

THE GLASSHOUSE

WINE APPRECIATION SOCIETY

MODULE 9

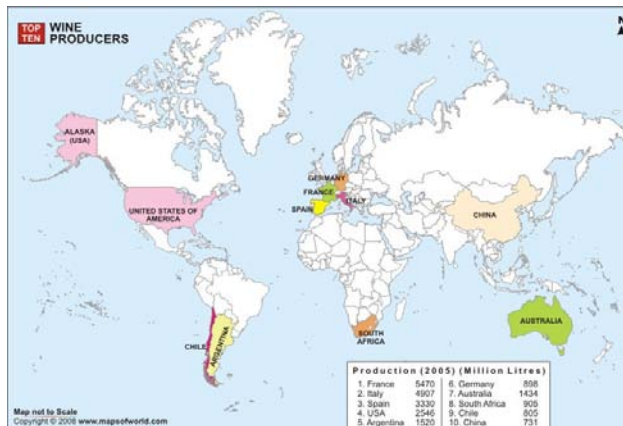
AROUND THE WORLD IN 8 WINES

PHILEAS FOGG DID IT IN 80 DAYS WE'LL DO IT WITH THE HELP OF 8 FABULOUS WINES - AND ALL IN ONE EVENING!!

A BLIND TASTING - FIND OUT WHICH ARE YOUR FAVORITES

Our focus is usually on one grape variety with its representation from different regions around the globe. This evening we will take a different approach tasting wines of different grape varieties that showcase the characteristics of that particular country at its wine making best.

Wine making is now a truly global activity – with a real cross fertilisation of grapes, and probably more importantly, ideas and knowledge. There are many who believe – this writer included – that France still provides the greatest inspiration and impetus for the rest of the world. Most wine makers outside France – aspire to the brilliance of the greatest French wines of Bordeaux and Burgundy – and both are still home to the greatest preponderance of the finest wines in the world.



But now we have French vineyards owners buying land in the southern hemisphere but also in the new new world of China. We have Australian and New Zealand wine owners buying land in the Languedoc- Roussillon region of France. Visiting vineyards around the world these days involves the regular meeting of many different nationalities working together to exchange news and views.

Technology is helping to broaden horizons even further – satellite gps systems monitored by dessication experts in Israel help with the pinpoint accuracy of water irrigation in France, and the southern hemisphere. Modern centres of wine knowledge at oenological courses in Australia, California as well as in France are populating vineyards with new experts.

So pin your taste buds back for an evening of excellence – and for once we will ignore the homelands of France.



ENGLAND

THE LAND OF BEER AND FISH AND CHIPS IS STIRRING THE WORLD OF WINE

'The country's transformation over the past five years, from novelty value to serious contender, has been nothing short of remarkable.'

Sparkling Wine

English vineyards are changing the minds of many wine snobs. England now regularly produces some of the finest sparkling wines that win prestigious prizes. Producers in Kent, mainly, and Sussex are making sparkling wines that win top prizes. It helps that the chalky soil of the North Downs is similar in composition and climate to that of Champagne and quality standards have improved enormously in recent years.

Of course in Roman Times we also produced wine - and in the world of wine - what goes round inevitably comes back round.

Chapel Down has been a leading proponent of wine-making for a number of years - although not that many in terms of the world of wine - and winning International Wine Challenge recognition.



Tonight's tasting is of Balfour Brut Rosé from Tenterden in Kent

Richard Balfour Lynn moved from apple growing to wine making in the 1990s - his day job is that of owner of the Hotel du Vin and other smart hotel groups. But he is also making a name as a respected and award winning wine maker. The Balfour Brut Rosé has won three major international awards in as many years and shows no sign of stopping that momentum. English sparkling wine cannot be called Champagne - as no wine outside that region is allowed to so define itself - but it is against some of the finest Champagnes that Balfour and other English fizz - such as Chapel Down - are competing and winning.

Global warming suggests that the down lands of Kent will continue to improve as wine growing areas.

Some fans of English wine are also suggesting that grape varieties such as pinot noir and sauvignon are also matching other wine 'A' star producers. For the time being we will be sticking with the champagne and also some excellent rosés

GERMANY

LONG OUT OF FAVOUR BUT THE SIXTH LARGEST WINE PRODUCER IN THE WORLD IS REALLY WORTH DISCOVERING

'The home of some of the world's finest, lightest, longest-living white wines'

The great grape of Germany is that of Riesling (pronounced reesling) - and although the German wine industry did itself no favours in the 1970s in an attempt to move towards mass markets - this is still the home of some of the most prestigious and ancient wine houses in the world.

A bit of background - courtesy of Jancis Robinson

'Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the German wine business prided itself on its equipment and administration - a combination unrivalled elsewhere in the world - but somewhere along the line lost sight of the taste of the wine itself. It is now rediscovering what made it so special in the first place.



The well intentioned German Wine Law of 1971 neatly assigned a number to every batch of wine, and allowed all but a tiny minority of wines to call themselves 'quality wine' or 'Qualitätswein' – the same rank as France's Appellation Contrôlée. More disastrously, it ordained that wine quality could be measured with one simple device, the refractometer with which vine-growers check the sugar content of their grapes. To qualify as a higher grade, or Prädikat, of wine, the grape juice simply had to be sweeter. The result was a steady invasion of German vineyards by wine varieties specially bred to provide super-ripe-grapes (which tend to produce wines which taste very bland). The major casualty was the difficult-to-ripen Riesling vine, Germany's greatest wine asset.'

In the UK we knew all about this trend - being bombarded with Blue Nun, Black Tower etc – and putting-off a generation of nascent wine drinkers – like me and all my friends!

But the wheel has turned and there has been a return to the grapes, to quality and to brilliantly made wines.

The wine we are tasting tonight is Dopff au Moulin Riesling 2008

The Dopff family have been making wine in Alsace for 13 generations at their 70 hectare vineyard in the heart of the best wine region.

SPAIN

RIOJA, RIOJA, RIOJA, RIOJA !!!!!

'The Spanish wine industry is large, technologically advanced and produces an amazing variety of grapes. For the English mindset however - it is just all Rioja.'

Rioja, in the north east of Spain was for most the only significant wine region of Spain. Perhaps that went to its head – and the complacency that ensued resulted in 'overpricing and underperforming'

Some cynics say that ...'Rioja has been American oak's most expressive ambassador ' – Jancis Robinson. The wine is made from a blend of Tempranillo and Garnacha (Genache) grapes and aged for a considerable time in the sweet, vanilla-scented warmth of small American oak barrels. The ensuing wines produced a relatively pale, gentle, soft wine reminiscent of strawberries and stewed fruit. It was also cheap and it became the first non-French wine to woo non-Spanish wine drinkers in the late 1970s.

But the wines got more bland and the prices shot up. Now there is a return to older slower and more full bodied styles.



Tonight we are drinking an old favourite of ours the Ondarre Reserva from the heart of Rioja – it is made with the latest technology but with the philosophy of producing traditional wines of the region.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's wine country is probably the most dramatically beautiful in the world



The grape that is synonymous with South Africa is Pinotage – but as a great wag once said ‘...life is too short to drink bad wine’. Instead we will taste the other wine of South Africa – Chenin Blanc, which is actually the country's most planted grape variety accounting for 17% of total wine output.

Most consumers come across Chenin Blanc in cheap and often tasteless wines – which is a pity. In its heart land of The Loire in France and increasingly in the southern hemisphere Chenin Blanc can produce dry and medium dry wines which have a hint of damp straw, flowers and a vaguely honeyed taste. In South Africa with the extra heat – it tends to hang on to its natural grape acidity that helps it to retain a clarity that other

white wine varieties can lose.

South Africa has more than double the amount of Chenin Blanc produced in France.

There are now some stunning Chenin Blancs that are being produced in South Africa and in other parts of the new world. Chenin Blanc also lends itself to being left on the vine to attract botrytis to make excellent sweet wines.

Tonight we are tasting a Paarl Chenin Blanc from Saam Mountain Vineyards

This is a very fine example of a well made South African Chenin Blanc. Saam Mt Vineyards is also spearheading ethical production initiatives and is a member of Wine Industry Ethical Trade Association (WIETA)

AUSTRALIA

IT HAS TO BE SHIRAZ!

Australia produces more Shiraz – known as syrah in its Northern Rhône heartland than anywhere else on earth. Australia has the perfect climate and soil structure to make good everyday shiraz that is often blended with cabernet sauvignon and also great Shiraz that stands up in quality and price to the very best that France can offer. Shiraz was brought to Australia in the 1830s and is the most important grape grown there in terms of both quality and quantity. Penfold's Grange commands process – at £150 and more – that would make even the diehard Rhône producer sit up and beg!



Tonight we are tasting The Black Shiraz – as the name indicates it is a dark and luscious wine from Bob Berton – a legend in the Australian wine industry

NEW ZEALAND

AN INDUSTRY THAT HAS BEEN BORN OUT OF THE ABSENCE OF ANY AGRICULTURAL SUBSIDY – A LESSON FOR GOVERNMENTS EVERYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD!



Whilst the Kiwis now want to grow wines of greater refinement and sophistication NZ will be famous for many years to come for its reinvention of Sauvignon Blanc as the freshest crispiest sauvignon in the world.

When the UK dumped its antipodean cousins for the EEC, as was, and subsequently withdrew 'Commonwealth preference' to European markets the New Zealand farmer did not sit on his porch and whinge. Instead he ripped up the soft fruits that had been destined for the UK and replanted the apples and pears of the north coast of the south island and planted grapes. The result has been an astonishing success story. Wine exports are now a key sector of the economy and a trip to Marlborough these days will result in an eye opening wine experience.

The early success was Sauvignon Blanc. Cloudy Bay took the world by storm – and others followed.

This evening we will taste our favourite of all – St Clair Sauvignon Blanc – which has been a mainstay of all our wine lists since the late 1990s.

The Ibbotson family are now grandees of the NZ wine scene – when we first met them they were producing 4,000 cases a year – that figure is now in excess of 400,000 cases.

CHILE

ENVIED BY THE OLD WORLD FOR ITS LOW COSTS, PEST FREE VINEYARDS AND WARM SUMMERS

Chile is rediscovering the peak levels it achieved in the late 19th century when it benefited from having a stock of vines unaffected by phylloxera. It prospered as its vines were used to restock the old world. The world's most prosperous wine industry was then owned by just 10 families, many of whom are still in control today. Remarkably the domestic market showed little interest in wine - but this far away country has been like a magnet for foreigners to come to the country to make good to very good wine. The French, for example, have been big investors in the country.



Chile accounts for 9% of all wine sales in the UK – a reflection of the range of wine, their quality and their very good value.

Tonight we are tasting Echeverria Merlot - a wine made by some very old friends of ours; the Echeverria family.

This wine is grown in one of the most idyllic vineyards to be found anywhere in the world. Interminably blue skies, Mediterranean climate, rich soil and all under the backdrop of the Andes mountains.....when can I go?

ARGENTINA

THERE IS NO BETTER WINE TO DRINK WITH A JUICY STEAK THAN AN ARGENTINE MALBEC

Argentina is the fifth largest wine producer in the world.



Argentina has changed the world's view of Malbec. Comparing the smooth wines of Argentina with the heavy tough Malbecs of Cahors – where they have not even called it Malbec until very recently – can be like drinking two completely different wines.

What is interesting is the fact that Argentine Malbec is the fastest growing red wine in the US. The grape from Argentina offers 'effortless ripeness, spiciness, robust alcohol and accessibility at a fraction of the price of comparable Californian cabernets' – say Jancis Robinson. Because of its success in the US – Cahors in south west France has now ditched the local names for the grape – Cot and Auxerrois – to proudly boast the Malbec name. Malbec from Cahors is a completely different kettle of fish, however.

Perhaps more surprising is how Argentina seems to struggle to make the same impact in Europe and in the UK. Whereas Chile means South American wines to most UK drinkers – Argentina only accounts for 1% of UK wine sales. (In the US Chile and Argentina account for 9% each of imports in volume but Argentina has snuck ahead in terms of value).

These wines are produced at some of the highest vineyards in the world at 1,700 metres.

Tonight we are tasting a fabulous example of an Argentine Malbec - Don David Reserve Malbec.