity lunches are the poor relation of dining out. Not everyone wants to travel a long distance on public transport, at night, in the middle of winter, to enjoy an outstanding dining experience. If I wanted to eat beef stew I would have stayed at home but obviously in some circles popping out for a bite of stew for lunch even if it does cost £33.00 for three courses plus 12½% is the norm in London. Credit Crunch, what Credit Crunch?

3 course lunch menu £33 each, coffee & petit fours £5 each, wine £49, 12½% service. Total £140.63

Starters



Main Courses



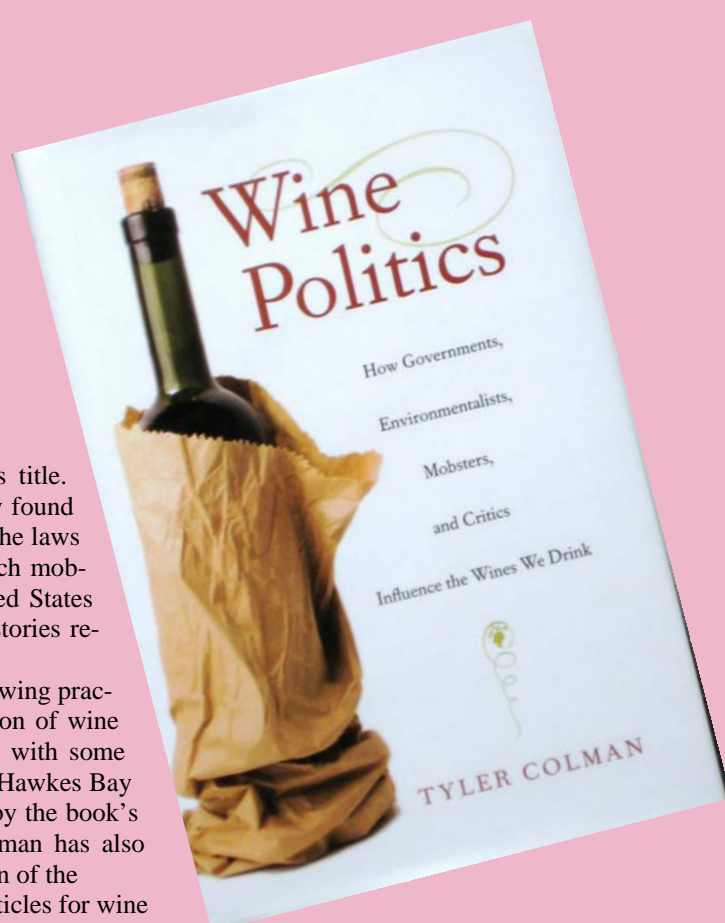
Desserts



WINE POLITICS by Tyler Colman

How Governments, Environmentalists, Mobsters, and Critics Influence the Wines We Drink

University of California Press: Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 2008 RPP £16.95.



The most arresting feature of this short book is its title. Governments and environmentalists, let alone critics, are rarely found rubbing shoulders with mobsters. In fact, no doubt deterred by the laws of libel, Colman is very cagey about identifying precisely which mobsters he has in mind (apart from the era of Prohibition). United States wine distributors, however, undoubtedly come closest, as the stories recounted on pages 97 and 98 attest.

Colman's argument rests upon a comparison of wine-growing practices in the Napa Valley and Bordeaux, and of public regulation of wine production and consumption in France and the United States, with some sideways glances at the Midi, Loire, Burgundy, and, as a coda, Hawkes Bay in North Island, New Zealand. This slender basis is explained by the book's origin as a PhD dissertation at Northwestern University. Colman has also achieved prominence through his contribution to the third edition of the *Oxford Companion to Wine* on Politics and Wine, his various articles for wine journals, and through his own weblog *Dr. Vino*.

For Colman, history holds the key to understanding why wine practice differs so markedly between France and the USA: the former's Catholic culture and rural economy are rooted in wine, whereas the latter is a land of largely Protestant immigrants, leading to an unholy alliance of 'Baptists and bootleggers', the one keen to ban alcohol altogether, the other determined to corner its distribution and profits.

For European readers, the chapters on the politics of American winegrowing and marketing offer the most startling revelations. Although Prohibition ended in 1932, its repeal was left in the hands of the federal states, with the result that state legislators and politicians in many cases retained control over taxation, sales, and label information. Although, unlike France, production, distribution, and retail sales were kept deliberately separate (supposedly to preserve independence and secure a free market), the outcome has until very recently been precisely the opposite, with big States-wide distributors exerting a stranglehold over growers and consumers alike. Only in the last few years are the widespread prohibitions on inter-state sales to private persons (treated as a serious criminal offence!) being dismantled.

Meanwhile, the concentration of power in the hands of the big corporations grows steadily, as global brands replace local individuality (see the table on pp. 112-113, where the leading three are all American), and that includes a mass invasion of the everyday wine sector by Australian brands such as Yellow Tail. More ominous still is the trend towards 'user-friendly' wines, confected to satisfy the demanding standards of Mr Robert Parker and his like. One Napa company, Enologix, even advises wineries on how to adjust their wines to achieve high Parker ratings – and it was founded by the Californian correspondent of the *Wine Spectator*.

Lest Europeans – or the French, at least – smugly conclude that over here all is well, Colman trenchantly shows how an entirely different system of regulation, the AOC supervised by the INAO, has had equally dire consequences. The profusion of AOCs – 470 in all, 57 in Bordeaux alone – has led to a bureaucratic nightmare and done nothing to prevent grievous overproduction of inferior wine, fit only for distilling. Here the gap between the prices charged for luxury wines and the rest has constantly widened. The role of the *négociant* in Bordeaux has been almost as baleful as that of US distributors, yet despite their loss of influence, the global preference for brands has affected the French market too and thrown the *négociants* a lifeline.

Colman casts a skeptical eye on the wilder shores of *biodynamisme*, but recognizes that a return to – and respect for – locality and environment, in short, *terroir*, does hold the key to quality wine-making in the future. His arguments could be usefully extended to cover the many scandals and political chicanery which have afflicted winemakers in Germany, Austria, or Italy in recent decades, but that would require another book. On his chosen ground Colman is incisive and provocative, but in his catalogue of villains he surprisingly finds no room for the *garagistes*, of whom after all Bordeaux has no shortage.

TOM SCOTT

Tom Scott is a professor at St Andrews University and is an authority on German Wine, contributing to Jancis Robinson's Oxford Companion to Wine

