

Whitewater Valley Wine Society

Tasting Report: May 2018

Spy Valley wines

Presented by Tony Cloke,

European Sales Manager, Spy Valley wines

Report by Barbara Jones

This month we were very pleased to welcome Tony Cloke on his first visit to our Society. Spy Valley Wines is one of the most highly regarded boutique wineries in the Marlborough region of New Zealand. Spy Valley can trace its history back to the 1990s when Bryan and Jan Johnson established their 320 acre vineyard on land considered too hard, too dry and too unfertile for wine. But their passion won through and the family run estate flourished. Today, under the direction of General Manager and daughter Amanda Johnson, they export eight varietals to 35 countries across the world. A key advantage of having an evening dedicated to one wine estate is that we were able to taste most of the varietals produced on the estate. Based in the UK, Tony Cloke is European Sales Manager for Spy Valley Wines. He started out as Brand Manager several years ago when he worked for Bibendum Wine, their UK market partner.

A full house greeted Tony on his first visit and after a short introduction the tasting began, not unexpectedly, with the winery's most popular, signature wine – a **Spy Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2017** [12%, £12.00]. Very pale in colour with hints of lime, the nose was bursting with gooseberry aromas. On the palate the wine was clean, fresh and bright with hints of grapefruit and minerality [a wine more savoury than sweet]. Some exposure to oak adds a little creaminess to this wine that is still evolving, for example, the determined effort to lower the alcohol content.

This was followed by a **Spy Valley Riesling 2015** [13%. £13.00] that again was very pale in colour. This wine had a mineral and light petrolly nose and in the mouth there was freshness, hints of blossom and honey; the wine was full and rich with ripe citrus flavours and a dry, persistent finish.

The third wine was a **Spy Valley Envoy Sauvignon Blanc 2015** [13.5%, £18.00], an up-market version of their entry level wine. This was straw coloured with more subdued fruits on the nose. Having been barrel fermented it was more medium bodied and smoother and richer than the first wine. It was still fresh in the mouth, however, but had more texture and a long finish.

Our next wine, a **Spy Valley Chardonnay 2015** [13%, £13.00] again pale in colour had hints of butter on the nose but lacked the oaky

intensity of flavour of single varietals of 10 years ago. This was a fresher, lighter wine with hints of butter creaminess from eleven months in barrel.

Our last white wine of the evening was **Spy Valley Pinot Gris** [14%, £13.00] that was straw coloured and had a ripe citrus fruit skin bouquet; there were also hints of pear and nutmeg aromas combined with bran. On the palate the wine was initially light but then appeared more-full bodied with a balanced combination of fruit sweetness and had a long finish – ideal with spicy foods! This wine was well liked by members.

The tasting continued with three red wines, the first of which was a **Spy Valley Pinot Noir 2015** [13.5%, £17.00] that had a garnet red colour and was more opaque than French equivalents. The nose was full of red fruits – plum and red cherry underpinned with fragrant notes of spice and dried sage. In the mouth there were long supple fruit flavours with hints of liquorice and cocoa.

This was followed by a **Spy Valley Syrah 2014** [13%, £17.00] that was opaque and had a dark black cherry colour. On the nose there were aromas of liquorice, fig and black pepper with hints of chocolate. The palate was full of red fruits, vibrant cherry and spice and the finish was long and elegant whilst still retaining some freshness.

Our evening ended with a **Spy Valley Envoy Pinot Noir 2012** [13.55, £22.00] produced from the oldest vines on an outpost vineyard. This wine had a bright ruby colour and a nose full of plum, cherry and anise aromas. On the palate it was initially light, but then there was more structure and weight of soft and sweet fruit followed by hints of chocolate and spice. This wine was a most pleasant way to end to our tasting and it was interesting to learn that it is served to First Class Passenger on BA flights!

We extend our grateful thanks to Tony for a most enjoyable evening – for many our first experience of tasting Spy Valley Wines. We appreciated Tony's intimate knowledge of the winery and production methods and also his relaxed style of presentation.