

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: June 2015

Champagne and Strawberries

Introduced by Society Secretary, Keith Cooper

Report by Barbara Jones

Think of champagne and you think of bubbles, excitement, celebration, luxury and excellence. Think of what's fun to eat with champagne and you'll think of strawberries! So this month we brought these together for an extravaganza evening of fun and indulgence, complemented by our usual selection of nibbles. The tasting was introduced by Society Secretary Keith Cooper, who said a few words about each champagne. However, the emphasis was on an informal evening where members and their guests could enjoy and discuss the champagnes amongst themselves.

Our tasting this evening explored three different styles of champagne – two non-vintage [NV] from two of the great champagne houses, two from great houses from the prestigious 'grand cru' village of Mailly, located in the heart of Montagne de Reims and then four 'growers' champagnes that are hand-crafted and usually from small producers. Three champagnes were vintage [V]. As a reminder champagne is made from three grapes, singly or blended – Chardonnay [C], Pinot Noir [PN] and Pinot Meunier [PM]. It is made by the 'method champenoise', which involves a second, bubble-forming fermentation in bottle, followed by ageing on the lees, then 'remuage' [shaking and turning bottles] and 'disgorgement' [removing the sediment from the neck of the bottle].

Our indulgent evening started with **Piper-Heidsieck Champagne Brut, NV** [PN, PM, 12%, £30.00] that was pale gold in colour with a hint of pear and apple on the nose and delicate, fine bubbles. On the palate it was structured and full bodied with a hint of burnt toast which some present disliked. These members preferred the next wine from a brother's house – **Charles Heidsieck Champagne Brut Reserve NV** [PN/ PM/ C, 34/33/33%, 12%, £30.00] that had a golden straw-yellow colour. The early floral nose developed more fruity notes with time and on the palate it was elegant with hints of honey and biscuit.

Our next two champagnes were Berry Brothers' own – the first was **Berrys' United Kingdom Cuvee, Grand Cru, Mailly NV** [PN/C – 75/25%, 12%, £26.95] that had brioche and flowers on the nose and an elegant palate that marries notes of lemongrass, gingerbread and honeysuckle. In fact, it was an effortless combination of structure and finesse! This was followed by **Berrys' United Kingdom Cuvee, Grand Cru, Mailly, 2005** [PN/C, 75/25, 12%, £32.00]. This champagne had

an elegant and beautiful texture with hints of toast and hazelnuts on the nose; on the palate it was creamy with a powerful finish!

And then after the break we moved on to the 'growers' champagne reflecting more notions of 'terroir', mostly lost in the big blends. The first of these was a **Chartogne-Taillet Cuvee Sainte Anne, NV** [PN/C, 50/50%, 12%, £25.00]. The grower ferments the wines separately by grape variety and by 'terroir' before blending. This champagne was pale in colour with a slight hint of chemicals on the nose. In the mouth it was light, bone dry, delicate and fruity – a perfect aperitif! The next champagne was a **Pierre Paillard Grand Cru Brut, NV** [PN/C, 60/40%, 12.5%, £25.00] from Bouzy village, was paler still with hints of citrus on the nose. On the palate it was full flavoured, even distinguished reflecting the outstanding quality of the grapes from this 'grand cru' area. Our next champagne was a **Marguet Grand Cru Amboniacus, 2009** [PN/C, 50/50%, 12.5%, £32.00], again pale in colour but with ample bubbles and produced bio-dynamically. This was a nutty style of champagne with extra complexity accounted for by the use of grapes from different 'grand cru' villages. Our final champagne on this exceptional evening was somewhat rare because of the grape, prized for its fruitiness and delicacy – a **Laherte Frères, Les Vigne d'Autrefois, 2009** [PM 100%, 12%, £39.00]. This was supremely stylish and refined with complexity and intensity!

Our grateful thanks go to Keith for sourcing a wonderful range of champagnes and also for his helpful comments extending our knowledge and experience in this area of tasting.