

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: March 2017

Presented by Tim North, Joie de Vin Ltd

Report by Valerie Richardson

Members were looking forward with anticipation to a tasting of Loire Wines. This was to be the first tasting devoted exclusively to wines of this region of France in over ten years for our society. Our speaker Tim North has large experience in French wine, having worked for France's largest exporter of wine for 18 years in establishing it in the UK. Tim and Jill North have set up a business fairly recently as independent merchants. Their objective is to share the artisan wines they have discovered during their travels across France. They take pride in visiting the winery of every grower on their list and engaging with the growers. Many of these growers are young with a passion for producing great wines.

With the aid of maps, diagrams, photographs and anecdotes we took a wine journey across the Loire from west to east. We sampled two Muscadets and were surprised by their richness and lasting qualities. The first **Domaine Salmon Vieilles Vignes 2014, Muscadet Sevre et Maine sur lie 12% £9.50** was full and round as the grower, Dominique Salmon picks from the oldest, richest parcels of vines and matures the grapes for a short time in oak foudres to ensure softness and richness but without oakiness. Very attractive on its own but also recommended to accompany fish, chicken or mild cheeses. The second **Domaine Salmon Chateau Thebaud Cru Communale Muscadet Sevre et Maine 2012 12.5% £15** reflected a recent movement to define the terroir of the wines in their labelling and create a new tier of Cru Communale (or village) wines. This offering was matured on its lees for three years. It was delicious alone with its intense rich fruity and nutty flavours and a tinge of saline/mineral. It would match fish and white meat in rich sauces, grilled fish or goats cheese and had long keeping potential of up to ten years.

Moving east to Touraine we were introduced to Christophe's wines from the Cher region. His **Domaine de la Chaise, Touraine Sauvignon AOP 2016.12.5% £9.50** was all one could want in a Sauvignon Blanc. Crisp, aromatic with full fruit flavours. 2016 had been a difficult year with half of his production lost in April frosts. Happily the rest resulted in a delicious wine. In 2011 the vigneron of the Cher Valley obtained approval for the new "Cru" of the Loire using only grapes from the best vineyards and the whites restricted to Sauvignon Blanc. The offering **.Domaine de La Grange AOP Touraine Chenonceaux 2014 13.5% £14** had a lovely length and had rich complex flavours of apricot and peach with floral notes. Recommended to accompany smoked salmon.

We then savoured an unusual Chenin Blanc, **Domaine de La Grange Patrimoine Blanc 2014, 13% AOP Touraine £14**. This wine is fermented in new oak barrels. The wood and the addition of a small quantity of chardonnay soften the acidity of the main grape. The wine was long and complex with hints of pear, apple and grapefruit. This could accompany rich, creamy sauces as well as apple or pear tarts.

Before the interval we had an adjustment to our usual order and tried a sparkling wine **Bruno Curaissier Methode Trad Brut.12.5% £15**. This was produced using traditional champagne methods. The wine was cooled after fermenting in the barrel which contributed to the full rich fruity flavour and produced a characterful wine.

As the Loire is more known for its white wines, Tim brought five still white wines and three reds. Like the whites, the three reds provided interest and did not disappoint. The first **Domaine de La Chaise Touraine Gamay AOP 2016 12.5% £9.50** was a bright raspberry colour. It was soft and fruity on the nose and palate. Light Loire reds respond to a little chilling and make a good summer wine. The second red **Domaine de La Grange Clos Mabille 2014 Touraine Rouge AOP 13% £12.50** was made from a parcel of 3 hectares composed of old Cot (more commonly known as Malbec) the dominant red grape of the Cher region and Cabernet Franc. Malbec in the Loire produces lighter and more elegant wines than in warmer regions. This one was well received with cherry notes and gentle tannins. 2014 was a very good vintage for reds in the Loire. For the final wine we returned to a very good representative of the new Cru, Chenonceaux Rouge **Domaine de La Chaise ,Chenonceaux Rouge 2011 AOP Touraine Chenonceaux Rouge £12.50**. A mature wine with a floral nose and still showing rich fruit flavours demonstrating good aging potential. This could be enjoyable with meats or cheeses.

We are very grateful to Tim for presenting such a very pleasing selection of wines, The content of the evening was very well thought out. With his close involvement with the wineries he put across the ever evolving world of wine production, the role and enthusiasm of the small scale growers and also the challenges and decisions which face them. He really encouraged us to look more closely at the very good wines of artisan growers.