

# Whitewater Valley Wine Society

**Tasting Report: September 2018**

**Fine Wines of California**

**Presented by Robbie Rugman, Fine Wine Ambassador,  
Gallo Winery**

Report by Barbara Jones

We started our autumn season with a tasting not to be missed! This was Robbie Rugman's first visit to our Society as he presented Fine Wines of California – really fine wines as we broke our all time record for the most expensive tasting on a Wednesday evening, worth over £800, with an average price of about £25.00 per bottle! Robbie is Premium Fine Wine Ambassador for Gallo Winery in California enabling him to include wines from the prestigious MacMurray Estate in the Russian River and Louis Martini Winery in the Napa Valley. Wine production in California exceeds that of Austria and if the state was a country it would be the world's fourth largest producer. Most of the world's most popular varietals are grown here but we don't see so many of these wines in the UK. When we do, they are often very expensive and so this was a very special event!

After a break of three months it was good to be back at The Raven for what was billed as an exciting tasting and members were not disappointed! The evening began with **MacMurray Pinot Gris 2015/16** [14.5%, £17.95] that was a pale gold colour. The nose was perfumed and expressive with stewed apple most prominent. This un-oaked wine was well balanced regarding acidity, fruit and alcohol and very well received by those present.

It was followed by two Chardonnays – the first of which was a **Frei Brothers Chardonnay 2015/16** [14.0%, £18.00], pale gold in colour and vinified from the grapes of two vineyards, subjected to gentle, whole cluster pressing. Here, there was a balance of butterscotch and citrus flavours with the oak prominent but not dominant.

By comparison the last white wine, an **Edna Valley Chardonnay 2015** [14.0%, £15.99], pale in colour with apple and apricot characteristics and well balanced regarding texture and acidity, was more refined and restrained.

Our first red wine came from the Californian Central Coast – a **MacMurray Pinot Noir Central Coast 2015** [14.5%, £21.50] produced from a single vineyard. This was more opaque than French equivalents with a rich, red cherry colour. On the nose and on the palate there were delicate aromas and flavours of cherry, raspberry and pomegranate with hints of vanilla and toast. Silky in the mouth this was a well-balanced wine where the alcohol was well integrated.

Alongside was served and tasted a **MacMurray Pinot Noir Russian River 2015** [14.0%, £27.50] produced from grapes from four vineyards. Again a more opaque wine with hints of lavender on the nose, the dominant flavours were of dark cherry, pomegranate and vanilla. Less silky on the palate this wine probably needed more time to develop and mature.

The next two red wines were from Louis Martini vineyards. The first was a **Louis Martini Sonoma Cabernet Sauvignon 2014** [14%, £19.95] produced from grapes of two vineyards, that had a dense blackcurrant colour with tannins softened by the inclusion of Merlot, Petit Syrah and Cabernet Franc. Predominant flavours were of wild berries, plums and liquorice with a hint of coffee – a full bodied wine with a lingering finish.

Alongside we tasted the Napa Valley equivalent – **Louis Martini Napa Cabernet Sauvignon 2014** [15.5%, £36.00] made with grapes from five vineyards, and had a dark burgundy colour. This time the Cabernet was softened by 5% each of Petit Syrah and Petit Verdot grapes. Aromas of blueberries, blackberries and blackcurrant were evident and the tannins were slightly sharper suggesting that this wine would last for around fifteen years. It was a rich full bodied wine, well balanced with a long finish – the increased alcohol percentage was also evident.

Our exciting evening ended with an **Orin Swift Abstract 2016** [15.5%, £44.35] from Winemaker Dave Phinney. The unusual label, a collage of many different parts and pieces heralding a wine made from multiple vineyards from year to year to ensure consistency, had a dense blackcurrant colour. Produced from a blend of Grenache, Petit Syrah and Syrah this medium/full bodied wine had a plushy texture, lots of spicy red fruits and a peppery finish that lingered – an excellent wine to end the Society's special tasting of Californian fine wines!

Our very grateful thanks go to Robbie for a well-illustrated and informative presentation. Members were privileged to be able to taste eight fine wines at one event.