

# Whitewater Valley Wine Society

**Tasting Report: October 2015**

## **The wines of Southern France**

**Presented by Richard Bray, Buyer at SWIG**

Report by Barbara Jones

Richard is an author and winemaker who is both Buyer and Head of Private Client Sales at Swig. With 15 years of experience in almost every aspect of the wine trade, he also works as assistant winemaker at both Coume del Mas and Mas Cristine, two of the top estates in the Roussillon. His first book, *Salt & Old Vines*, a memoir of the several vintages worked in the South of France, was released in April 2014 and won the Gourmand UK award for Best French Wine Book. It's also required reading at Plumpton College, which provides the UK's only fully accredited oenology and viticulture degree. Originally from Boston, Massachusetts, Richard has lived in the UK for 26 years but says he has never lost his accent! With Richard's background as a winemaker in Southern France, it seemed only natural to ask him to present his pick of Swig's wines from that region. Swig is a London based merchant and has a population of just six. They started back in 1997 when they opened their Belsize Park shop. Today, most of their trade is done through their mail order arm, a business which has received much accreditation in the wine world.

Our first tasting of four white wines took us to Gascony – a **Domaine Horgelus Sauvignon Blanc/Gros Manseng, 2014** [12%, £8.95]. This usual 50/50 blend had a pronounced and vibrant honeysuckle nose that after a short time developed more grassy tones. Pale lemon in colour, on the palate there were 'ripe tropical fruits and melony characteristics'. The wine was clean and fresh from the Sauvignon, made richer and fuller by the Manseng – it impressed some members and was generally well liked. The next two wines came from the Languedoc region – the first was a **Mas Bres Stella Blanc, 2014** [13.0%, £11.95] from the Nimes/Arles area. This was an unusual blend of Fermentino Rolle/PinotBlanc/Riesling. Pale lemon in colour it had a nose full of tropical fruits and was fuller bodied and richer than the first wine, with a hint of oak. An organic wine that was enjoyed by most but not all! Our third wine was a **Turner-Pageot 'Les Blanc', 2013** [14%, £14.50], a 50/50 blend of Marsanne/Rousanne – vines that are difficult to grow but worth the effort for flavour. Again pale lemon in colour with a hint of oak on the subdued nose that had 'barley-sugar sweetness', this food wine though dry had a sweetish finish. The whites ended with a wine from Roussillon – **Domaine J-P Padie Fleur de Cailloux, 2014** [12%, £19.50] – a blend of Grenache Blanc/ Macabeu/ Grenache Gris. Another pale lemon wine, this was described by Richard as the 'Chablis' of the south' and that it had 'racy minerality'. It was certainly not a characteristic chardonnay being too lean

and astringent, but it should age well and probably improve. For many now, it was a 'glug and forget' sort of wine!

Our first red wine of the evening was a **Les Fleur de Montblanc Merlot 2012, Pay de Thongue** [13.5%, £8.95]. This co-operative wine was 100% Merlot with the typical blackcurrant red colour. It had a fruity nose with smooth tannins, a hint of Ribena on the palate and short length – a classic Pay D'Oc and very quaffable! It was followed by a **Mas Brunet Cuvee Tradition 2012, Terrases de Larzac** [13.5%, £14.95] – a blend of Syrah/ Grenache/Mourvedre. This winery sells 80% of its wine from the cellar door and this particular wine was quite different from the first as it had a 'Burgundian twist', making it Pinot Noir in style, in colour and body but with a veggy nose and slightly sharp tannins. Perhaps it needs more time? Our second co-operative wine was a **Chateau Durfort Corbieres 2013**, [13.5%, £12.50] where in wartime it was the women who made the wine while the men were at war! This had a dense black cherry colour with hints of fruit and wood spice on the nose. A 60/40 blend of Syrah/Grenache it was more full bodied than the previous reds with tannins that were beginning to soften – the biggest wine yet and typical of the region! Our tasting ended with a **Le Chateau d'Albas Minervois 2012** [14%, £14.50] a 55/35/10 blend Syrah/Grenache/Carignan. This wine was full of black cherries – colour, nose and palate with the Syrah adding blueberries rather than pepper. It was full bodied with smooth tannins and probably was the biggest wine of the night enjoyed by most present.

Our thanks go to Richard for a most interesting selection of wines, well presented with sound knowledge of both the region's grapes and 'terroir'. Thanks too, to Jim for recommending him!