

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: Chateau Musar

Presented by Jane Sowter, Chateau Musar UK

Report by Valerie Richardson

The Hochar family have overseen the production of Musar in Lebanon for several generations. Year in, year out, they consistently make this world famous wine, despite the political distractions, literally in their back yard. The pleasure of marketing Chateau Musar throughout Europe is a task keenly undertaken by our presenter, Jane Sowter. She works tirelessly to help make sure that the Musar wines reach our shelves in the UK and frequently presents the wines to full houses throughout the UK. The highlight of our evening was a vertical tasting of four vintages of the legendary Chateau Musar flagship wine, including a vintage from the last century! This flagship wine is made from cabernet sauvignon, cinsault and carignan, released after several years ageing in the cellar- a rare privilege for wine lovers!

The evening opened with an unusual rose, **Musar Jeune Rose 2016** 12% alc at £12. It had a lovely coppery colour and the peachy, herby, sherry notes improved in the glass. Based on cinsault and mourvedre it would suit tapas and meze. Jane recommended it for red wine drinkers. This wine had been in development since 2006/7.

Musar Jeune Red 2014 12% alc.at £12 followed. This new wine was a youthful wine with no oak ageing to give a lively, spicy, fruity wine from younger vines of syrah, cinsault and cabernet sauvignon. A bistro/ gastro pub style wine perhaps?

This first section of the evening finished with the more familiar **Hochar Pere and Fils Red 2013** 13.5% alc. at £16.50. Jane's anecdote about Serge Hochar's resistance to having a wine with his signature as a label gave an insight into the philosophy of the winery. This simple matter of fact title for the label followed. This wine, based on grenache, cinsault and cabernet sauvignon, spent 9 months in oak barrels, producing an earthy wine with strawberry notes and an edge similar to Italian reds.

The next part of the evening covered a range of 4 vintages of Chateau Musar Red. This wine is produced from cinsault, cabernet sauvignon and carignan. The winery gives much emphasis to responding to the qualities of the grapes and how they evolve and mature in the vats rather than strict percentages of grapes. Production is long, with three years in vats followed by blending and then five years of keeping before release. Wines are subject to continuous review. Indeed, the first offering **Chateau Musar Red 2006** 14% at £27.00 was released after the 2007 as it was not considered ready for drinking until later. This wine has a strong

structure after a year in oak barrels. There are strawberry fruity notes as well as the distinctive earthy richness.

Chateau Musar Red 2005 14% alc. £37.00 is now in short supply and offered the distinctive Musar style with hints of cedar and spice on layers of dark fruits. Jane offered detailed advice about double decanting and allowing good length breathing time for these red wines.

Chateau Musar Red 2002 14% alc. £31.00 showed some sign of ageing with a little brown edging to the dark, rich red colouring and was smooth and attractive.

The oldest wine **Chateau Musar Red 1999** 14%alc. £33.00 had rich Mediterranean flavours with figs and raisins on the palate. Again, as ever, all the wines are typically Musar but with subtle differences in personality.

The evening was rounded off with two surprises. The first was **Chateau Musar White 2008** 12% at £16.50. This was an interesting wine based on indigenous grapes obaidah and merwath. It was very pale in colour but dry, fruity, honeyed and quite rich. It did not require chilling and followed rich reds with ease.

L'Arack de Musar 53% alc. at £29 followed. Apparently, this is much consumed at cafes in the Lebanon. This aniseed surprise was enjoyed, diluted, of course, with water!

Our thanks go to Jane for her enthusiastic presentation of the wines and the insights she offered into the philosophy and commitment to wine production shown by the Hochar family at Chateau Musar.