

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: May 2016

Bordeaux: A tasting of 8 vintages

Presented by Esme Johnstone, FromVineyardsDirect

Report by Barbara Jones

This month we were delighted to welcome Esme Johnstone, Founder of FromVineyardsDirect. The wines of Bordeaux are less affordable than in the past, so the challenge is to find wines which show the character of the region at sensible prices. The region produces a great range of wines, from both the crus classés and lesser known appellations. We tasted eight different vintages going back to the excellent millennium 2000 vintage. FromVineyardsDirect is the brainchild of David Campbell and Esme Johnstone. Esme's involvement in wine started at an early age when his father gave him a thimble full of wine at dinner with the promise of a full glass if he could get the vintage right! This not only encouraged a keen interest in wine but also in statistics and all things commercial. Esme founded Majestic Wine, which revolutionized wine buying in the UK. Esme sold his interest in Majestic in 1989 and moved to Château de Sours in Bordeaux where he created critically-acclaimed wines including 'probably the best Rosé in the world.'

The tasting began without our presenting duo – Esme and Lucy who were delayed by the chaos on the M3 on their Journey from Richmond. Consequently, it fell to Secretary Keith to present the first two wines which fortuitously had been delivered earlier. This Keith did admirably and not unexpectedly being a great Bordeaux fan. Our only white wine of the evening came first – a Chateau Bauduc, Bordeaux Blanc 2015 [13.5%, £9.95] that had a pale lemon colour and a lovely fruity nose. Made almost entirely of Sauvignon Blanc 90%/10% Semillon on the palate there were hints of grass, elderflower and honeysuckle. It was quite full bodied, had high acidity and was most well received – not surprisingly it is the top house white in restaurants owned by Rick Stein and Gordon Ramsey!

And then came seven delightful reds, the first of which was a St. Julien 2010 [13.5%, £19.95]. This cherry coloured wine was exquisite, declassified from one of the 'Super Second' growths in the heart of St. Julien – and from the great 2010 vintage. It was a very serious high quality Claret with a profound richness making it very approachable whilst still young. It also has 10+ years longevity – the Chateau wine of the same vintage sells for £2000 a case, so therefore a superb bargain! Following it was difficult – a Chateau Brown Lamartine, Bordeaux Superieur 2012 [13.5%, £14.95], a 50/50 blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Blackcurrant in colour it had tobacco notes on the nose and was reasonably soft in the mouth though tannins were still in evidence

and should soften further with time. Next came the first of three wines from Haut-Medoc – a Chateau Les Moines 2009 [13.0%, £14.65] Another dark red wine, blended from 70/30% CS/M, was rich, full and complex with hints of menthol and leather on the nose and some evident vegetable. It is drinking well now though with time it will improve and the tannins will fade. The Chateau Citran, Haut-Medoc 2005 [13.5%, £23.95] was another stunning 50/50% blend of CS/M; exceptionally dark in colour with hints of a brown rim due to age; this was a very high quality claret drinking beautifully now with bags of cellar potential for further improvement! We then diverted briefly to Fronsac for a Chateau Vielle Cure 2004 [13.5%, £19.65] a 90/10 Blend of Merlot and Cabernet Franc, with a deep blackcurrant colour and a fruity nose. This was a seriously good wine that would stand up well to its St. Emilion and Pomerol neighbours. Usually rated 90+ points by Parker, it is a gem at this price and quality. We then returned to Haut-Madoc for a Chateau Malascasse 2003 [13.0%, £16.95] – another dark red wine that was Cabernet dominant and full of baked fruits on the palate reflecting the vintage of an abnormally hot summer. Though drinking well now with a wonderful, mature complexity and evident tannins, this is a wine that will not keep. This exceptional evening ended with a sixteen year-old wine, a Chateau Simard, St. Emilion Grand Cru 2000 [12.5%, £19.93] that had a dense blackcurrant colour and a perfect balance of tertiary aromas and fresh primary fruit that is apparent on the nose and continues on to the palate. Tannins are softening nicely leaving a silky smooth wine - a real treat with which to end the evening! Our most grateful thanks to Esme and Lucy for a superb tasting!