

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: September 2015

The wines of Virginia, USA

Presented by Vivienne Franks, Association of Wine Educators

Report by Keith Cooper

Just under 40 members gathered at The Raven Hotel to welcome Vivienne Franks from the Association of Wine Educators. This was her first visit to our Society, a tasting slotted into her busy schedule which sees her travelling extensively to the world's wine regions. She is also a judge for the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC) and The International Wine Challenge (IWC).

The state of Virginia has about 230 wineries, most of which have upped their game in the last 20 years. The state has risen to become fifth largest wine producing state in the US. Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the wines thrive on the terroir and the predominantly warm climate. They are less oaked than those we generally see from the US west coast. In summary, they offer a style which bridges the US and Europe.

Most of our members had never tasted wines from Virginia, USA, since they are not widely available in the UK. Some understandable concern regarding what the wines would be like soon turned to excitement on finding that the grape varieties were familiar and the wines themselves were of excellent quality.

Our evening started with a white wine, **Barboursville Vermentino Reserve 2013 [£18.12, Zonin]**, this being their first vintage of this varietal; with a light gold appearance, it's a fresh and crisp wine which would make a great aperitif, to be drunk young.

Our second white was **King Family, Monticello, Viognier 2013 [£21.99, Selfridges]**. Made by a winemaker from Crozes-Hermitage, the French style showed through; the wine had hints of butterscotch with a peachy finish. It would be great with seafood!

Our final white was **Veritas, Monticello, Viognier 2013 [£19.99, The Oxford Wine Company (OWC)]**. The winemaker is Andrew Hodgson, an Englishman, who gave up his job as a paediatric psychologist to become a winemaker. This wine really needs food, possibly a nice game bird, although our members found the cheese nibbles brought out the depth of fruit.

We then moved on to the reds, starting with **Veritas, Monticello, Petit Verdot 2010 [£23.99, OWC]**. This was a very popular wine, which showed a deep earthiness and hedgerow fruits; it was smooth and intense and would be complemented by red meat.

We then tasted a pair of "Bordeaux blends", wines made with the same grapes as in the famed Bordeaux region. Firstly, **Boxwood Estate, Middleburg, Topiary 2010 [£27.95, OWC]**, a blend of cabernet franc and merlot, reflecting the style of St Emilion on Bordeaux's right bank. It had a taste of cinnamon and soft brown sugar, and the palate was rich.

The second Bordeaux style pairing was **Boxwood Estate, Middleburg, Boxwood 2012 [£29.99, Selfridges]**. This mirrored the left bank Medoc region of Bordeaux, comprising cabernet sauvignon, merlot and petit verdot. It had a deep, inky appearance and most agreed that it was worthy of the same price tag as a decent Bordeaux.

We finished the evening with a pairing of wines in the style of Italy's Barolo, both made from 100% nebbiolo grape. The **Barboursville Nebbiolo Reserve 2008 [£25.16, Christopher Piper Wines]** was the lighter in style, smooth with a hint of sweet coffee.

And we concluded the tasting with **Breaux, Percellville, Nebbiolo 2006 [£29.99, OWC]**. This was very popular with Barolo lovers; it had a fresh nose and a hint of toast; if we'd had a steak to go with it, we would have been able to imagine being at the vineyard in Virginia!

Vivienne presented the wines with great enthusiasm, demonstrating her considerable knowledge of the region, gained through several visits to the state.

And our members' overall thoughts on the wines? Surprisingly good, though like most wines from the USA, the pricing tends to inhibit greater consumption. The evening had been a rare treat and we thank Vivienne for coming along to join us.