

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: March 2015

The wines of New Zealand

Presented by Annabel Virtue of Bibendum

Report by Barbara Jones

It's been four years since Annabel Virtue last presented to us. For Society members in attendance that evening, the tasting was one of the highlights of the year! Annabel has been working in wine for nearly 20 years, her career including time with Decanter Magazine, an Italian importer and a Californian producer before joining Bibendum. Annabel's approach to tastings is that they are about having fun and enjoying the wines, whilst at the same time learning something new and taking home some knowledge about the wonderful world of wine. This time Annabel had just returned from an eagerly anticipated month-long visit to New Zealand; so she was very much up to date with what's new and exciting in the country's wineries and also included in the tasting her own pick of wines that were a little less mainstream, some from up-and-coming wineries. Bibendum is one of the very finest independent importers of wine into the UK supplying restaurants, hotels retail outlets and private customer. They uphold their philosophy of never selling boring or predictable wines – only the best, and the most exciting available at any given price.

At the start of the evening Annabel announced that this was a tasting without Sauvignon Blanc! She added that whilst much is excellent, there is a lot of inferior stuff being marketed – so beware! This was to be an evening of aromatic whites and it started with a **Millton Chenin Blanc, Gisborne 2013** [13.55, £14.10] produced on an organic and biodynamic vineyard. This lemon coloured wine, with hints of lime was off-dry and honeyed on the palate with a nose of mixed tropical fruits. It was pure and fresh with a long finish and quite different from both the French and South African equivalents. Next came a **Huia Pinot Gris, Marlborough 2013** [13.55, £14.26]. Similar in colour to the first wine, and again from an organic producer, the nose here was full of lychees and apricots. On the palate it was clean and fresh though the finish was a little drier - a great food wine. The **Prophets Rock Riesling, Central Otago 2010** [12.0%, £22.62] was from a vineyard at altitude where the diurnal temperature range was often around 25C. Paler in colour than previous wines this was lightly perfumed on the nose and the expected hint of petrol was there but subdued. There was good acidity which helped to counter the fullness and richness of the wine and its characteristic oiliness. The white wines ended with a **Spy Valley Gewurtztraminer, Marlborough 2013** [14%, £13.54]; with a limey-lemon colour this wine was 'lychees in a glass'! Sweeter than previous wines on the palate

because of more residual sugar, it had a slightly sharp-edged finish – predictably excellent with Asian food!

We returned to Huia for our first red of the evening – a **Huia Pinot Noir, Marlborough 2012** [13.5%, £17.54]. This cherry-red coloured wine was fresh and vibrant, full of cherries in the mouth with some tannin bites and acidity. We travelled south for the next pinot noir – a **Quartz Reef Pinot Noir, Central Otago 2012** [14%, £20.72] which was similar in colour to the previous wine, but with a slightly musty nose. This wine was smoother and richer with a hint of spice – perhaps a reflection of being further away from the cooling sea breezes of the Marlborough area? The last two wines came from the Te Awa Winery – the first its entry-level wine was a **Left Field Merlot/Malbec, Hawkes bay 2011** [12.5%, £13.90]. Deep red in colour this wine was plummy with Merlot with some spice from the Malbec and a little lift from some Cabernet Franc. It was juicy and fleshy with medium smooth tannins – more Bordeaux in style than Mendoza. The tasting ended with another wine produced on the Gimlet Gravels of the region – a **Te Awa Syrah, Hawkes Bay 2011** [12.5%, £16.60]. This was a chunky, more premium wine with big, bold fruit. It had a deep blackcurrant colour and a heavier, fruity nose and on the palate, there was juicy chocolate and liquorice with the Syrah's characteristic spice - a wonderful way to end this evening of very different New Zealand wines!

Our thanks go to Annabel for another excellent wine experience delivered with the usual humour and panache!