

Circle Update

July 2016

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From the editor: **Wink Lorch**

The times they are a-changin’

The wine world is but a microcosm of the whole world. We deal with, arguably, a non-essential or luxury product, although its origins are agricultural and that inherently means people working with nature. Vine farmers are vulnerable to everything else that happens in the world, whether man-made or not: from political change and market upheaval to climate change and unusual weather events, they along with all of us must feel that we are living in very challenging times.

Grape farmers who do not make their own wine are particularly vulnerable, as can be read in the worrying piece about grape prices in South Africa, contributed by Michael Fridjhon in this issue of *Update*. On recent visits to Savoie I have also heard about vineyards being grubbed up as they are no longer viable. The director of one Savoie cooperative told me that his members receive only 60% of the price per tonne for their grapes compared to a decade ago – something that is simply not sustainable.

Climate change and its effects on the wine world is the focus of an article by Linda Johnson-Bell and also features in my report from the fascinating International Cool Climate Wine Symposium held in Brighton in May. With bad news on prospects for the 2016 vintage from many parts of Europe, climate change is something everyone in the world of wine needs to pay close attention to.

Sommeliers value their jobs too and work in an ever-more competitive environment. On a more cheerful note and in a gripping tale, Amanda Barnes shares her experiences of watching the Best Sommelier in the World Competition in Mendoza. However, sommeliers might have to change how they describe wines according to Steve Slatcher’s well-argued opinion on how many aromas are perceptible



by tasters. I am delighted that this issue’s featured photographer, Ricardo Bernardo, took up my challenge to create, exclusively for *Update*, an image to go with Steve’s opinion piece and for this July’s very sunny cover. My apologies to readers in the grips of the southern hemisphere winter, but I hope this brightens your day.

Continuing with a sunny theme, we have a range of features on top tastings of sweet wines, Champagne, whisky, English wines and Douro Superior, along with discoveries of new wines from Prosecco, mountain purity in South Tyrol and contrasts in France’s South West. My thanks to all the contributors of these articles and to all the other photographers, who allowed me to use their pictures to help illustrate these articles. Thanks also to Robert Smyth’s help in editing the whole issue.

The AGM in May brought a changing of the guard and I look forward to working with Colin Hampden-White, our new chairman. I was happy that he agreed to be the focus of my ‘meet the member’ interviews, along with Heather Dougherty, a member who is also chairman of the Association of Wine Educators.

There are several CWW members’ trips this year and each will have its own separate report, starting with one on the trip to the Concordia Family wineries in the Duero, which took place last month. The next issue of *Update* will be in October and I welcome your suggestions for content and submissions by 5th September.

Circle Update: the newsletter of the Circle of Wine Writers

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Circle Update is available to external subscribers for £60 a year. The Circle’s membership list is available in various media from £95. A special joint package of the membership list with frequent emailed updates through the year and a year’s subscription to *Circle Update* is available from £135. These options can be viewed at www.circleofwinewriters.org. For more information, please contact Andrea Warren (see right). Membership enquiries should also be directed to her.

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Front cover: *Flavours in a glass*, specially commissioned to go with this issue's opinion piece. Back cover: *Sherry butt* named for journalist *Manolo Liaño* at *Bodegas Barbadillo* in *Sanlucar de Barrameda*. Photos by **Ricardo Bernardo**, this issue's featured photographer.

Membership of the Circle of Wine Writers (www.circleofwinewriters.org) is open to accredited wine journalists and other professionals communicating in the media about wine. As such, it is editorial policy to give the editor and each writer for *Circle Update* freedom to express his or her views. It must therefore be stressed that the Circle as an organisation does not formally associate itself with the opinions expressed by contributors, except where this is specifically stated.

Members who wish to send copies of articles in *Circle Update* to non-subscribers are requested not to forward the full issue. Pdf 'offprints' of specific articles are freely available from the editor, Wink Lorch.

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From the chairman: **Colin Hampden-White**

A spirited beginning following the AGM

to all who provided a prize for the raffle and bought tickets for such a good cause.

I was very pleased to include a whisky tasting after lunch, although the timing wasn't perfect as it coincided with Oz Clarke's induction into the New Zealand Hall of Fame. Those who stayed enjoyed it and Kevin Abrook, William Grant and Sons' global whisky specialist for innovation, expressed his pleasure at being able to cross the categories and speak about whisky to a mostly specialist wine audience. I am sure we will have further dedicated whisky tastings in the future.

Following this year's AGM, we have some further changes and appointments to the committee, including Tanya Mann, who will help with the Christmas party. For more details, see p.7.

Future plans

The Circle will be organising more BYO events throughout the year. We had a hugely successful BYO at the Chesterfield Hotel in Mayfair; there wasn't a spare place. This was very kindly facilitated by William Wilson, its sommelier and assistant restaurant manager. Attendees matched the fabulous food with some spectacular wines. Our next event will be at the Hide restaurant in the City and anyone wishing to join us should reply with haste to the email once it goes out to ensure a place.

The committee is moving forward with plans to update the website to become more useable and interactive, especially for the Register of Work. Not only will this make it much easier for people to update what they are doing, but will free up a certain amount of Andrea Warren's time so she can concentrate on other matters.

I would like to start my first chairman's report by offering huge thanks to the outgoing chair, Jim Budd. Not only did he serve as chair for the last two years, but has had a total of 26 years on the committee, including many years as editor of *Update*, all of which have involved an incredible amount of work to support and run the Circle of Wine Writers.

I'd like to thank Wink and Robert for an excellent April edition of *Update*; it is very good to see such a diversity of articles. If any members have thoughts on a specific wine subject, been on a trip or visited a particularly interesting producer, please let Wink know, as I'm sure we'd all love to hear about it.

We had a very well attended AGM this year, and I am pleased that having lunch afterwards seems to work well. Many thanks to Jim for bringing such fabulous sparkling wines for us to drink before lunch. I would also like to thank Linda Johnson-Bell for allowing us to take over the Portobello Gold and her team for looking after us.

We had a very successful raffle for our chosen charity, Room to Read, raising £425 in just a few hours. Thank you

At the Circle we sometimes forget that we include spirits writers. We have several members who write about both wines and spirits and I would encourage any of you who know spirits writers, online and in print, to encourage them to apply for Circle membership. We will have more spirits tastings in the future and hopefully a trip to Scotland before too long to visit distilleries, cooperages and other whisky-related locations. Like wine, whisky has a long history and an extremely varied flavour profile, the most of any oak-aged spirit. I have been approached by quite a few people expressing an interest in these trips. If you would like to be included in this type of trip, please let Andrea know so we can have an idea of numbers.

I would like to thank all the members of the Circle for their support. I hope that we show the way to young and emerging writers, communicators, photographers and educators. It is the strength of our membership that makes the Circle what it is and, with the future in mind, I hope we will continue to be united, and remain accessible for generations to come.

I was sad to learn that Tom Whelehan, one of our longest standing members, passed away recently (see members' tributes on p.11). Although I didn't know Tom, from what I have read he was a remarkable man and will be sorely missed by those who did, and my condolences go out to them.

The UK is in a state of flux at the moment following the vote to leave the European Union. Although the Circle of Wine Writers is based in the UK, I hope we all consider ourselves to be an international organisation. We will continue to strengthen our links around the world and this of course includes our European neighbours, friends and family.

A mainly pictorial report: The CWW AGM 2016 and Cyril Ray lunch



The Circle AGM was held at the Portobello Gold restaurant on Portobello Road in the heart of Notting Hill, West London. The hotel, bar and restaurant is owned by Michael Bell, husband of CWW member Linda Johnson-Bell, and we are grateful to them for letting us use the premises. Some of us of a certain age arrived, exclaiming how we remembered our pilgrimages to Portobello Road market in years gone by and wondering why had it taken us so long to return...

During the AGM, Colin Hampden-White was elected as chairman, along with two new committee members. Full details are shown on p.7.

After the business proceedings were completed, outgoing chair Jim Budd offered us three Loire sparkling wines that he had brought over from the Loire specially for the occasion. Together with guests we then settled down to lunch and the important business of sharing the bottles we had brought since this, for the first time ever, was a BYO Cyril Ray lunch. Members had also brought bottles (shown above) to donate to the raffle which was in aid of the Room to Read charity – the raffle raised £425.

CWW member, photographer **Bob Holmes**, who lives in the US, was in London at the time so able to join us at the event – he has kindly shared a selection of photos from the lunch and important raffle draw, above and below.

After a long lunch, we had little time for the whisky tasting, organised by our new chairman, Colin Hampden-White, but it was much appreciated by those who did stay and is reported on by Sandy Leckie on the following page.



From left: Andrea Warren shows her administrative skills sorting out the raffle tickets; Kathy Burk with Jim Budd; Colin Hampden-White and Heather Dougherty sharing BYOB wines; Christopher Fielden doing the same.



CWW TASTING: Sandy Leckie winds down after the CWW Cyril Ray Lunch 2016 with an exclusive whisky tasting of some of Grant's most limited releases. Photos by Colin Hampden-White.

Rare whisky releases top off fine feast

The grand finale of the splendid Cyril Ray feast was a tasting of whiskies from William Grant & Sons, which was organised by our new chairman.

With around 10% of the market, the company is the third largest producer of Scotch whisky, behind Diageo and Pernod-Ricard. Unlike its larger competitors however, it retains its independence as a family-owned business.

Its range of brands includes two iconic single malts – Glenfiddich, by far and away the best-selling single malt in the world, and Balvenie – as well as the popular 'triple malt' Monkey Shoulder. Grant's Family Reserve is the third best-selling blended whisky in the world.

The tasting was led by Kevin Abrook, Grant's global marketing manager with special responsibility for innovation. Kevin had selected four spectacular whiskies for us to taste, including two collectors' items!

We began by tasting a single grain whisky.

Girvan Patent Still Proof Strength Single Grain Whisky (57.1% abv)

One of only seven grain distilleries in Scotland, Grant's plant near the town of Girvan on the Ayrshire coast, 50 miles southwest of Glasgow, is equipped with some of the most advanced technology in the industry. Most of the spirit is destined for blending but a small quantity is retained for long ageing and eventual release as a single grain bottling, a category that is winning increasing favour among whisky lovers.

Pale gold in colour, this had aromas and flavours of baked apple, caramel, vanilla and cinnamon spice. Quite

rich in the mouth with a long, dry finish but not in the least fiery, despite its strength.

Retail price: £75 from The Whisky Exchange

We then tasted two very rare bottlings.

Kininvie 23 Year Old 'Batch 3' (42.6% abv)

Grant's built the Kininvie distillery on the same site as Balvenie to produce malt for blending purposes rather than release it in its own right. Production started in 1990 and continued quietly behind the scenes until the release of a



Kevin Abrook of William Grant & Sons

limited quantity of a 23-year-old malt bearing the Kininvie name in 2013. After spending most of its life in ex-bourbon casks, this was 'finished' for six months in ex-sherry casks before release. Labelled simply as 'Batch 1', it was received enthusiastically by those who managed to lay their hands on a bottle. A second limited release in 2014 sold out rapidly and the Kininvie name was made. It now has cult status and tasting 'Batch 3', released in 2015, we could understand why.

Quite pale in colour. Floral and gently fruity on the nose – ripe apple or peach – with a hint of spice. More pronounced fruit on the palate with some honeyed sweetness and soft, spicy, biscuity notes. A very fine and beautifully balanced whisky.

Retail Price (for a half bottle): £125 from The Whisky Exchange

Continued overleaf

Rare Cask Reserves Ghosted Reserve (42% abv)



This is a limited release of a blend of selected malts from two distilleries no longer in production – Ladyburn, which closed in 1975, and Interleven, which closed in 1991. Only 4,100 bottles of the blend were produced.

The marriage of these two malts, very different in age and style, has created a wonderfully complex and elegant whisky. The dry oaky richness of the older Ladyburn has been enlivened by the aromatic,

fruity sweetness of the Interleven. What a privilege to have had the opportunity to taste this very fine and rare bottling. Retail price: £375 from The Whisky Exchange

To finish, we tasted the inaugural release from Grant’s new malt distillery.

Ailsa Bay Single Malt (48.9% abv)

At the start of the new millennium, growth in sales of the flagship Glenfiddich and Balvenie brands was beginning to restrict the volume of malt available for blending purposes. At the same time, sales of Family Reserve were on the up. This prompted the company to invest in additional malt production capacity. It chose to do this by building a new malt distillery on the Girvan site, where Ladyburn once stood. This was named Ailsa Bay after the eponymous bay on which Girvan stands, itself named after Ailsa Craig, a craggy island in the Clyde estuary visible from the town. Its state-of-the-art design and equipment gives it the capability

to produce malts in a variety of styles. It was commissioned in 2007 and then extended in 2013. It now has eight wash and eight spirit stills and the potential to distil around 12 million litres of spirit a year. That’s quite a lot of malt!

For this inaugural release William Grant demonstrated the flexibility of Ailsa Bay’s production facilities by going for a heavily peated malt, a rare style for a Lowland distillery.

Powerful aromas of smoke, liquorice and tar. On the palate, citrus peel, honey and spice come to the fore to challenge the domination of the peat. A youthful whisky, of course, and punchy with it, but the quality is there and we can look forward to great things from Ailsa Bay in the future. Retail Price: £54 from The Whisky Exchange.



Circle Committee Roles May 2016

President: Rosemary George MW

Vice-presidents:

Bob Campbell MW

Oz Clarke

Committee Members:

Chairman: Colin Hampden-White

Honorary Secretary: Vivienne Franks

Honorary Treasurer: Keith Grainger

Other committee members and roles:

- Winifred Bowman – register of work
- Kathleen Burk - membership secretary
- Vivienne Franks - trips

- Colin Hampden-White – social events
- Caroline Henry
- Tanya Mann – shadow Christmas party arrangements
- Steven Morris – Christmas party
- Helena Nicklin – benefits coordinator, social media coordinator, The Benevolent liaison
- Angela Reddin - tastings sub-committee coordinator
- Liz Sagues – *Circle Update* liaison and press list
- Simon Woolf – website

PR is also being reviewed by some members of the committee both internally and externally of the Circle. If you have any comments regarding this, then please email Vivienne Franks at aspectwine@aol.com.

Below, a trio of Champagne experts at the AGM: Michael Edwards, Jayne Powell and Caroline Henry. Photo by Wink Lorch.



Membership changes and news



We offer a warm welcome to four new members of the Circle: **Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW**, **Nina Caplan**, **Marie Cheong-Thong** and **Christine Havens**.



Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW

Today based in Brussels, Pedro learnt about wine while studying agrofood engineering and then followed it up with a Master's in Viticulture and Oenology. He continued studying all over the world until he became a Master of Wine. He now dedicates much of his time to supporting MW students and helping the MW board. He has judged in the main wine competitions, gives tastings on four continents and writes for major wine magazines including *Essentiel Vino!*, *La Libre Belgique*, *Dernière Heure*, *De Morgen*, *Planetavino*, *Selectus*

Wines and *Decanter*. He says that he strives to keep his independence and sense of joy and only works for the education and promotion of wine, for the cause of intelligence and culture about wine.

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Nina Caplan

Nina is the wine columnist for the *New Statesman*, for which in 2014 she won two awards: the Fortnum & Mason Drink Writer of the Year and the Louis Roederer International Wine Columnist of the Year. She writes a column on food and wine for *Decanter* and one for *Whisky quarterly* on any drink except whisky. Nina also writes about food and travel and is currently working on a wine travel book for Bloomsbury following the journey of the vine through Western Europe. She lives in London and Burgundy and spends as much time as possible in Australia, where her family are from. She started her career as a film critic but is very happy to have ended up as a wine writer.

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Marie Cheong-Thong

Based in London, Marie Cheong-Thong has been a freelance educator, photographer, writer and consultant on wine, food and sake for many years. After an initial career in marketing for IT companies, she found her true calling – training at Le Cordon Bleu London and the WSET. She conducts masterclasses, workshops and trips, and judges both wine and sake around the world. Last year she won a scholarship to research *washoku*, sake making and culture in the Mie Prefecture of Japan. Marie is a member of the

Association of Wine Educators, the British Sake Association, the London Sake Study Group and the Culinary Academy of Japan. She publishes actively under her LarderAt36 moniker on social media as well as writing her own blog.

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Christine Havens

Christine is a wine writer, graphic designer, photographer and former winemaker currently based in Portland, Oregon. An early adopter of Vivino, sharing wine ratings since the app launched in the US in 2011, Christine is now a featured user with over 37,000 followers. She frequently contributes articles and wine pairing recommendations to the news section of the app and also writes for *The SOMM Journal*, *Tasting Panel Magazine* and *The Clever Roof*. She has been a guest on WineVine.tv and Vin Village Radio. This year she will start contributing as a writer for Wine

Access, as well as hosting a wine cruise in Oregon. Christine is a Millésima Wine Blog Awards finalist, a #winelover specialist and is studying for her WSET Level 3.
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Julie Sheppard

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Carol Whitehead

Awaiting new contact details.

Simon Woolf

Jan den Haenstraat 1-2, 1055 WB, Amsterdam, Netherlands

The following members have changed mobile numbers or emails:

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Martin Isark

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Linda Johnson-Bell

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Andreas Kjörling

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Members who now have retired status:

Mark Ridgwell
John Salvi MW

Resignations:

David Furer
Freddy Price
Lisa Shara Hall
Alf Tumble

RIP: Tom Whelehan

The Circle currently has 253 members

News about members

Recognition:

Chandra Kurt wins new Swiss award:

Earlier this year Chandra was given the award of Commandeur de l'Ordre des Vins Vaudois – commander of the order of wines from the Vaud. This completely new award was created by the Vaud wine office, with the aim of honouring eminent personalities whose works contribute to the knowledge of the vineyards and wines of the Vaud. The office cited in particular the way that Chandra had united German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland by publishing her books in both languages and also her close relationships with the vigneronns of the region. A second press release described why Chandra was a 'phenomenon' – congratulations to her.

Jancis Robinson MW adds to her collection:

In April Jancis was honoured by the French being awarded the Officier

du Ordre du Mérite Agricole (at the same time as Alan Cheesman), given on behalf of the French Minister of Agriculture. A few days later she received the highest VDP honour, the 'Golden pin of honour', which was presented to her by Hugh Johnson, who himself had been the very first to receive this honour in 1993. Both of these are great recognitions of Jancis' ongoing hard work.

Britt and Per Karlsson don robes in Portugal:

We know that members often become enobled into wine fraternities in the course of their travels. The *Update* team so enjoyed the photo of Britt and Per below that we felt we had to mention they had been inducted into the Periquita Brotherhood, created by JM da Fonseca.



Photo by Magnus Melin.

Photographer awards: There was a bumper crop of awards for CWW photographers in this year's Pink Lady Food Photographer of the Year competition. Many congratulations to **Bob Holmes** who won the Errazuriz Wine Photographer of the Year 2016 award for his photo of Mayasara Winery. The photo won first place in the Places category and another photo of his won second place. **Matt Wilson** won first place in the People category and **Mick Rock** won second place – Mick also had several photos commended. **Andrew Barrow** won third place in the Produce category. We show the two winning photos overleaf. The finalists' gallery can be viewed at: <https://goo.gl/P7h7sV>.

Reminders to members from Helena Nicklin:

- Please support, follow and RT us on **Twitter** and our new **Instagram** account, both under @circleofwine.
- From Zalto to holiday rentals, remember that you have some great **benefits** as a CWW member. Log into the member's area on our website to see the updated list.
- Calling all **photographers!** We want to use your best photos (with credit) on our Facebook header. Please send to Helena Nicklin via Andrea.

Continued overleaf



Prize-winning photos: On left, Mayasara Winery, Oregon by **Bob Holmes** and on right, 'Skin Contact' by **Matt Wilson**.

Book news

OIV book awards: Special mentions were given in the 2016 OIV book awards for Update's deputy editor, **Robert Smyth**, for his book *Hungarian Wine: a Tasting Trip to the New Old World* and to **Neville Blech** for his guide *Wine Behind the Label 9th edition*, co-authored with David Moore.

In previous issues of *Update*, we said that we would include in this issue a full list of members' books being published this coming autumn. However, only a few members have sent any information and the main wine book publishers have very few listings. We would like to highlight that **Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book 2017** will be published by Octopus Publishing Group and marks the 40th edition of the world's best-selling wine book.

Oz Clarke's The World of Wine will be published by Pavilion Books this autumn.

Over the next two years, publisher, Infinite Ideas will

be rolling out a series of books issued in paperback, under its Classic Wine Library imprint with several members as authors. Spring releases were *Port and the Douro* by **Richard Mayson**; *Cognac, The story of the world's greatest brandy* by **Nicholas Faith**, *Sherry* by **Julian Jeffs**, *Madeira, the islands and their wines* by Richard Mayson and *The wines of Austria* by **Stephen Brook**. August releases are *The wines of Faugères* by **Rosemary George MW** and *The story of champagne* by Nicholas Faith. Some of these books are extensive re-writes and updates of previous editions, most notably Nicholas Faith's Champagne book, which was originally published in 1987.

In Israel, **Yair Kornblum Koren**, former CWW member Sagi Cooper and wine educator Haim Gan have published *The Comprehensive Guide to Israeli Wines 2016* in both English and Hebrew. The guide reviews the best of Israel's wines, with hundreds of scores and tasting notes, as well as general information about the local wine industry, the wine regions, the grape varieties and more than 100

wineries in Israel. It is available to members of CWW at a discount for \$25+\$10 (for registered airmail). For orders and information contact Yair or visit www.thewines.co.il.

General news

Jim Budd and **Michael Edwards** will be joining the team for the 10th edition of Neville Blech's *Wine Behind the Label*. Jim will write on the Loire Valley, and Michael will cover both Champagne and North West Italy.

Paul Howard invites members to view his completely revamped website, which focuses on the world of biodynamic wines. His original site was created in 2004 and thus required an extensive re-design to make it fresh and mobile-friendly. Visit www.winealchemy.com.

Linda Johnson-Bell has contributed an excellent consumer-oriented piece on climate change for this issue, see p.36.

She says: "I am trying to close the gulf between the press, the producers and the consumers, on this topic. On the trade level, I recently presented my paper, Viticulture's Global Water Footprint, to last month's Royal Anthropological Institute's climate change conference, but it is currently undergoing a peer review and so I am unable to share it now. I have formed a think tank (<http://twacci.org/>) and have been brought onto another (GCAP) as a 'viticultural resilience expert'. We are working on private market adaption investments for our client, the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington. Currently, I am also preparing papers for other conferences and focusing on avoiding/reversing soil salinity caused by irrigation; sourcing cool-climate regions; creating regional adaptation templates, etc. If any of this sounds interesting to you, please feel free to contact me."

Thomas Rydberg has launched a new Danish wine magazine called *Din Vin Guide*. It includes 92 pages on wine and is distributed to consumers via more than 1,200 outlets in Denmark. He is also publishing and editing the Danish *Whisky & Rum* magazine.



Members pay tribute to Irish member, Tom Whelehan, who has died, aged 82.

Photograph of Tom Whelehan, copyright Matt Kavanagh, courtesy of The Irish Times.

RIP Tom Whelehan: CWW Honorary Life Member

Chevalier du Mérite Agricole in 1966 and Officier du Mérite Agricole in 1977.

In the *History of the Circle of Wine Writers*, Christopher Fielden mentioned Tom as an early member, writing about an event: "... and Tom Whelehan, one of the first to broadcast about wine, who arrived at an early tasting well-primed and waving a shillelagh." This sets the tone for many of the memories from members below.

Tom's son David of Whelehan Wines was interviewed by the Irish Independent in 2015 and said: "Dad's palate became very highly regarded on the international circuit and particularly recognised in Bordeaux. As a result, our home had almost weekly visits from winemakers coming to explore the Irish market. Even the late Bob Mondavi, when developing the cooperation between California and Château Mouton-Rothschild, flew into Dublin, tasted lots of old vintages of Mouton-Rothschild, then the two of them flew off to Bordeaux and the famous joint cooperation of Opus One was founded."

Tributes are paid to him by several CWW members, beginning with Jean Smullen, who fills in some details about his career, followed by two further Irish members.

Jean Smullen offers an appreciation of Tom's role in the Irish wine trade

Tom Whelehan, one of the pioneers of the Irish wine trade,

passed away suddenly and peacefully on Friday 8th July. Tom was the first wine correspondent with *The Irish Times* and wrote a wine column for them from 1960 to 1987. He was also a regular contributor for *Hotel & Catering Review* published by Jemma Publications.

As well as his writing, he was the wine consultant for Quinnsworth, which was one of Ireland's biggest supermarket groups at the time. It was subsequently bought up by Tesco. He was responsible for popularising wine in Ireland and raised awareness through his writing in the national press and his work with a major supermarket group. When Tom started to write about wine on the Irish market in 1960, wine consumption was a mere 0.3 million cases per annum; the growing interest was evident, so much so that by 1990 sales of wine on the embryonic Irish wine market had risen to 1.7 million cases annually.

Today, Ireland has an 8.7 million case market. Since the early 1990s the market grew enormously thanks to foreign travel, more disposable income and the availability of more wines, particularly from the New World via the major multiple and retail groups. TP's input via the Quinnsworth group certainly had an impact on this growth.

Wine was a passionate sideline for TP (as he was affectionately known); he worked in the pharmaceutical industry and was managing director of TP Whelehan and Sons until its sale in 2010.

One of the earliest members of the Circle of Wine Writers, Tom Whelehan (also known as TP Whelehan), from Ireland, died on 8th July, aged 82. His funeral took place in Dublin on Tuesday 12th July. Our sincere condolences go out to his wife Anne and his children Rebecca, Kevin and David.

As both a wine consultant and a journalist, Tom was well known in the Irish wine trade and he was the author of two books, *The Irish Wines of Bordeaux* and *Best of Wines in Ireland*. He was given two important French awards,

Tom's sons David and Kevin followed him into the wine trade. Kevin, who is based in Japan, works in the drinks industry there; David, who was the wine buyer with the O'Briens off-licence group for over a decade, recently opened his own very successful wine shop in south County Dublin, called Whelehan Wines.

Tom was erudite and entertaining with an encyclopaedic knowledge of wine. A bon vivant and born storyteller, wine events were always fun when Tom was in situ. He was dearly loved by his fellow wine writers and by his many, many friends in the wine trade both here and abroad.

Raymond Blake remembers Tom's gift of the gab and his generosity

"I rise as if by levitation." This was Tom Whelehan's catchphrase as he got to his feet at the end of countless wine dinners to regale his fellow diners with tales of bibulous adventure from the world's wine regions. Anecdote was piled upon anecdote and any divergence from strict truth was more than made up for by entertainment value.

But Tom was more than just a witty after dinner speaker; he was the most generous of men and I remember him as a kind and encouraging wise counsel when I was the new kid on the wine-writing block. We first met at a boring trade tasting, populated by 'interesting' wines of humdrum character and little appeal. We left together and ended up in his home where we launched into a vinous Tour de France from his cellar.

Tom kept a good cellar and its contents were for drinking and sharing – as I discovered that day. This was not a collection to be prized, gloated over and boasted about. Nor, I am sure, did he ever see it as an investment. Tom was a wine lover through and through. His enthusiasm for wine was unbounded and he passed that enthusiasm onto his two sons.

Years before that epic first meeting I was well aware of 'TP' Whelehan in his role as wine correspondent of *The Irish Times*. As a youngster I became fascinated by wine long before a drop passed my lips and would regularly seek out his column to learn more. Thus, he played a small but significant role in encouraging my burgeoning interest in

wine and for that I will always be grateful.

When the time came for me to leave Tom's home after our Tour de France, a bottle of Château Lafite 1961 was pressed under my arm, "for the road". That's how I'll remember Tom Whelehan.

Mary Downey followed Tom as *The Irish Times* correspondent

I heard plenty of amusing stories about 'TP' long before I ever met him. Back in the early 1980s, when I was assistant editor of the Aer Lingus inflight magazine *Cara*, he would accompany our oenophile editor on occasional assignments to wine estates with Irish connections – particularly in Bordeaux where his capacity to arrange the opening of barred gates and precious bottles for lavish bacchanalian soirées was apparently without equal.

He had by this time firmly established his reputation as Ireland's pre-eminent wine writer, and with good reason. I often wondered what he later thought of the small band of us who followed in his wake – probably with less proficient palates, shallower knowledge and only a smidgeon of his talent for fluent, elegant prose. But, during my decade as wine correspondent of *The Irish Times* – a role that Tom had filled impressively for more than two – I found him patient, gentlemanly and generous. Every so often he would ring up to gently point out an error or issue an invitation to come and sample treasures from his cellar.

Not that TP was always benign. If he didn't like a wine producer or his wines (or perhaps the pomposity or complacency with which they were presented), his blistering rebuke could silence the room. We have missed his mercurial presence at tastings and dinners for many years now. But how lucky we are that his son David has channeled TP's legacy into Whelehans Wines – one of the most exciting wine shops in Ireland.

From London Jim Budd recalls a very significant phone call

I think I must have met Tom on several occasions in London in the early 1990s, quite probably at Circle tastings.

Then in September 1996, I had a call from Tom asking whether I knew anything about scam companies based in the UK selling Champagne as a millennium investment on the premise that there would be a shortage of Champagne on 31st December 1999 as people rushed to celebrate the new millennium. This was news to me but I said I would see what I could find out. A little bit of research soon showed that there were a number of companies involved in this scam. A few days later I reported back to Tom asking him whether he wanted to follow this up. He didn't, so I decided I would and persuaded *Decanter* to run an article on these millennium scam Champagnes.

It was Tom's 1996 phone call that led to a now 20-year period of research into drink investment scams, my investdrinks.org website and now the investdrinks blog.

And, Andy Henderson reflects on the CWW tastings Tom attended in the 1980s

Always a grand line, I reflected, as he signed in at tastings and AGMs: 'Tom Whelehan, Irish Times'.

There was the attraction of that gentle Irish lilt, or maybe, with everyone aware that he'd travelled furthest we all wished to acknowledge that as we greeted him. With an average attendance of about a dozen for tastings back then, I recall the wonderful contrast of Tom regaling Harry Yoxall, blending the blarney with the taciturn and filling the room.

Perhaps 1993 was the last AGM he attended. It was in the boardroom of Davy's in Crown Passage Vaults. "We changed the venue especially for you, Tom," and he just chuckled throughout the meeting before we adjourned for a long, amusing and reflective evening. He was just such a lovely courteous and amusing man. It was great to have known him.

Finally, John Salvi writes from Bordeaux

Please record my deep sadness at the death of dear Tom. Unfortunately, my memories of him are for the most part unprintable, but remain very, very dear to me.

He was a fine writer, but above all an incomparable bon viveur. His lovely wife used to wait for him behind the front door with a rolling pin!!



Featured photographer: **Ricardo Bernardo**

Ricardo Bernardo is a professional photographer who lives in Portugal's Algarve and is passionate about the seafood of the region's Natural Park, Ria Formosa. Ricardo has developed his photography career linked to the world of wine and has been a member of CWW since 2014. His work ranges from shooting intimate food and wine tasting events to large fairs and international conferences, as well as commercial photography. His love for local cuisine is also reflected in his work documenting the most varied gastronomic creations. He is published regularly in national and international magazines.

Ricardo says that he is collaborating with a new Portuguese magazine, called *Drinks Diary* (drinksdiary.com), and is currently taking pictures for the third issue. It is a print magazine dedicated to beverage professionals, from bartenders to sommeliers and restaurateurs. "In this last six months I have photographed food and wine in Spain, Greece and England. In Portugal I've been doing a lot of cocktails, wine events and commercial photography," he says. Ricardo's own website is at <http://ricardo.bernardo.photography/>.

Left: Dessert paired with a cocktail prepared by bartender Roman Foltan (pictured below) at the Al Quimia restaurant in the Epic Sana Algarve hotel.



Below and top right: In the Viña La Canariera vineyard of Gonzalez-Byass in Jerez de la Frontera (sherry country).

Below right: Oloroso bota at Delgado Zuleta in Sanlúcar de Barrameda.





CWW TASTING: The Champagne masterclass led by Cyril Brun of Champagne Charles Heidsieck at the London Wine Fair on 3rd May 2016 was relished by **Becky Sue Epstein**. Photos by **Brett Jones**.

Magnificent magnums and musings on climate change

Cyril Brun, cellar master of Champagne Charles Heidsieck.

Obviously this seminar at the London Wine Fair was sold out: it was about Champagne and its title was: Does Size Matter?

The title was inspired by the philosophy of Cyril Brun, cellar master of Champagne Charles Heidsieck. I sat in the front of the tasting room, while ranged behind me were dozens of wine luminaries and eager students; the seminar was full.

A smartly-dressed man with a straightforward method of speaking, Brun seems as comfortable speaking in English as in his native French. He joined Charles Heidsieck last year after 15 years at Veuve Clicquot.

Brun believes that we should only drink wine aged in magnums – or larger. He prefers the way Champagne ages more gently in large format bottles. At the seminar, to illustrate this he showed us the 1983 in magnum and in bottle, as well as the 1989 in several formats and a 1982 ‘Champagne Charlie’. He also gave us all the disgorgement dates of the wines tasted.

Vintages 1983 and 1989

One reason Brun chose 1983 for the tasting was that he wants to “bring back 1983 to its rightful place” in vintage

history. He believes it was wrongly eclipsed “by the noise about Bordeaux” in 1982 and “not much attention was paid to Champagne in 1982 and 1983”.

The Charles Heidsieck Vintage 1983 was made with a classic blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay. The magnum was disgorged in 1993 but Brun advises holding this wine a bit longer (another year or two) before drinking because he detects “a few angles that need more softening”. Even now, after over 30 years, it has lighter toast and yeast elements than many other Champagnes. As we tasted, Brun advised us that, “the effervescence has almost disappeared. But when you taste a wine of this age you are paying attention to the complexity of the wine and the bubbles don’t matter anymore”.

In the standard 750ml bottle, the Charles Heidsieck Vintage 1983 is also ready to drink now, with honey notes cascading through a perfect nose and palate, both containing notes of yeast, toast, agar and an umami hint of mushroom. This bottle was disgorged one year earlier than the magnum of the same vintage.

Interestingly, Brun says that the 1982 Charles Heidsieck ‘Champagne Charlie’ blend of 50/50 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in magnum is ready to drink now. It has small bright

bubbles, and Brun says he loves the nose better than the palate which he finds “a bit too heavy” and just on the brink of declining. The *chef de cave* at the time was the legendary Daniel Thibaut, and Champagne Charlie is a name that Brun hopes will be reborn, the last vintage being 1985.

For the 1989 vintage, Brun brought samples in 750ml, in magnum and in jeroboam. He said that of the three great consecutive vintages, 1988, 1989 and 1990, the 1990 has been considered the best. However, he finds that the 1988 is still improving; he called the 1989 “classic”; while he thought the 1990 “is starting to decline”. Surprisingly, he said that the 1989 reportedly had average-to-low acidity and some people considered this vintage to be too ripe, but for him it had a “perfection of ripeness” and was a dream for a winemaker. The 750ml bottle and the magnum were disgorged in 1999, while the jeroboam was disgorged in 2012.

Sampling the 750ml bottle, I found that orange added its aromatic presence to the toasted yeast aroma. The palate was also toasty, with some honey flavours, too. The magnum was personified by golden roasted yeast and on the palate it was a lively, vibrant wine. Brun called it “perfection of balance on the palate”, though he found

the end palate slightly drying. In contrast, I found the 1989 jeroboom's aromas at first sulphury and mushroomy but these soon dissipated, and when sipped the wine settled beautifully on the palate.

Traditionally, Charles Heidsieck has released its vintage Champagnes after ten years. Brun notes that due to global warming, the grapes are now getting riper than before and this may speed the evolution of the wine in the bottle, so over the next decade the house may shorten its releases to between eight and a half and nine years. In any case, they monitor all the wines carefully and do not always release them sequentially. We were very privileged that these older, rare and valuable vintage Champagnes were specially selected for our seminar.

Climate change and cultural challenges

The issue of climate change surfaced also in the discussion of the 2015 vintage that had kicked off the seminar. Brun said that this was the first time it had been “too hot” during the day at harvest time, making harvesting the grapes a challenge. In this heat, the grapes can begin fermenting (or even rotting) uncontrollably the minute they are picked. Because of France's tightly held traditions, he believes it will be a challenge to persuade the French to harvest at night in order to keep the grapes cool as done in many warmer New World areas. “Very likely I will get my successor to do it,” he concluded, taking the long view.

Furthermore, Brun believes “there is no one solution to global warming” but “pieces of different techniques” will be used “to preserve the freshness that is necessary for our style” of wine. Brun prefers changes such as massal selection for Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. He feels that another possibility discussed, that of re-introducing some of the other grape varieties that were used in the past, would change the style of Champagne too much.

Brun sees additional changes ahead. In the future Champagne may become like Burgundy, he says, where “differences may be acknowledged between small parts of a village”. But he concedes that this will be a difficult political decision.

2015 vintage: vins clairs and reserve wines

From the 2015 vintage, we tasted several *vins clairs* – the wine components of Champagne. A Pinot Noir from Aÿ was bright, grapey and juicy with ripe phenolics. A bit of a drought in the early summer helped the grapes' ripeness along. But Brun said this earlier ripening is “not good news when we are based in Champagne... and prefer a little bit of underripeness”.

A Pinot Meunier from Verneuil was a “very good surprise in this vintage”, according to Brun. It had a chalky minerality and Brun is considering how it might refresh his non-vintage blend. Referring to climate change and this year's ripeness of the Pinot Meunier grapes, he acknowledged: “If I would have said ten years ago we could refresh the blend with Pinot Meunier, everybody would have laughed.”

Our next *vin clair* was an Oger Chardonnay which was super citrusy; I think the correct term is ‘aggressive’ which is an indication of ageability in Chardonnay, Brun told us. He was concerned that some of the 2015 Chardonnay wines might be too soft for great ageability, which is why he chose this particular Chardonnay for his blend.

Brun threw two reserve wines into the tasting: a 2008 Oger Chardonnay and a 1996 Cramant Chardonnay. The latter showed what he termed “the classic acid profile of the 90s” and as for 2008, Brun said that it is the classic vintage of the decade. This 2008 wine was beautifully rounded and evolved. In response to a question from Anne Krebiehl MW on whether autolytic character came partly from reserve wines in the blend, Brun answered yes, saying the reserve wines are stored on their lees.

Brun said that in the future we should rely more on the sensation on our tongues and palates instead of on the numbers [like pH measurements] because the ripeness of the grapes will affect the sensation in the mouth. He also mentioned that 2015 “probably will be a vintage year” with its overall freshness and acidity. It's too early to know much about prospects for the 2016 vintage but there was a spring frost. Which just goes to show, said Brun, that “nature is the boss”.

And back to the question about the influence of size on Champagne development... Here's the answer: Brun believes that in Champagne bottling “size has much more impact than the date of disgorgement”.

Students of Plumpton College assisted with the arduous task of pouring the magnums for the tasting.





Meet the member: *The Circle of Wine Writers appointed Colin Hampden-White as its new chairman at the last AGM, so it seems appropriate to discover the man behind the title. Also a chairman, but of the Association of Wine Educators, Heather Dougherty is a Francophile and fierce defender of the benefits of wine education. Wink Lorch conducted these interviews by email. Photographs were supplied by the interviewees.*

Colin Hampden-White: ‘The whisky world has always said they could spot wine tasters at a whisky tasting.’

At the CWW AGM in May 2016, Colin Hampden-White was elected as chairman of CWW, having been on its committee for some time. He joined as a member in 2013.

Brought up in Scotland, at the age of 30 Colin ditched a career as a quantity surveyor to find something more interesting to do. Already a keen amateur photographer, he was taken on as a photographer – first by the *The Scotsman* in 2001 and then two years later moved down to London to work for *The Times* and *The Financial Times*.

After a few years he moved on to working on magazine features, in particular with Condé Nast for whom he still works. His fine art photography was picked up by Rebecca Hossack, who runs a well-known contemporary London art gallery. She gave him his first solo show in London in 2009 and in New York three years later, leading to his work being exhibited internationally as well as in the UK, where it features in the National Portrait Gallery. His portraits of winemakers were given a show entitled *The Greatest Winemakers* in 2010 at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery and selected images won him the Champagne Louis Roederer Award for Artistry in Wine in 2012.

As well as producing fine art photography, Colin also writes regularly, in particular on whisky. He is the editor of *Whisky quarterly* magazine, which launched last year.

How did your involvement with the world of whisky start?

I was given my first dram by a game keeper on a bitterly cold day. It was Lagavulin 16 and I shall never forget it. Professionally, my whisky world started when I was commissioned by Darius Sanai, the editor in chief of Condé Nast, to write and take photographs for his magazine, *LUX*, in 2010.

Like you I'm British, and we British are embarrassed to ask things we should know, but for the sake of the CWW's international membership, please tell us why you have the title of 'Sir' as shown in the Circle's member directory?

I'm afraid I have done nothing special for it; it's an old inherited title originating with the French side of my family. Our records date back to Normandy, around 948 AD, before crossing the channel. We have a good deal of tradition and it is part of that long history.

Wine obviously has a place in your heart as well as whisky. Were you brought up in a household that drank wine and if so, what did you think about it growing up?

My parents didn't really drink fine wine, I was a teenager in the days of Hock and Black Tower. My first real taste of something lovely was on holiday in Switzerland when a neighbour of our hosts opened a bottle of 1969 Chianti Classico. I was 16 and it opened my eyes to what wine could be and from then on I loved it and wanted to learn more. My housemaster at Downside School was a very progressive teacher and, having been given far too much wine by parents at the start of term, would open bottles and educate his sixth form.

And what wines do you enjoy drinking most at home today?

We like a big mixture at home. Apart from the old favourites from all around France, we enjoy Portuguese wines, some of the more delicate Australian, Argentinian and Californian wines, but European Riesling and Furmint from Hungary are also favourites.

How did you find the experience of photographing some of the world's greatest winemakers?

It was an amazing time. I was very lucky and captured them in the 2010 vintage. They were all very happy from the 2009 [vintage] and knew that 2010 offered another great vintage. It was a very upbeat time and they were very generous with their time, wines and welcome. I have stayed good friends with many of them over the years.

With your professional hat on, what are the biggest differences between the whisky world and the wine world?

The whisky world has always said they could spot wine tasters at a whisky tasting. They are the ones spitting! In reality there is little difference, I find many whisky drinkers like fine wines. There are large companies such as Diageo and very small producers such as Overeem in Tasmania; whiskey now comes from all over the world. They [Diageo and Overeem] both have history, with distilleries dating back to the 1700s.

How have you ended up as editor of a magazine? Was that in your game plan?

It certainly wasn't a game plan. I just enjoyed writing, and taking pictures. Having built a great friendship over a few

years with Krzysztof Maruszewski, the publisher of *Whisky quarterly*, he asked me to help him start the magazine, and edit it, so I jumped at the chance.

Why did you join CWW in the first place and what has inspired you to move on to being on the committee and volunteering to lead the Circle as its chairman?

I joined for a few reasons. Firstly, I thought it would give me a greater chance to network with others who wrote about and loved wine as much as I did. I also thought it would give me the opportunity to attend tastings and go on trips for which I wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity. Lastly, there was a degree of prestige; to be accepted into a society by one's peers gives great encouragement.

Through becoming a member of the committee I sought to encourage others to join, and not just from the world of wine, but also spirits, as well as from a younger age bracket. It was because of this last wish, to encourage a new generation of wine and spirits writers to become members,

that I accepted the nomination for chairman. We are incredibly lucky to enjoy membership from some very well respected and established writers, educators, broadcasters and photographers, and I hope they will all pass on their encouragement and knowledge to a new cohort through their membership of the Circle.

Away from the world of alcoholic drinks, what activities provide your biggest enjoyment in life?

Photography – even though it is part of my work, I still love it. I still take series of photographs for galleries and privately to simply enjoy at home. I play a little squash and tennis. I also collect items with a connection to Westminster Abbey. Caroline and I were married in the abbey, so it holds a special place in our hearts.

If you had to choose a last drink, would it be whisky or wine?

Too hard to answer! I would find it difficult to choose between white or red, Speyside or Islay, let alone wine or whisky.

Colin discussing his photo of Lalou Bize-Leroy at a London exhibition. Photo by Paul Muir.



Colin and his wife, Caroline (centre), at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery in New York, flanked by Ewan Morgan and Gillian Cook of Diageo. Photo by Daniel Peter Jamieson.



Meet the CWW Member 2:

Heather Dougherty: ‘Consumers are hungry for knowledge of wine and generally very happy to admit to how little they know.’

Based in Surrey, South East England, Heather Dougherty is the current chairman of the Association of Wine Educators and for ten years has run her own wine events company, Red, White & Rosé.

Heather began her career in the travel technology business, but decided wine was more fun and switched careers while bringing up a family and studied with the WSET to achieve her Diploma. She has been a member of the Circle since 2008 and writes a regular wine column for the *Surrey Advertiser* – these articles she shares along with others on her blog, Liquid Assets (<http://yourliquidassets.blogspot.com/>). She is also a regular wine judge for all the major wine competitions held in the UK.

Heather was shortlisted for the 2012 Louis Roederer wine writers’ awards in the Regional Wine Writer category. France, and especially Champagne, are important focuses for Heather, both in her work and on holidays too – she speaks the language fluently. In 2015 she was one of three UK finalists in the European Champagne Ambassador competition and has since gained the Champagne Master Level qualification with highest honours from the Wine Scholar Guild.

Was wine on your radar growing up?

Yes, my parents were enthusiastic holiday-goers in France, Germany and Spain when I was growing up, where they got a taste for wine. I can’t remember the first time I was offered a taste of wine, so I must have been pretty young.

What made you decide to swap the travel business for working in wine?

I had drifted into the travel industry, without having consciously chosen it. I was surrounded by people who were genuinely passionate about travel, and I developed a yearning to work in an area that I was truly enthusiastic about. I was quite a high-flyer and my job was taking up more and more of my waking (and sometimes sleeping) hours. Approaching ten years of working for the same company, I felt that if I didn’t make the leap then, before I knew it, 20 years would have gone by! I’d got the wine bug via a wine appreciation course, followed by WSET qualifications and felt my future could lie in wine. After a summer off, I got a job at Oddbins – *et voilà*.

Had you experience of delivering presentations before you began as a wine educator?

My first job in the travel industry was training travel agents (remember them?) on a computerised reservation system. As I moved into business development and account management roles I made many presentations – most memorably to the board of American Express, having worked through the night. We did win the business though!

Is wine education in the conventional sense still relevant for wine consumers?

Absolutely. Consumers, especially in the UK, are hungry for knowledge of wine and generally very happy to admit to



how little they know. They are very open to learning more – but we do have to make sure we are offering education in a form that is appealing and accessible.

Can you share any horror stories you’ve experienced running educational wine events?

Well, there was the time I arrived at a corporate wine event with all the wines, glasses and so on – but no corkscrew. The client loaned me one, but I’ve never made that mistake again!

What’s your biggest frustration in preparing for a wine event?

Getting wines and the rest of my paraphernalia into big corporate locations can be really challenging – above, all is gleaming steel and glass, but below is the netherworld of the underground loading bay with its arcane rules and often no mobile signal. I’ve learnt to allow plenty of time and to be very nice to anyone who might be able to help.

As chairman and therefore the main spokesperson for the Association of Wine Educators (AWE), can you explain what the association is for in just two sentences?

The Association is a group of independent, professional wine educators, based in the UK and, increasingly, around the world. Our members must hold the WSET Diploma and have all been rigorously assessed on their ability to communicate effectively.

And, what makes it different from the Circle?

Ultimately we are both involved in communicating about wine and a good number of our members are also part of the CWW.

Many of us in the wine business don't fit neatly into a single role and many AWE members also write about wine and there are CWW members who also present and educate. But AWE members will probably do more communication in front of 'live' audiences, rather than online or on paper.

Do regional newspaper columns still help the wine trade and do you think they still inspire readers?

What a good question! I'm not sure I can answer on behalf of the wine trade, but I do meet 'normal' (non-wine trade) people in Surrey who say they enjoy reading my wine columns in the *Surrey Advertiser*. I make an effort to be informative, but with a sense of humour and hopefully avoid anything that might qualify for Pseud's Corner.

When you travel with your family to wine regions, how do you stop them being bored?

Luckily, wine regions tend to be in pretty, scenic regions with good weather, so that helps. Keeping visits to producers short is probably the key.

You're obviously a real Francophile. Is there anywhere non-mainstream you would recommend others to visit?

As the owner of a jolie laide 1981 VW camper van, I can

recommend some great French campsites for wine lovers. Probably my favourite is the tiny site attached to Champagne Novack in the Marne Valley. The setting is great, tucked below the vineyards, but the best bit is the chance to round off a day touring the region with a chilled bottle of their Champagne as you take in the view from the camper.

What wine region of the world that you haven't yet been to would you most like to visit and why?

This is probably not very original, but top of my list is South Africa. A beautiful country, with some of the most exciting wines being made anywhere.

What question would you like to answer that I haven't asked you? And can we have the answer too, please!

What efforts are you making to raise the profile of the AWE? We have launched the second edition of 100 AWESome wines this year – unbiased recommendations from our members of wines that are all great value for money and worth seeking out. The concept has been really well received by consumers who love having a brochure to keep and to refer to when they are wine shopping. From our side, the brochure is also a great way to promote the AWE and its members.



Heather's VW camper van parked up by a vineyard below the imposing Dentelles de Montmirail, and somewhere less glamorous.



FROM THE EDITOR:

Would you like to feature in this 'Meet the member' feature for a future issue? In particular, if you have just launched or started a new project, or have particularly good stories to share, please get in touch by email: wink@winklorch.com

Amanda Barnes takes us to the frontline of this year's Best Sommelier of the World competition, held for the first time in Mendoza. A version of the article was originally published on Amanda's website: www.AroundTheWorldIn80Harvests.com.

Behind the scenes at the battle of the somms

Some 500 people poured into Argentina's wine capital, Mendoza, in April, to witness and participate in the elite battle of the world's top somms, which is effectively the Olympics of the sommelier world. With only 14, and now 15, holders of the title of Best Sommelier of the World, this is the most elite accolade in the career of a somm and the competition is fierce.

This year was the biggest in the competition's history with 61 candidates ready to pit their skills against each other. As the Association de la Sommellerie Internationale (ASI) celebrated a new growth spurt to reach 58 member countries, the Best Sommelier of each country (usually the latest winner of the national competition) was invited to

participate alongside the three international title holders: Best Sommelier Europe (Swede Arvid Rosengren), Best Sommelier Americas (Argentinean Paz Levinson) and Best Sommelier Asia-Oceania (Hiroshi Ishida from Japan). As the crème de la crème of the sommelier world arrived (each with their own entourage of coaches, fans and family), the Argentine Sommelier Association (AAS) greeted them with a packed agenda of winery visits, parties, tastings and countless Argentine *asados* (BBQs), as well the main competition.

This was an enormous and unprecedented undertaking which involved three years of planning for the AAS as first time hosts. The AAS was only formed in 2001 and its

president Andres Rosberg explained that the sommelier profession is a young one in Argentina and although people do not exactly look down on it, sometimes it's hard for people to understand the extent of its influence. "This event has been important because people have now seen that maybe it is worth it to

pay attention to sommeliers. And for our professionals and sommelier students, just to be able to give them the experience of meeting the sommelier 'rock stars' – mixing with them, talking with them and seeing them work – helps them to understand what it is all about," he said.

It was undoubtedly a unique opportunity for the 160 volunteer sommeliers who worked the floor of the event, cleaning more than 14,000 glasses and pouring over 1,000 Argentine wines throughout the four days of the event. Of course, having Argentina in the international limelight was also an enormous opportunity for the local wineries to showcase their top wines to some of the most influential sommeliers in the world.

The competition

The art of preparing for this competition is to expect the unexpected. "They never know what form the competition will take," explains former Best Sommelier Chile, and technical committee member, Ricardo Grellet. "They know there are three elements – service, tasting and theory – but they don't know in what order."

Early on the first morning of the competition, the candidates were greeted with a blind tasting of two wines and four spirits, a theory exam and a practical test of serving champagne, all under the eye of the judging panel and spectating press. Premeditated traps laid by the judges included a small speck on a champagne glass, and taxing questions such as listing from memory Germany's wine regions by size, in reverse order. The first round of tests lasted some five hours and would determine who would



The stage is set at Mendoza's Teatro Independencia, where the three finalists had to perform for judges and the audience. The eventual winner, Arvid Rosengren, was first up. Photo by Amanda Barnes.

reach the semi-finals. That evening, the semi-finalists were announced and for the first time in history, there were 15 and not 12. "There were a lot of people coming here and we wanted more people to have the chance to be in the semi-final," explained Shinya Tasaki, ASI president and Best Sommelier of the World 1995.

The semi-finalists comprised a strong northern European contingent with Christian Jacobson from Denmark, Heidi Makinen from Finland, Henrik Dahl Jahnsen from Norway, Raimonds Tomsons from Latvia, Robert Andersson from Sweden, and the favourite Arvid Rosengren from Sweden. Other favourites to make it through were Hiroshi Ishida from Japan, David Biraud from France and Paz Levinson from Argentina. Previous continental winners, Satoru Mori from Japan and Elyse Lambert from Canada, also made the cut, joined by first-time semi-finalists Piotr Pietras from Poland, Alexander Rassadkin from Russia, Gareth Ferreira from South Africa and Julie Dupouys from Ireland. In a heavily male-dominated competition (57 men compared to four women), it was a celebrated victory for all four women to make it through to the semi-finals. Champagne from Moët (a sponsor) was flowing but the celebrations were short-lived as the semi-finalists had to prepare for their next, and more demanding, round of ten tests early the following morning.

Left: The 15 semi-finalists included all four women contestants. Photo courtesy of the competition organisers.

*Right: Finalists had to pour a magnum equally into 15 glasses. Photo by **Amanda Barnes**.*



A rigorous four-hour examination period saw more written theory, blind tasting and practical assessments. Dealing with the pressure and putting on a convincing smile is what candidate Hiroshi Ishida believes makes this the top sommelier competition. "The content is really interesting. If it was just tasting and knowledge – what is the difference to another wine professional [competition]? The contest has to include proposals to the client, even if the client is difficult," he said.

After all 15 completed the exams, the judges kept schtum until the finalists were announced on Tuesday. Monday was a welcome day off for the candidates as they and a 400-strong entourage of attendees spent the day winery-hopping in the Uco Valley. Three wineries, two barbecues and lots of wine later, it was time to bed down before the big final on Tuesday.

At 3.30pm, the audience filled the Teatro Independencia, in Mendoza city centre, where the competition would be live-streamed and broadcast on television with overflow screenings in the Hyatt next door.

If you were wondering how they make pouring wine a spectator event, try announcing the three finalists just five minutes before they have to compete. The adrenaline levels didn't drop as the number of candidates went from 15 down to three, with a palpable echo of heartbreak in the room.



A dark horse in the competition, Julie Dupouys (originally from France but representing Ireland), made it into the finals, along with two of the favourites from the outset: David Biraud from France and Arvid Rosengren from Sweden.

Arvid was the first on stage as the theatre curtain lifted to reveal a mock restaurant with 23 judges scoping out the competitors as they were given tasks to perform in front of the live 500-strong audience. A series of 12 tests, lasting roughly 45 minutes, lay ahead for each candidate. To start with, a table of judges ordered a classic Martini cocktail and a bottle of Champagne that wasn't available to the candidates. Part of the challenge is to spot the ruse and offer the best alternative Champagne.

Each of the exams tested the sommeliers in their wine and drinks knowledge, their ability to keep their cool and to make the client feel good during service, as well as blind tasting and identifying both wines and spirits. Once the audience learned more about the blind wines served as the competition progressed, it soon became a fun spectator sport.

The most impressive part was as each sommelier spontaneously waxed lyrical about pairing a series of cult wines with a special menu of their creation. The most gut-wrenching moments were the rapid technical rounds of blind tasting and the task to identify mistakes in a wine list in under 30 seconds.

After over two hours of individual performances, the three returned to the stage for two tasks together, battling it out face to face. The first was a 15-second recognition round to write down the names of the faces and places that appeared on the screen – châteaux, winemakers and vine diseases flashed up on the boards. Imagine a sober, high-pressure pub quiz in front of a well-suited black tie audience.

The final task aroused deep oohs and aahs from the spectators as a stage of three tables was revealed, and each candidate was asked to serve a magnum of Champagne equally into 15 glasses, without returning to re-pour any glasses and leaving the bottle empty. The tension could

have been cut through with a knife as the candidates literally raced side by side for a painstaking seven minutes pouring pink bubbly.

After the task was over, the candidates got to take a well-deserved swig of Champers and take a seat for the big announcement.

The moment we had all been waiting for...

ASI President Shinya Tasaki opened the last white envelope of the competition to announce the new Best Sommelier of the World: the young Swede, Arvid Rosengren. "It feels great," the 31-year-old sommelier enthused after winning. "They were really tough finals and I wasn't expecting to win!"

Arvid marks a shift from the previous winners. He works in a trendy restaurant in Soho, New York, where they serve old wines accompanied by loud hip hop. What does this

2016 Best Sommelier of the World, Arvid Rosengren. Photo courtesy of the competition organisers.



victory mean for the future generation of sommeliers? "You don't have to be stiff to be a sommelier, and I think it's good for the new generation and important to show the world that sommeliers can be different," he said. Arvid is the second Swede to win the accolade, confirming an emerging trend of the high number of Nordic countries represented at the top of the competition.

After a well-deserved drink, and more steak for dinner, the order of the top 40 was announced after midnight by Best Sommelier of the World 2010 and CWW member Gerard Basset. Frenchman David Biraud had taken second place, Julie Dupouy third, and out of the semi-finalists in fourth was Paz Levinson, and in fifth Elyse Lambert.

An impressive three women had made it to the top five, but for now the Best Sommelier of the World remains an all-gents club – at least until the next games begin in 2019.

Neville Blech tastes more evidence to suggest that Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and other classic varieties are the grapes to take England forward, in both the sparkling and still categories.

Noble grapes the best bet for England

Since we wrote our *Guide to the Vineyards of England and Wales* in 2008, English wines have come on a ton. To go from under 300 commercial vineyards then to over 500 now, some of which have been purchased by overseas buyers, is a reflection on the worldwide interest English wine has garnered over the years.

Of course, global warming has been a definite plus – transforming our rather marginal climate, which would otherwise only support the hardiest of grape varieties, to what is now proving to be conditions conducive to farming mainstream cool climate grapes. These include Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, which leads us on to what is now considered to be the major strength of English wine production – sparkling wines.

These three grape varieties of course are the major components of Champagne, thus allowing us to draw direct comparisons with the sparkling wines of England and Wales. But there has also been a remarkable upsurge in the quality of still wines, particularly the whites, although there is not much in the way of economies of scale realised on the UK wine producing scene, so they might appear to be just a little more expensive than wines of similar quality from other countries.

I attended the English Wine Producers annual trade tasting in London this May and here are my brief impressions.

There were 62 sparkling wines to taste, which were thoughtfully divided into categories: Non Champagne varieties and blends, 100% Chardonnays (Blanc de Blancs),

Traditional Varietal Cuvées (the majority), Blanc de Noirs, Sparkling Rosés, Extra Brut and Demi-Sec.

Only four of the 62 were categorised as from non-Champagne varieties and blends, and three of them did have some Pinot Noir and/or Chardonnay in the blend. This in itself is indicative of how well English producers now handle the Champagne varieties. As a result, these four wines were far less impressive and even bordering on harshness.

In the Blancs de Blancs category, my top two, Wiston Estate 2010 (£40) and Brightwell 2009 (£21) both scoring three stars plus out of five, edged out some of the others. While I found these two equally good, it does show what terrific value the Brightwell is. There were good blends from



The 2016 English Wine Producers trade tasting was held in the Great Hall at One Great George Street in Westminster, home of the Institute of Civil Engineers. Photo courtesy of John Mobbs, www.greatbritishwine.com

Ridgeview (the Bloomsbury and the Cavendish 2013, both £26.95), Lyme Bay Classic Cuvée 2013 (£22.95), Wiston Estate Cuvée Brut 2010 (£33), Jenkyn Place Brut Cuvée 2010 (£28.50), Henners Reserve 2010 (£32) and Nyetimber Classic Cuvée 2010 (£32.99). But the star in this section, in fact, the star of the show, was the Hambledon Première Cuvée Brut NV, which had the finesse and elegance to put many a Champagne to shame. On the cusp of five stars, at £42.50 it's not cheap, but this is a real example of getting what you pay for.

The rosés were headed by the four-star Exton Park NV made from 100% Pinot Meunier (£34.95), which showed good finesse coupled with some intensity of fruit. Not far behind were Wiston Estate Rosé 2011 (£36), and two wines made of 100% Pinot Noir – Sixteen Ridges 2013 (£30) and Three Choirs (£29).

Noble grapes also leading in still wines

There were also 52 still wines available to taste, most of which were white. There was a fair selection of wines from the Bacchus variety, which was probably considered

as England's best white shot in the past, but I didn't find anything outstanding here – Bacchus does have a tendency to be a bit flabby, but one with good structure was the 2013 Litmus Element 20 from Denbies, although it was a 50/50 blend with Chardonnay – at £20 a bottle it wasn't cheap.

What did catch the eye, however, were the two white Pinot Noirs on show: the Sixteen Ridges 2014 (£12.50, 3.5 stars) and the Litmus 2013 from Denbies (£20, 3.5 stars), both vibrant and fresh with good aromatics. Apart from a crisp and fresh Reichensteiner 2014 from Brightwell (£9.99, 3 stars), noble grape varieties are faring better than the crossings, with 3.5 stars awarded to the Stopham Estate Pinot Blanc 2013 (£12.50) and 3 stars to Hush Heath's Skye's English Chardonnay 2015 (£16.50).

The still reds are probably not yet up to the mark, but once again remarkable progress has been made over the years and I am sure that continued global warming will enhance the quality of the reds in due course. Meanwhile I was impressed by the Bolney Wine Estate Foxhole Pinot Noir 2014 (£16.99) which had good finesse and true varietal flavours.

Ultimately, there can be no doubt that English sparkling wines now rank amongst the best in the world. Climate change has certainly helped, but increased winemaking skills and attention to detail will ensure a proper place in the annals of wine production. Still wines produced from noble grapes are also beginning to show real quality. However, if there is a caveat, a breakthrough in the market is a little hampered by the lack of economies of scale. Thus many of the sparkling wines are more expensive than some Champagnes and still wines of similar quality from countries where the costs of wine production are much lower have a definite price advantage.

Clearly, our *Guide to the Vineyards of England and Wales* from 2008 is out of date and needs substantial updating. Are there any potential sponsors out there?





Steve Slatcher believes it's better to be roughly right than exactly wrong when it comes to describing wine. This article is adapted from a series of posts on Steve's blog www.winenous.co.uk.

OPINION: Why four's the aroma limit

Opinion is divided on tasting notes with flowery language and long lists of descriptors. Many serious wine lovers seem to expect them, and writers duly oblige, while the wine-drinker-in-the-street, when paying any attention at all, dismisses them as pretentious nonsense. Personally, I look at them quizzically, and wonder if they are really communicating anything of value. There are a number of contentious issues in tasting note style and content, but here I want to tackle just one: the number of aromas mentioned.

A specific issue with large numbers of aromas in tasting notes is that a series of experiments have shown people are incapable of identifying more than four aromas when those aromas are blended together. So how can tasting notes meaningfully refer to more than four? Was there a problem with the experiments? Or, after the four most prominent aromas mentioned in a tasting note, are we merely reading the product of an overactive imagination?

The research was carried out by David G Laing and co-workers in the 1980s and 1990s. In the first experiment, mixtures of up to seven aromas were delivered to the noses of subjects in vapour form, and they were asked to identify the aromas present. Each aroma came from a single chemical compound known to the subjects by an everyday name. Aroma concentrations were chosen to be moderately strong perceptually, and each aroma was roughly equally strong. The aromas were also known to be identifiable in binary

mixtures in the chosen concentrations. The subjects were first allowed to familiarise themselves with the individual aromas for several minutes, and then given mixtures that varied in terms of number and type of aromas.

The finding was that no more than four aromas in the mixture could be correctly identified. In subsequent experiments, subjects were given more training or chosen from expert flavourists and perfumiers. In addition, sets of aromas were then selected that were thought to either contrast or blend well with each other, while aromas based on more than one chemical compound were also used going forward. There were some differences in the results, but the fundamental conclusion remained: people could not correctly identify more than four or so aromas. So how do wine tasters manage to identify so many aromas? And what does it mean when they do?

I know some tasters sample their wine over the course of an evening, with and without food, and possibly even continue with the same bottle over two or more days. That is potentially going to lead to longer tasting notes, and the naming of more aromas, because the wine, context and taster might change over that period.

Others however are perfectly capable of reeling off a list of aromas within the space of a few minutes. The people I have personally seen doing this have all been Americans with some level of sommelier qualification, and

my preliminary conclusion is that it is related to their training and culture. In the case of professional wine critics who name many aromas, I suspect that, due to pressures of time, those lists are also usually produced rather quickly.

But are the aromas named in these long lists actually represented in the wine as chemical compounds in concentrations that could stand any chance of detection? Note that Laing's limit of four applies not to the imagination, but to the correct identification of aromas from chemicals actually physically present in the mixture.



Even if the aromas do not really exist, there may be understandable reasons why they may be identified. In Avery Gilbert's book, *What the Nose Knows*, there are several examples showing that we are extremely suggestible when it comes to our sense of smell, and suggestions of what we might find in a wine can come from many sources. The best known example is perhaps that the addition of red food dye to white wine prompts people to find aromas usually associated with red wine. In real life all manner of things might suggest what aromas should be in the wine, not least being told what the wine is, even if that information is false. There is no shame in being suggestible in this manner. It is simply the way we humans work perceptually.

Without wanting to name names, I am also convinced that some tasters fabricate aromas because they feel, for whatever reason, a few more are needed. I too would do that under certain circumstances – for example if I were taking some sort of test, and was required to list a certain number of aromas. If you have a good idea of what the wine is, it is very easy to throw in a few extra descriptors that would not raise eyebrows. Claret? OK, that will be blackcurrant, pencil box and French oak. Choose more unlikely ones if you aim to impress.

For whatever reason, some tasting notes contain more aroma descriptors than Laing's experiments suggest is possible. I cannot find any particular problem with the scientific evidence for our poor ability to identify aromas in a mixture, and I see no reason to doubt its applicability to wine. If anything I would expect it to be an easier task to identify aromas in Laing's experimental situation than with wine – in the experiments there were always subsets of the same seven or eight aromas, as opposed to the much larger number possible in wines.

Not all on the nose

However, there is a possible issue because the experiments presented aromas only to the nose. With wine however, aromas are detected also when it is in the mouth. Does that cause a greater number of aromas to be detected in total? My personal experience suggests that happens

only occasionally, and to a small extent. And the results of a quick ad hoc online poll I ran seemed to suggest most other tasters feel the same way. What about letting a wine develop over a few hours or days? Does that let additional aromas develop and become identifiable? It is possible, but again in my experience it is rarely the case.

So if we take the identification of an aroma literally, by which I mean that the chemical compounds responsible for that aroma are present in the wine, I think it is fair to say that the limit of four correct identifications should apply. However, aromas mentioned in the tasting note may merely be reminiscent of the real thing. Or, as some less kind people might put it: imagined or made up. In these cases, there can clearly be no limit on the number of aromas, but by what criteria can we judge the value of such lists?



Communication is king

For me, the main criterion for a successful tasting note is its ability to communicate the experience of drinking the wine. And here I mean to communicate accurately and not just to give an impression of what the experience might hypothetically be like. When I am tasting, the correspondence between my experience and tasting notes independently written by others is usually minimal, and we can also get hints of how successful communication is by comparing different peoples' tasting notes of the same wine. Usually any similarity is limited, and sometimes the differences are huge, particularly in the list of aromas mentioned. It is interesting to speculate about to what extent the differences are due to the subjective nature of taste, and to what extent it is imperfect communication; but differences there are.

The tasting notes I find communicate best are those where the aromas listed are few, and not very specific. For example, it can often be accurate, and still helpful, to identify citrus aromas in a wine. But when someone else describes a wine as tasting of lemon, I often think it is closer to lime. I admit that it seems reasonable to distinguish fruits at the level of detail of lemon and lime, but does anyone actually care? It is difficult to imagine a disgruntled customer returning a bottle of wine to a shop because the wrong type of citrus fruit was mentioned on the back label. The precision of detail is also linked to the issue of the number of aromas, as one person's citrus fruit could be another's three separate aromas – lemon, lime and orange – or even kumquat, clementine and charred mandarin.

In summary, there are two main reasons why I am sceptical about long lists of aromas. First, if you take a literal interpretation of aromas in tasting notes, on balance I agree that it is impossible to produce correct lists containing more than four. Second, I am not convinced about how useful long lists are anyway. I favour a shorter tasting note that contains only the dominant aromatic components, and one that is not over-specific in its aroma descriptors. Indeed, it is better to be roughly right than exactly wrong.

Image created by Ricardo Bernardo.



On a visit to Prosecco **Robert Smyth** finds new styles emerging and even re-emerging from an ancient age. The photos are by Robert.

Back to basics with Col Fondo

on the front label. Col Fondo appears to be something akin to what Prosecco tasted like before technology and particularly before the autoclave (pressure tank) came along. It is made in a version of the ancestral method but how this method is interpreted varies considerably between producers. Common to all is that the second fermentation, or a continuation of the first, takes place in bottle. As in France's fashionable, often medium-dry Pétillant Natural wines the yeasts remain in the bottle right up until serving, but with Col Fondo all the sugar is converted leaving a dry wine.

While Col Fondo does indeed taste yeasty, it generally captures something of the Glera grape's fruitiness, even though it's bone dry. While this stuff isn't going to set the world on fire or threaten Champagne in terms of complexity or elegance, it does offer another string to Prosecco's bow. It is all the rage in Italy right now and some examples are pretty complex, but they have very good drinkability too.

Col Fondo was always served before the 'regular' Proseccos on the winery visits we made and it can be served with the lees shaken up, resulting in a cloudy wine, or it can also be served clear if the lees are kept firmly at the bottom of the bottle with careful handling. Currently, it is mainly made in the lighter sparkling frizzante style but this may change in future as the Consorzio considers enabling it to have full-blown bubbly spumante status.

Valdellövo's Bade 2013 comes from 60-year-old vines, and is 90% Glera with the other 10% made up by Bianchetta and Verdiso, from the hills of Collalto and Susegana on the Conegliano side of the Prosecco DOCG area. After pressing of the grapes, the must was fermented in steel

tank for ten days. The wine was then conserved on fine lees (*feccie nobili*) for six months. Next, selected yeasts were added to the tank and the wine was then bottled by hand for the second fermentation. It spent 20 months on the lees in bottle, is unfiltered and has lots of citrusy freshness, lemon zest and lemon grass alongside toasty, biscuity notes. Malibràn has two Col Fondo labels: per tradizione Sottoriva; and Credamora, which has no sulphur added and had that biting on lemon kind of rawness. The wines offered stretch back over several vintages. The Sottoriva 2012 had developed really complex autolysis and was the only one that had me scribbling 'Champagne-like'. Never mind vintage variation, when it comes to Col Fondo, according to Malibràn winemaker Maurizio Favrel, "every bottle has its own life". He is also a firm believer in the ageing potential of Col Fondos, as well as of regular Proseccos.

Respite from Extra Dry

While there's still a sea of Extra Dry Prosecco, the style traditionally quaffed by the Italians themselves, increasing numbers of producers are working on progressively drier offerings, through a combination of meeting international demand for drier wine, as well as sometimes preferring it themselves. Even the Bruts are heading south in terms of sugar content. Valdellövo and Ruggeri's Bruts weighed in on the sugar scales at 7g/l, while Malibràn went lower still with its self-explanatory '5 grammi Brut'. These were all linear, focussed, edgy and exciting.

It is notable that Prosecco from the DOCG's most prestigious vineyard, the 107-hectare Cartizze, is usually designated Dry – the sweetest of the three categories,

The 2015 vintage looks like an excellent quality one for Prosecco DOCG with abundance in terms of quantity to allay supply fears brought on by the washout of the 2014 vintage. The wines are showing vibrant fruity and floral aromas backed up with good fruit and balance on the palate. While the consistency of many Prosecco DOCGs tasted at this year's edition of the VINO in Villa press event – mainly from the 2015 vintage – was impressive, it was perhaps more exciting to witness the emergence of a new style, or rather the re-emergence of an ancient way of making Prosecco.

This style is generally referred to as Col Fondo, which can be translated as 'with sediment' – a reference to the yeast that stays in the bottle, although the Col Fondo name is not used by all producers. In fact, the Drusian winery says it has patented the term but many other producers use the name on their labels too. Valdellövo's example is simply called Bade and also carries the words *Fermenti naturali*

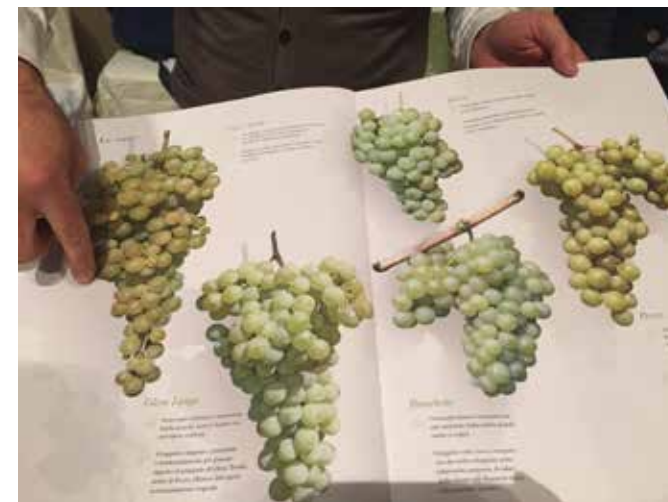
which starts at 17g/l and goes up to 32g/l. The reasoning usually put forth for this is that the higher acidity that this vineyard delivers thanks to its complex cocktail of soils brings balance to the wine, although on tasting many it does feel that the scales are naturally tipped in a sweetish direction. Another reason is said to be the extra ripeness that the grapes achieve on this prime hillside site. However, the drier trend is even spreading to the hallowed steep slopes of Cartizze. Villa Sandi's Cartizze Brut captures the renowned site's intensity in a full-bodied wine of real substance with 11g/l of sugar. Incidentally, Villa Sandi also makes traditional method sparkling wine from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Cartizze may be joined in future by other names, such as Colbertaldo, Santo Stefano and Soligo, if the increasing number of releases of single-vineyard Rive pique the interest of critics and consumers alike. Rive is a word from

the local dialect meaning 'vineyards on steep sites'. Indeed, there are some very steep sites in the DOCG, especially on the Valdobbiadene side. This move brings greater variety to the Prosecco DOCG picture, which has long been one of creating consistency by blending from various vineyards, often balancing out the fruitier and richer wines from the clay of Conegliano with the more floral, acidic and mineral wines of the steeper sites and more limestone soils around Valdobbiadene.

The final development going on in the Prosecco DOCG is something of a resurgence of other local grape varieties, while the Glera grape continues to dominate. Marchiori incorporates a total of five grapes in its wines, with the blend certainly bringing out distinctive flavours with more nuttiness than usual. In addition to Glera (or Glera Tonda as it is also known), Marchiori uses Glera Lunga, Bianchetta, Verdiso and Perera.

Along with Glera, Marchiori uses a further four grape varieties for its Proseccos.



On a visit to Alto Adige Donna Jackson is particularly impressed by the Lagrein variety as well as by the community spirit. The photos are by Donna.

The winemakers of South Tyrol

After last year's Merano wine festival, which takes place annually during the first week of November, I decided to return to dig deeper into Alto Adige, the mountainous Italian region that borders Austria and Switzerland and is famed for its vivacious, pure mountain wines.

The upper reaches of the Adige River flow through the valleys and gorges carved out by it and its tributaries – hence the name Alto Adige (High Adige). The other more political and historical name for this region is Südtirol (South Tyrol in English). It was formerly part of Austria, until after the First World War when Italy claimed it. More recently, in 1971, the population voted to remain autonomous under Italy. The official languages are German (69%), Italian and Ladin (a Romance language).

The influence of Austria is still keenly felt in this fiercely independent part of Italy. Walking into the cellars you will often see the Austrian eagle carved into the older casks. German is spoken everywhere and Italian and English are optional extras.

You will also feel the influence of 3,000-metre high, snow-covered mountains towering over you while standing in vineyards planted on sunny slopes. The average temperature in the north of South Tyrol is a mere 12.2°C and the average rainfall is 717.7mm. Although if you are lucky enough to enjoy the mesoclimates of Merano and the region's capital city of Bolzano, which are protected from cooler temperatures by the southern Alps and Dolomites in summer, it can get balmy and hot.

Lagrein the local hero

This region is known for its outstanding white wines, but no other grape holds so warm a place in the hearts and minds of the local population and its gifted winemakers than the well-regarded red-wine grape Lagrein. This grape has never migrated into the winemaking mainstream, although there have been small pockets of experimental vineyards planted in Australia and California. Lagrein certainly possesses qualities sought after by many dedicated winemakers: high acidity, low pH and high tannins. Perhaps its low yields have scared some off, although I believe this is because the region guards its heritage and vine material jealously and wants to keep it this way.

Various theories have been put forward as to its origins and ancestry, from Lagaria in Greece to the Lagarina Valley in Trentino. First mentioned in the 17th century in monastic documents, modern scientific records show that the grape was more likely to have been named after Val Lagarina in Trentino. DNA testing shows it likely to be a natural crossing of Teroldego (from Trentino) and another variety. It is probably related to Syrah, Pinot Noir and Dureza.

Lagrein is produced today in both Alto Adige and neighbouring Trentino under DOC regulations. It is sometimes blended, for its wonderful purple colour and tannins, with Schiava, Teroldego and Merlot. Lagrein's silky

tannins and plummy, earthy-mineral qualities make it a very good partner with the robust local cuisine that comprises pork, aged cheeses and venison. Yet I also love it as a standalone wine. Quite a few winemakers now produce wonderful Lagrein rosé and my personal favourite is made by the renowned Alois Lageder.

The Alois Lageder cellars are at Tòr Löwengang. The cutting-edge winemaking cellar complex at the Löwengang estate in Magrè is the result of 200 years of winemaking by the Lageder family. The biodynamic farms, winery complex and marketing of this successful family wine brand are led by Alois Lageder and his son, Alois Clemens. Their Lagrein reds should be tasted for the true expression that this local gem can achieve.

Winemakers working in tandem

My winter visit started in the small village of Marling, just outside the town of Merano, in the province of Bolzano. Here the winemaker, Erwin Eccli, of the small Pardellerhof-Montin winery invited me to join him for the day in his organic mountain vineyards and to meet some of the other winemakers. His own small winery possesses mountain vineyards dedicated to making low-yield organic wines. Pardellerhof and its neighbouring picture-perfect farm, Poppohof, share resources and also work in tandem. It is

a very pleasurable thing to see this community spirit in winemaking, which Erwin tells me is not rare in these parts. The spotless winery and cellar gleamed as I tasted the tank samples. The new release of a sparkling Moscato Giallo coincided with my visit. The Poppohof Meraner is Vernatsch (Schiava or Trollinger), while the winery also produces an excellent Lagrein and a full range of local whites which can be purchased at the cellar's tasting room.

The Goldmuskateller Passito, made by Erwin from his precious and carefully tended 0.1ha of Goldmuskateller, simply must be tasted. Of red wine varieties, Pardellerhof has 0.3ha of Lagrein and 0.5ha of Vernatsch. It also has 0.5ha of Chardonnay and 0.7ha of Pinot Grigio. It produces 9,000 bottles per year, which will increase in a few years with planned plantings. The other Eccli brother, David, farms at Salorno where the Lagrein and Pinot Grigio is grown. Pardellerhof offers family apartments to let on the farm near Merano for an idyllic family holiday.

Erwin took me up on the other side of Merano near the towns of Tirolo and Schenna to visit the beautiful Weingut Innerleiterhof, which is where Erwin got his start in 2012 in the borrowed cellar. The state-of-the-art cellar and private wine hotel with its exclusive rooms and award-winning food are well worth checking out.

Just a 20-minute drive along the main road out of Merano, towards Bolzano, lies the Kellerei Terlan (or Cantina Terlano), in the small town of Terlano. The winemaking team here is headed by Rudi Kofler and the wines are excellent. I was recently invited to a vertical of Terlan's aged Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs going back to the 1970s, which was a real education. Among its range, Kellerei Terlan produces Lagrein Riserva Porphyr, its flagship label, and also the more affordable Gries Riserva. The old name dunkel you may see on some labels means dark in German. The cantina also produces a Lagrein rosé.



From left: Erwin Eccli of Pardellerhof-Montin in his barrel cellar; the Poppohof label shows the ongoing Austrian influence; a contrasting label for the fine Lageder Lagrein from the Gries vineyard.

White and red Douro wines seriously impress **Annabel Jackson** and her fellow jury members at the local wine competition.

Douro Superior shows its class

The 2016 edition of the Concurso de Vinhos do Douro Superior saw 19 gold and 29 silver medals awarded out of the 150 wines entered into the competition, which is an indication of the tremendous quality coming out of the Douro Superior. “The Douro Superior [wines] have the same aromas and flavours of the rest of the Douro wines, but they are more intense and expressive,” said winemaker Jorge Moreira. They are also noteworthy for their freshness.

The competition, held in May in the town of Vila Nova de Foz Côa, was organised by the magazine *Revista de Vinhos* and assisted by a jury of 37 wine professionals, including myself. The magazine’s editor, João Paulo Martins, concurred that this is surely Portugal’s most dynamic wine region right now.



It is from this remote and rugged part of the Douro, still largely unfarmed and uninhabited, that the region’s first table wine was produced – the iconic Barca Velha in 1952. Back then, the area was accessible only by boat and Xito Olazábal, winemaker at Quinta do Vale Meão (the same estate that produced

Quinta do Crasto (right) and below a stack of Barca Velha. Photos by Mick Rock of www.Cephas.com



Barca Velha) says the potentially treacherous journey from Porto to visit their family used to take an entire day, and that arriving in the Superior, a mere 20km from the border with Spain, was like entering another world.

Today there’s a road, but negotiating hairpin bends at up to 800 metres above sea level is a minute-by-minute reminder of the extraordinary topography of the Douro, and the viticultural feats which have been achieved. At Crasto, they pump one million litres of water a day (from May to September) onto their 170-hectare site, 114 hectares of which is under vine. So far, there’s not even a real toilet on the estate. Owner Jorge Roquette says there’s nothing rational about wine, at least not up here. They started this particular estate in 2003 and Jorge says he still has two workers building walls full-time on the terraces.

More and more Cima Corgo names are up here alongside Crasto: Vallado, Ramos Pinto and Rozès, to name a few. The top red wine of the competition was Quinta do Grifo Douro Grande Reserva tinto 2011 from Rozès – a stunning wine from a stunning vintage.

There are some great new names up here, such as Muxagat where Luis Seabra, formerly of Niepoort, consults. Muxagat is in Mêda, close to the Dão, and it can

do particularly fantastic things with white, principally the Rabigato grape, which Luis also blends with Tinta Cão.

The top white of the competition was rather curiously Passagem Douro Reserva branco 2015 from Quinta das Bandeiras Vinhos. This estate is a collaboration between the Berqvist family, which owns Quinta de la Rosa, and Jorge Moreira. They don’t have a toilet here, either, but Jorge marvels that they could buy 100 hectares from a single owner – a complete impossibility in the Cima Corgo.

This is not necessarily a wine which would always do well in a blind tasting, being defined neither by aroma or acidity. Rather, it is dense and forceful, and intellectual. It is made from a typical field blend – Jorge doesn’t know the exact mix – but the major grapes are Rabigato and Malvasia. Jorge says he couldn’t produce anything interesting for a while, even when he tried to focus on structure above flavour and aromatics. Neither did skin contact deliver results of any note. When he began to ferment the grapes on skins for three days, he found that the phenolics were incredible. He moved the juice to oak and carried out *bâttonage* to give it some aeration. The wine went from being brown and phenolic to something beautiful, elegant and restrained; something full of character too.

Michael Fridjhon exposes the penny-pinching practice of fleecing grape growers that blights the South African wine industry and sucks its oldest vineyards dry. The article has been adapted from an original Michael wrote for the Daily Maverick.

The great grape con

Theft is addictive – not only because the adrenaline high which apparently accompanies the performance of the act parallels the endorphin-addiction of the long distance runner, but because the proceeds of crime swiftly migrate from bonus income to part of the essential budget. The traffic officer who never planned on a career of bribe-taking swiftly includes the revenue in his monthly budget, and in time finds he can't make ends meet without it.

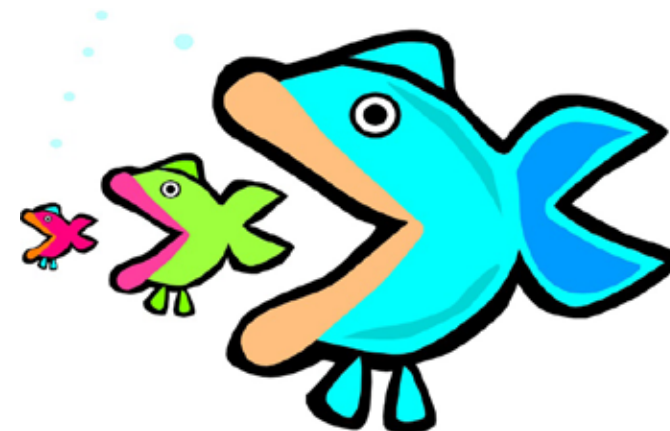
As you make your way up the food chain – all the way to heads of state in South Africa and South America – you will discover that those in receipt of difficult-to-declare bonuses have long ago incorporated the income into their lavish lifestyles. Institutionalised theft is not only limited to government officials. You don't have to be certifiably paranoid about the US banking system to link the subprime crisis of 2008 with smart men in grey suits and preppy braces taking from the poor to give to the rich.

Capitalism enables the rich to get richer: the super-wealthy negotiate better deals than their less fortunate counterparts. They pay less to bank, to rent a car, to stay in smart hotels and they get the best of frequent flyer offers. They use their access to immediate money to drive down the prices of goods and services. They consume their competitors as they ascend the food chain. Shakespeare understood this dynamic. In *Pericles*, he puts forth a dialogue between two fishermen, in which the first says, "Master, I marvel how the fish live in the sea." To this, the other replies, "Why, as men do a-land. The great ones eat up the little ones."

The proceeds of unequal deal-making are as addictive as other forms of corruption. Those who control the route to market enjoy a massive advantage over the suppliers of raw materials. In the South African wine industry (and this model is largely true of most New World wine producing countries) some power resides with those who own processing capability, but wealth arises from owning (or at least controlling) the channel that leads to market.

Who holds the purse strings?

In South Africa there are just over 3,000 fruit growers and some 600 wineries, the majority of which process the fruit from their own vineyards. This means that there are probably no more than 300 buyers of grapes – in other words, one purchaser for every ten growers. There are certainly no more than 30 distributors – one for every ten commercial wineries. It's also a safe guess that no more than ten retailers (chains and multiples) account for 80% of all retail wine sales. You don't need a degree in competition law to work out that the segment with the least clout is the grower collective – the essential component in the whole value chain. They have no collective bargaining arrangements since they are disparate, under-represented and at the mercy of the owners of production facilities. Their crop has a very limited window of value: the fruit is at optimum ripeness for 24 hours – after which its value drops precipitately. They can only survive by entering into supply contracts, the bulk of which give the buyers vastly more leeway than the sellers. The capitalist system calls this willing-buyer-willing



seller, but this doesn't mean that the outcome this particular set of transactions delivers is the best possible result within the continuum which runs from the farmer to the consumer.

The processors are not much better off, although at least the fruit has a significantly extended shelf life once it has been converted into wine. If they are owners of popular brands, they have a route to market – though they must wrestle long and hard with the retailers to extract value for their stock. In short, in this food chain the retailers and the big brand owners dine best – and they are addicted to the 'subsidy' they have engineered into the system. The grape growers, on the other hand, are the bottom feeders – and they must make do with whatever crumbs fall from above, even if, in the end, this means that they will die out, bringing down with them the whole grand edifice. The average income that the system 'allows' the fruit producers is usually less than their true annual cost of production. Frighteningly few of them recover their farming overheads, as well as the replacement cost of their vineyards. It's no surprise that the agricultural side of the industry is shrinking – there are some 25% fewer growers now than 20 years ago.

Western Cape crisis

The attrition has been worst in the quality production areas, many of which are closer to the main centres of the Western Cape. This is partly because most of the arable vineyards

are now on slopes (the flatlands having been lost to urban creep), partly because of the higher farming costs that come with lower yields. By the same token, the most profitable vineyards are closest to ample water and plentiful sunshine: in other words, in flat, arid areas adjacent to irrigation water where the semi-desert conditions also bring the advantage of low disease risk. Vast swathes of vineyard have been laid out in a way that facilitates mechanical management strategies (and proportionately lower labour costs). High yields more than compensate for the lower fruit prices: £80 per tonne when you are bringing in 30 tonnes per hectare looks better on your bottom line than £300 per tonne and five tonnes per hectare, especially when the latter comes with labour intensive farming.



Those who believe that capitalism is self-regulating and yields the most efficient results will have a difficult time explaining what will ultimately happen to the quality end of the Western Cape wine industry. Growers in the premium areas won't be able to afford to replace their vineyards. They will have to live with the systematic invasion of incurable vineyard viruses. Over time, their yields and quality will drop: if they are lucky they will sell to developers before their banks foreclose on them. Either way, their land will be irretrievably lost to wine production. Such an outcome may meet the logic of optimising the land's current commercial value, but not perhaps realise the greatest good for the greatest number. This is a short-term gain for a long-term wasteland. It is the result not of the efficiencies of the system but of its skewing in favour of those who control the purchase price of grapes – rather than the final selling price of wine.

Small guys may be hung out to dry in the Cape's vineyards, some of which may join the 'at risk of extinction' list. Photos by Steven Morris.



What to do?

You could make these heritage vineyards viable by paying the growers at least £500 per tonne for their fruit. This would increase the wine cost component of the final product by less than 50p. Since premium grapes don't go into jug wine, this is unlikely to have any effect on retail sales. However, human nature being what it is, the gatekeepers retain as much of the margin as they can for themselves, adopting an 'after me the flood' approach to the consequences of their pricing policy. Many of the fruit buyers are not wealthy brand owners behaving like candidates seeking a lead role in Bonfire of the Vanities: they are younger, under-capitalised garagistes trying to make their way in the world. Nevertheless, lacking the route to market that comes with big brand distribution, they have higher-than-average costs in finding customers and getting their creations to them. No doubt they promise themselves that when their businesses have grown, they'll allocate more generous pay-outs to their grape growers.

This model is predicated on the continued supply of quality fruit from older vineyards. I don't wish to be alarmist but the attrition has been dramatic and shows no signs of letting up. South Africa is losing 1% of its vineyard area annually. Rather more importantly and worryingly, we are losing older, lower yielding vines in favour of more productive new plantings with lower quality potential. In the past ten years the net vineyard loss has been 5,000 hectares while the total amount produced has actually increased by about 5%. High volume industrial grape farming is replacing the more nuanced, lower yield, quality old vine production. It's easy to predict where this will end up.

Once a vineyard has been run into the ground, it is gone forever. An extra 25p per bottle for every year of the vineyard's life was probably all that was needed to save the land from townhouse development (or in the case of one of the most famous wines from the 1990s – a parking lot at a shopping centre). When all we have are vast tracts of vineyards laid out alongside the Orange River, there will be nothing left to remind us that we were once one of the world's great wine producing nations.

David Copp feasts on the sophisticated stickies from a quartet of Top Selection growers. All photos by Mick Rock of www.Cephas.com.

A top sweet selection

The Top Selection portfolio tasting held at London's Westbury Hotel on April 20th 2016 was a wonderful opportunity to taste the great late-harvest wines of Egon Müller, Alois Kracher, István Szepsy and the Lur-Saluces family. At a similar tasting 12 years ago only late harvest wines were shown, but today the wine world has moved on and these winemakers have recognised they will not survive without making dry wines as well.

Egon Müller: the incredible lightness of being

I started with Egon Müller, who was keen to show me the Riesling he produces in cooperation with Miroslav Petrech at Château Béla in Slovakia, just across the Danube from Esztergom in Hungary. It has the pleasant limey flavours and mineral crispness that we have come to expect of Müller's wines. His influence has also extended to Australia, where he is involved in a joint venture with Michael Andrewartha in the Adelaide Hills. Kanta 2009, a cool climate Australian Riesling reflects the relatively recent German preference for bone dry wines as distinct from the richer Clare Valley style now so popular.

The delicate, ethereal Scharzhofberg Kabinett is always a treat and prepared me well for the superb 2014 Spätlese. Egon Müller's wines remind me of the Czech novelist Milan Kundera's famous novel because I have mentally changed the title in my mind to *The Incredible Lightness of Being*. How does he get such a delightfully light touch and yet offer us a mouthful of flavour with such elegance and delicacy?

The Scharzhofberg vineyard (in which he has an interest) was almost certainly planted by the Romans, so the land has been well worked. It was probably even better

cared for under the monastics who tended it for 1,000 years before Egon Müller's antecedents acquired the steep south-facing section on weathered slate at 170-320 metres above sea level. It is truly a great pleasure to taste such definitive wines.

Kracher still a cracker

From Saar I moved on to Illmitz, the home of Alois Kracher on the east bank of the Neusiedler See, opposite Rust. Luis, as Alois was known before his untimely death at the age of 48 in 2007, claimed that of all the great European late-harvest wine regions, Neusiedler probably has the most consistent conditions for botrytis. "Eight out of ten vintages produce something worthwhile," he used to say.



This visionary winemaker achieved his ambition of making truly world-class Austrian late-harvest wines. Luis left the business in the capable hands of his son Gerhard who has developed his dry Pinot Gris and Welschriesling and a semi-sweet Muscat Ottonel. These are accomplished wines and really worth getting to know.

However, my real interest was in Kracher's late-harvest wines, which are made in two distinct styles: Zwischen den Seen (Lit. From between the lakes), which was fermented in tank to preserve freshness and fruit; and Nouvelle Vague, vinified in barrel to give the same kind of richness and opulence as the great sweet wines of Sauternes, Tokaj, Rhine and Mosel.

One of Kracher's greatest achievements has been the elevation of the rather prosaic Welschriesling to extraordinary heights of richness and delicacy in his late-harvest wines. Luis instituted a numbering system to indicate the degree of sweetness of his wines with No. 13 being something akin to the extremely sweet and nectar-like eszencia in

Left: Egon Müller's manor house below the Scharzhofberg vineyard in the Saar Valley. Below: vineyards close to one of the shallow lakes east of Neusiedler See.



Hungary. Kracher's Auslese, Beerenauslese and TBA (Troockenbeerenauslese) wines from Welschriesling, or its combination with Chardonnay, were all sensational.

2013 was generally a difficult vintage in Austria because the weather fluctuated so much, but the late burst of warmth and dampness that went on well into October helped to produce superb noble late-harvest wines. 2014 was a smaller vintage but produced well-structured, fine and elegant wines.

The star of the Kracher offerings was the 2004 Welschriesling TBA (241g/l RS, 6.8g/l acidity, 10% alcohol) with a deep golden colour, an intense honeyed bouquet, opulent stone fruit flavours and good length. Full of life and charm, it sells at around £30 for a half litre bottle and is well worth considering as a treat.

Szepsy the sublime

István Szepsy was born in the shadow of Tokaj Hill, alongside the River Bodrog and spent his childhood summers in his father's vineyard. "Even in the worst days of the communist period, my father was happy tending his vines and I learned to love them, as well as the hills, the wildlife, and the people of our part of Hungary," said Szepsy. "This is an extraordinary landscape recognised by UNESCO, not just for the wines we make. As my father passed on his love of the land to me, I hope to do likewise for my son and daughters."

His son István, who now often represents his father on these occasions, is an extremely competent guide to the family's range of wines, which are divided into the three different strands of dry, late harvest and aszú. The Estate Dry Furmint is a blend made from Szepsy's first-class vineyards, many of which – Király, Betsek, Szent Tamás – are in the Mád Basin. "We are keen to show those less familiar with Furmint what the variety has to offer," said István jnr. "But we are also keen to show what superb single vineyard sites we have."

I've been up in Uragya with István (where he made his first great dry wine for Királyudvar in 2000) and the soil is rough red clay. The volcanic nature of the soil is revealed in the heart of the wine which has superb structure and length.

Szepsy has some of the very finest middle parts of Szent Tamás, on the south-facing hill, where he probably makes some of his very finest dry wines. The 2007 and 2008 Szent Tamás both show just how stylish dry Furmint can be; they make me think of Burgundy. But they are NOT Burgundy. They are Tokaj wines made by István Szepsy, with their own distinctive character and perhaps a little more stone fruit.

Szepsy's second suit is lighter late-harvest wines, a field he pioneered with his 1999 Tokaji Cuvée. This was the first serious attempt to produce a clean, fruity, modern aperitif style wine and it was rapturously received, even if some traditionalists turned up their noses at it. Since then, Szepsy has espoused Szamorodni, picking botrytised and non-botrytised 'as they come' and vinifying them together and making a wonderful wine to be enjoyed at any time.

When I first went to Tokaj in the early 1990s, István was starting out on his own, and made Szamorodni to earn some income while waiting for the botrytis to come in the most favourable conditions.

Szepsy's great aszú wines are sublime and have been assessed by much better palates than mine. Why are they so good? Because he really knows and loves his terroir. As the manager of the Mád cooperative in the communist period, he got to know the sites that most consistently delivered the best botrytised grapes. After the Berlin Wall came down, he patiently acquired the plots he really wanted. Szepsy is a meticulous grower who is constantly among his vines, crop-thinning, rejecting anything less than perfect and always aiming to produce the phenolically ripe grapes which give his wines majesty, power and presence. His wines may appear expensive but I consider them superb value for money, if excellence is your mantra.

A spot of sumptuous Sauternes to finish

Going from Tokaj to Sauternes means going south into the warm and fertile corner of Aquitaine above Sauternes and Fargues, where there are conditions to produce truly superb late-harvest wines.

Château d'Yquem may be the best known but you will surely never be disappointed with good vintages of

Suduiraut, Rieussec, Fargues, Guiraud, de Rayne Vigneau and Lafaurie-Peyraguey, or Coutet, Climens and Doisy-Daëne from nearby Barsac. It is tragic that great Sauternes are not more widely appreciated.

Philippe de Lur-Saluces from Château de Fargues, a 15-hectare estate to the southeast of d'Yquem, chose to show two mature wines and two from younger vintages. The 1994 was not the greatest vintage, yet it produced a really interesting wine that's still as fresh as a daisy 22 years on. The 1996 was a more generous vintage showing off all the glories of Sauternes. I also enjoyed the accomplished 2003, which showed the same intensity and class as its former stablemate, the celebrated d'Yquem.

Great Sauternes are richer and perhaps fatter than their counterparts from Tokaj but it is pointless getting drawn into discussion about which is better. Indeed, I found plenty to admire in all the four different late-harvest regions tasted, and am delighted to confirm they all have their own wonderful characteristics. All the wines, sweet and dry, were superbly made. For those less familiar with the dry versions of Furmint, Hárslevelű and Welschriesling, Top Selection provided a marvellous opportunity to catch up, while it was a true feast for those who admire late-harvest wines.



Château de Fargues in Sauternes.

Paul Strang catches up with old winemaking friends who despite their very different wineries have so much in common he decides to introduce them to each other.

A tale of contrasts in the South West

My wife Jeanne and I had been invited to lunch at Château de Mercuès, perhaps the most prestigious of all Cahors addresses, after the French home of the Queen of Denmark. Our host was Anne-Catherine Vigouroux, the daughter of Georges and the doyen of the long-established Vigouroux wine family. We had known Anne for many years, ever since her family had made it clear that, as a mere woman, she was not to have a future in the Vigouroux wine business. Anne then set up her own business, Wine Trade 4, with the object of introducing French growers from all parts of the country to possible export markets, organising and participating in salons all over the world. She was last in London with a representative team of producers earlier this year.

Although excommunicated from the family business, Anne took an interest, encouraged by her father and brother, in the development of Château de Mercuès, which her father had bought at an auction in 1983. Georges' success, later

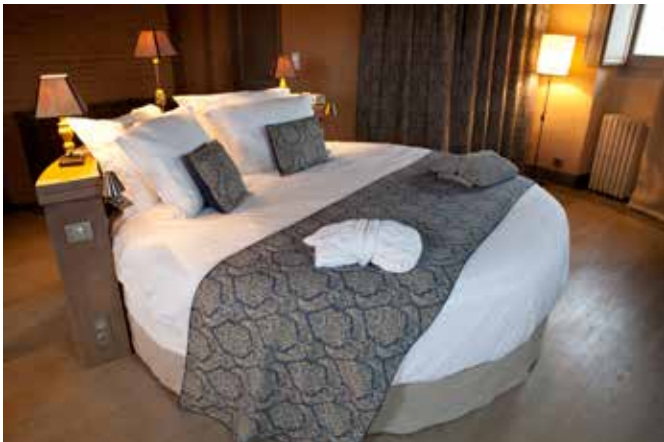
reinforced by his son Bertrand, enabled him to finance the transformation of a derelict, abandoned medieval castle into one of the most admired château-hotels in France. It was here that Anne met an American friend of ours, which in turn led to Anne becoming a good friend of ours, too. We have kept up with Anne ever since, visiting most of the shows she puts on in London. At a recent lunch with her in Paris she invited us to Mercuès, along with a family of Australian winemakers from the Hunter Valley.

Before lunch we were taken on a tour of the *cave* and the *chai*. The former was notable not only for its entirely subterranean architecture and vaulted ceiling, but also for the magnificent array of new oak barrels. No barrels are used twice and after the vintage they are sold on to port and sherry makers. No red wine is actually fermented in them, but is made in the adjoining *chai*, with its gleaming stainless steel. The underground situation means that the whole enterprise can be carried out without temperature control of the interior.

We were then offered a tasting of the three red wines: Le Vassal, pure Malbec, raised in tank, an attractive fruity entry-level wine, already drinkable after only two years in bottle; Le Grand Vin from 2013, with 18% Merlot added to the statutory Malbec, assembled and aged one year in barrel; and Le Prestige, an all Malbec affair from 2014 and surprisingly forward. In fact, the softness of the tannins was one of the surprises of the occasion: another was the scarcely evident *élevage* in wood.

I was not surprised to learn later that Bertrand, who now runs the Vigouroux business, is a frequent visitor to Mendoza. His interest in Argentinian Malbec is about to be reinforced by a partnership with the Californian wine consultant, Paul Hobbs, who, through his Argentinian interests has been an important force in popularising the Malbec grape in the US. It seems the popular myth that Argentinian and Cahors Malbec can always be distinguished from one another is about to be exploded, if it hasn't been already. Indeed, there are certainly growers in Cahors who are trying to achieve a more South American style, getting away from the old-fashioned idea of black wines, however much the authorities persist in promoting 'black'. To my mind, it is questionable whether Cahors will retain any typicity if it emulates Argentina in style.

No expense spared for the hotel rooms and the barrel cellar at Château de Mercuès, who supplied the photos.



There are three dining areas in the château; an outside summer courtyard, the deluxe restaurant only open in the evenings, and a so-called 'bistro' restaurant, where 11 of us sat down to lunch. Mercuès produces a small amount of IGP white wine from Chenin Blanc. One version is dry and unoaked, the other slightly sweet *moëlleux*, fermented and aged in barrel. We were poured the first as an aperitif and the second to accompany the foie gras. As partner to the lightly poached chicken with vegetables, the unoaked Le Vassal was thought the more appropriate. After lunch, there was a tour of the château, immensely luxurious in its appointment throughout.

Peyres Roses: bijou and biodynamic

In return for her hospitality I offered Anne to come to our part of France and to be introduced to some of our Gaillac winemaking friends. Anne confessed that Gaillac was an area she knew little about. Also, because of her professional interest in small, artisanal growers, I was particularly keen

Astrid Bonnafont-Serres and her son Charles in their vineyard at Domaine Peyres Roses. Photos by David Lochner.



for her to meet Astrid Bonnafont-Serres and her son Charles, who make the wine at Domaine Peyres Roses, where we had been invited to their *portes ouvertes* only 48 hours later.

The contrast could not have been greater. Astrid has barely eight hectares of vines compared with the 200 or so which the Vigouroux own or control at Cahors. A similar area is given over to growing plants and trees (including some truffle-oaks) expressly to encourage the widest possible diversity of flora and fauna, for she and Charles are passionate biodynamic growers. Here there is no château, just an ordinary country farmhouse; no serried ranks of new barrels, just a few used barriques to hold the limited range of wines to which they give wood-ageing; no architect-designed cave to store the wine in, just a couple of barn-like buildings.

Astrid came with her mother from Belgium to Normandy where they made cider and calvados, so the shift to winemaking was not hard. Her marriage to Olivier has broken up but it was he who initially made the wines when

they moved to Gaillac in 2001. Olivier also inspired Astrid and all four of her sons to become devoted to the making of natural wines. Charles is just 21 and still in college, and his younger brother Antoine may well join him in the winemaking when he is a little older. Meanwhile, they have recovered from a disastrous year in 2013 when they lost most of their crop to hail and are today making some of the most admired wines in Gaillac. For their whites, they have the local Mauzac and Len de l'EI, and a little Muscadelle. The range starts with an unoaked and very thirst-quenching blend called Antidote, good enough to grace the tables of Club Gascon in London;

followed by a barrel-aged version of the same wine called Cuvée Armand, named after one of Charles' older brothers.

There is a small range of sweeter whites of astonishing quality, ranging from *moëlleux* to an almost *vendanges tardives* style. The reds are from Braucol and Duras, with a little Merlot and Syrah: the first is a complement to Antidote and is called Impeccable, and for an entry-level wine it is mouth-wateringly good; A Capella follows and comes from the older vines on the property going back 35 years. Then there is Cuvée Charles, which is given a gentle *élevage* in the old barrels. For Charles, organic winemaking is not a step backwards in winemaking technique, but a leap into a future in which he does not hesitate to experiment, by the acquisition for example of the newly-fashionable egg-shaped giant amphorae. He is trying out a more or less pure Braucol wine in this vessel and I had the privilege of tasting this from the egg, as it were, and it promises to be an exciting addition to the range of wines at Peyres Roses.

Astrid is happy to leave the winemaking to her sons while she looks after the business side. They are all helped at busy times in the calendar by Astrid's mother who comes to stay for extended periods of time. To help the promotion, Astrid celebrates Whitsun by holding tastings and lunches on three successive days, at which 60 or more guests participate in a joyous celebration of the family's achievements; not in any formal dining room but *al fresco* in the heart of the vineyards. For those who have the energy and the stamina, these events are followed by a tour of the vineyards conducted by Charles who explains at length the theory and practice of biodynamic vine-growing. Astrid also organizes 'apero-concerts' every Wednesday during July and August when local groups play and sing jazz and the guests enjoy the wines as the sun sets.

The contrast between Mercuès and Peyres Roses is not just between the opulence of the one compared with the relative modesty of the other, but between the prestige of an internationally successful and respected commercial enterprise on the one hand and the evangelical enthusiasm of confident youth on the other. The wine world is fortunate to have exponents of both philosophies.

Linda Johnson-Bell, CEO and founder of The Wine and Climate Change Institute (TWACCI), on why wine and climate change may not end at all badly. Part of this article was originally published in Sotheby's Magazine and Belmond Magazine. Photos by **Mick Rock** of www.cephas.com

Game-changer for wine

I am standing in the shade of an olive tree that still clings to its sweetly pungent, oozing fruit. Sweating harvest workers frantically race up and down the sloping hill before me. I am in the scorching heat of Emilia-Romagna, Italy's famed 'fertile crescent' – its food basket. But the land beneath the vines is compacted and dry. Dust devils swirl between the gnarled roots. I am in the way and feel helpless. There is much shouting. The owner looks tense. The grapes need harvesting. *Subito*. But he has a dilemma. If they cannot get the grapes in fast enough, by hand, before the vines shut down from the heat, or the grapes burn, they will have to machine-harvest. He is against this. It bruises the grapes, and in this heat they would oxidise in a very short time. Still, better to machine-harvest than to let them die on the vine. But then... harvesters are in short supply this week – he is not alone...

What does climate change have to do with wine? Everything. Wine is made from grapes and grapes are a fruit – and more than that. They are the crop most susceptible to climate variations. They can anticipate Mother Nature's every mood. In fact, climatologists adore the wine industry. What other farmers have painstakingly recorded every single climatic detail? What fodder. The planet is warming, and we can taste it. For example, Bordeaux's alcohol content has been creeping higher and higher for years now, due both to a desire to emulate the high-alcoholic (heat-induced) Napa wines so beloved by the American wine critics, and to having fallen victim to Mother Nature's unwittingly ironic plan to do it for them.

The New World wine regions of California, Australia, New Zealand and South America have already been experiencing problems for much longer. These countries do not have indigenous grape varieties. The wine grape, the *Vitis vinifera* species, was brought to them via the Europeans. Purists are perfectly entitled to argue that trying to grow fruit in a non-indigenous climate was going to end in tears. There is only so far we can manipulate a growing environment. It's not because Chardonnay can be grown everywhere, that it should be. Now, as the Cabernet-coloured heart of our fine wine regions in Europe is finally hit, the issue has become mainstream and is no longer the preserve of the eccentric or scholarly few. France alone has suffered a loss of billions of euros. The world is finally paying attention.

Variable weather is good, extremes are bad. The challenge to work with or overcome Mother Nature is the 'point' of the entire viticultural exercise. A great winemaker is one who can navigate the vagaries. The New World wine regions were pooh-poohed for being lazy. Wine growing in a constantly sunny climate is considered easy work – too easy – and the wines reflect that. But it's not just heat causing the problems. What seems to be happening is that there are more extreme cycles of weather within the larger cycle of an overall warming: weather and climate are not the same things. Record cold winters are followed by record droughts, and fire seasons give way to extreme rainfall and flooding – even in one region, and during one growing season. Harvest variations used to be the guarantee of wines with character and personality, but too much variation means too much

unpredictability and ruined crops. How much more variation can winemakers tolerate?

The world's fine wines come from 'cool-climate' regions: Mosel, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Piedmont. A cooler climate allows the fruit a longer 'hang-time', a longer growing season. This produces fruit with greater elegance and the structure essential for ageing. The hotter a growing season, the shorter it is. The heat increases the sugar content of the fruit. And the higher the level of sugar at fermentation, the higher the level of alcohol of the resulting wine. High levels of alcohol make a wine unbalanced and erase all of the grape's varietal character and compromises its ageing ability. Ever wonder why so many big red wines taste the same? It's the heat. Anything above 14% alcohol and it becomes difficult to taste the grape variety – much less its terroir.

Why we should care about climate change and wine? Because it is climate that determines whether a wine is a great wine or just a good wine. And the goalposts are



Weather watch: a computerised weather station with rain gauge at Château Lafite-Rothschild.

changing. Also, in the same way that our food crops are affected by provenance, quality, price, and scarcity, so are our wines. We will have erratic wine supplies. Production costs for wine producers will skyrocket and so, too, will prices. Our favourite wines are tasting different. Some of our regions will change wine grapes and wine styles, or cease wine production. European appellation laws will fall by the wayside as Chianti and Brunello di Montalcino may be made from 'warmer' grapes such as Nero d'Avola and not Sangiovese. Sancerre may not be Sauvignon Blanc anymore. And Bordeaux is already replacing its increasingly unviable Merlot plantings with more Petit Verdot and using Carmenère. How we drink, buy, store and invest in wine is changing. And that's OK.

Pushing the boundaries

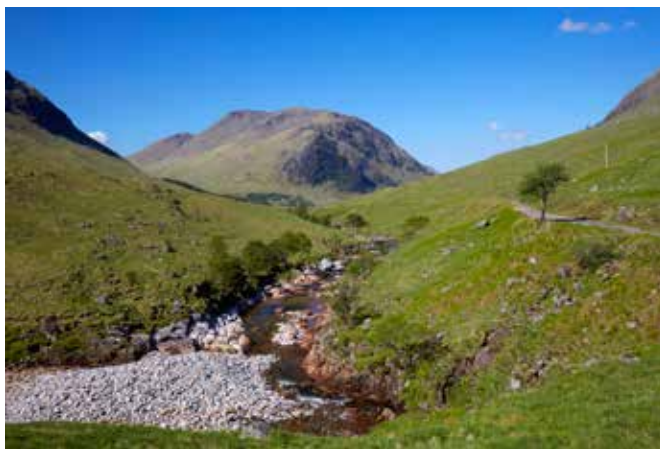
This is where it starts to get interesting. It is not all doom and gloom. To the contrary. As winemakers are on the frontline battling these changes, they are becoming the global pioneers in eco-inventiveness. Their dedicated and creative efforts in mitigating and adapting to climate change are contributing to the worldwide knowledge-bank. And even more importantly, it means that we are going to see more wines from newer regions. We will see wine grown

in Brittany and Normandy. Sweden is now planting Pinot Noir, and Scotsman Christopher Trotter has just harvested his first vintage in Fife.

These changes are exciting. Cool-climate hunting is the new wine sport. Who knows where our next 'Chablis' region will be – Yorkshire perhaps? Exploring and experimenting in new regions will take a while. As adaptable as they are, growing grapes is not like the fashion industry. Trends cannot be accommodated for from season to season. Grapevines have life spans that reach into their 50s, 60s, and 70s, all the while producing better fruit. Wine producers are having a difficult time navigating their way through such a quickly changing landscape with a product that has a built-in timeline dictated by nature.

Investors, too, are in for an interesting time. They need to know where to buy in the future and how to revalue their current stock. As the classic wine-investment regions continue to produce wines with 15% alcohol and higher, these wines will not have the ageing potential they once had. So the tenet upon which their investment is based, no longer holds. Should investors start following cooler climate regions and buy wines that may turn out to be our future classics? Should they try to buy as much of our much older vintages as possible? The game is changing.

Possible new locations for future vineyards? A cabbage patch in Brittany, France, or the hillsides of Argyllshire, Scotland.



The dawn of a new era

The future? The answers will be different for each wine region: some will be forced to cease viticulture, others will adapt and improve and yet more will emerge. The wines from the classic regions, the fine wines, are the ones most affected. Bulk, commercial wines that rely upon technology rather than nature, will continue to do so.

We will not see a shortage of wine, just a shortage of fine wine as we wait to see what the newer regions produce for us – very exciting. Another silver lining is that during this reshuffling period, there will be more regions making wine than ever before. The regions that are benefitting from warmer temperatures will be producing more of their own wine and more reliably, along with those regions that will commence viticulture entirely. More countries than ever before will have their own production. This then might lead to a reduced demand for wine imports. And considering that wine's biggest cost to the environment, after water, is transport, this is good news.

This is a pivotal era for the wine industry. The wines of the southern hemisphere will at first do better due to their coastal influence. They will move south, closer to the pole, until they run out of space – something the northern hemisphere has more of, which means that the north will ultimately be home to the majority of the world's wine production. Those regions in northern Europe will be the first to find our next classic terroirs. The Old World will hang on for as long as it can with its current grape varieties, trading on their established appellation 'brands' until, with forced irrigation and heat, they become New World versions of their old selves. Full-scale replanting programmes will eventually be embraced, exploring first the forgotten indigenous grape varieties and then adopting others from other warmer regions. Many have already begun, others are adopting a 'wait and see' policy. But again, as the old regions lose production capacity, the newer regions will gain in production and balance will be restored.

There will be wines that we will miss, and wines that we will welcome. Just like with good friends. So, let's drink to that...

The United Kingdom hosted the ninth International Cool Climate Wine Symposium in May. **Wink Lorch** attended the three-day conference in Brighton and shares some highlights. Photos by Julia Caxton, courtesy of the symposium organisers.

England sparkles for an international crowd

The buzz and the pride were palpable at this stellar event held in Brighton, both among the English wine producers present and the experienced British wine trade delegates. That the United Kingdom had reached the stage of being considered worthy as a wine producing nation to host an international conference, aimed primarily at wine producers, really felt like something special. Many of those who had attended other such conferences said that this one was organised with supreme efficiency, which helped that buzz to continue throughout the symposium. The main events were held at one of Brighton's many seafront



The venue was the Hilton Hotel Metropole on Brighton's famous seafront.

conference hotels, and the gorgeous weather (evidently a surprise for some foreign delegates) enticed many to sneak out for strolls along the promenade.

It was the late Mike Roberts OBE of Ridgeview Wine Estate, together with Chris Foss of Plumpton College and consultant Justin Howard-Sneyd MW, who originally presented and successfully won the bid for the UK to host the 9th edition of the International Cool Climate Wine Symposium (ICCWS). From the close of the previous symposium held in 2012 in Hobart, Tasmania, to the opening party held at Brighton's museum in the town's famous pavilion, a huge team of people were involved in raising finance and support from all directions, creating the programme, organising logistics and promoting the event. Among them were several Circle members including Steve Charters, Jamie Goode, Stephen Skelton MW and José Vouillamoz, all of whom were speakers or members on panels, along with Richard Bampfield MW. Featured speakers included CWW members Jancis Robinson MW, Oz Clarke and Jamie Goode. English Wine Producers, as an organisation, was heavily involved and the chairman of the event was Bruce Tindale of High Clandon Estate Vineyard. Several CWW members, in addition to myself, attended part or all of the symposium. In total there were nearly 600 delegates from 30 countries, including (probably in order of importance) producers, academics, students, trade or associated businesses and communicators.



Opening keynote speech by Jancis Robinson MW.

The programme was aimed squarely at wine producers and included a mixture of technical and business presentations, seminars and debates. Some themes were of particular interest to those making wines in cool climates; others were of more general interest to anyone working in the field of wine. Not surprisingly, a number of presentations touched on the challenges of climate change; on the other hand, I was surprised that so little attention was given to environmental issues, such as organic production techniques.

Two major tutored tastings of English wines were scheduled and a few other seminars included some wines for tasting. However, most tasting was done between sessions, provided by winery and regional sponsors, including several English (mainly sparkling) wine producers plus Wines of Austria, Wines of Canada and Laithwaite's.

Thanks to excellent WiFi coverage, the audience was able to use a really simple application, www.sli.do.com,

during the seminars to give instant feedback through polls or questions to the speaker panels. It was one of the best uses of technology I've ever experienced at a conference.

Jancis takes a dig

Before Jancis Robinson's keynote speech, proceedings were opened by Bruce Tindale who introduced George Eustice, British Minister of State for Farming, Food and the Marine Environment, part of DEFRA (the department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). Mr Eustice paid tribute to the progress of English wines, especially sparkling, but he would have been unprepared for the major dig levelled at him and his department by Jancis.

Jancis first praised the organisers of the event and the progress of English wines that has been helped by the high quality training offered by Plumpton College. But, she then took advantage of the presence of the most senior governmental representative for vineyards, saying:

"One shameful development, however, is that Plumpton's WineSkills Programme has had to be abandoned because DEFRA, the relevant government department, has rescinded its funding of it – at the very time when the English wine industry has reached new heights of accomplishment and fame." Chris Foss has since confirmed that Plumpton will revive the WineSkills programme anyway. Nevertheless, Jancis was not finished.

"There is another area in which our government, through DEFRA, is sorely lacking in its support for something of which Britain can now be thoroughly proud... For some mysterious reason, DEFRA has failed to renew its membership of the OIV, the world's massively important International Organisation of Vine and Wine (cost of membership is just a modest five-figure sum). Holland, Belgium, Sweden, India and Azerbaijan are all members. Why not the UK? This means that Plumpton can't participate in international research projects, leaving it marginalised from the world of wine academe. And it also means that the British, and English wine producers in particular, have no voice whatsoever in international wine negotiations and regulation." There has been no progress on this since.

Jancis' full speech can be read on her site at <http://goo.gl/HDaRwc>.

Viticultural and oenological themes

The first day's theme, Facing a Challenging Climate, began with a presentation on emerging cool climate regions by Professor Hans Reiner Schultz, from Geisenheim University in Germany, together with Professor Greg Jones of South Oregon University. Using extensive data, they demonstrated the pushing of the boundaries – latitude-wise – of the limits of viticulture, due they said to an average one-degree warming worldwide over the past century. Throwing out the traditional 50° northern limit, today's most northerly vineyards are in Aalborg in Denmark and in Gothenburg in Sweden, both at around 57 degrees north. The most southerly is in Sarmiento in Argentina's Patagonia at a latitude of around 46 degrees south. The speakers warned that the biggest challenges in these areas were the risks of temperatures dropping to below -20°C, and they said the need to select cold-resistant vines was essential.

A breakout session on new varieties for cool climate regions shared the latest developments on vine-breeding, mainly for reasons of sustainability and disease resistance. This was one of a few sessions that did address reduction in the use of chemicals. However, the wines tasted were distinctly less exciting for wine lovers than those made from ancient varieties presented by José Vouillamoz,

putting forward the alternative view that reviving existing, extremely rare varieties might provide a better solution for cool climates.

In a more controversial talk titled Optimizing Cool-Climate Wine Styles, the president of the OIV, Dr Monika Christmann, of Germany's Geisenheim University, discussed the new options winemakers face in today's changing climate. She asserted that, even in cool climates, the challenge today is finding techniques for alcohol reduction or acidification rather than for must concentration. In discussing new winery technologies that the OIV is considering for approval, Dr Christmann told the audience that consumers either had to accept these new technologies or they must get used to new wine styles. It was an obvious dig at the natural wine world and caused quite some intake of breath around the room. She warned that reduction in the use of SO₂ was "very dangerous".

Many other detailed technical presentations were made and several are reported on by Julia Harding MW in the Purple Pages members section of www.jancisrobinson.com.

Continued overleaf



Left: Professor Greg Jones from Oregon demonstrating the changing map of worldwide viticulture. Below: Dr Monika Christmann of Geisenheim University makes her point.



Clockwise: sparkling wines stole the show; a large number of volunteers helped with pouring; Sam Lindo of Camel Valley and chairman of the UK Vineyards Association speaks about his wine in Oz's tasting; questionnaires for the sensory perception seminar and rapt attention...



Business themes

More controversy through lively debate occurred in a session on the challenges involved, especially for emerging regions, in developing strong regional identities, whether through regional promotional bodies or appellation systems. Mark Driver of Rathfinny Wine Estate presented a case study of his application for a Sussex PDO (aside: where will this stand in our post-Brexit world?). Many in the room argued that a Sussex PDO would simply confuse the marketing message of English wines as a whole – Steve Charters said that England needed to concentrate on identity, promotion and branding rather than creating a PDO.



The tastings and sensorial perceptions

The tasting of 12 sparkling wines, led by Essi Avellan MW, impressed the audience, who at the end were asked to use sli.do to vote on their preferred three. The winners were Nyetimber Classic Cuvée 2010 in first place, followed by Wiston Rosé 2011 and Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs 2010. Less conclusive was a similar poll at the end of the tasting of ten still English wines with Oz Clarke. However, the tasting included many positive comments on the future of the Bacchus grape for England's signature white, and of the increasingly high quality of still Pinot Noir as shown by examples from Bolney and Gusbourne. Oz delivered a cracking presentation, inviting the winemakers in the room to comment on their own wines, though none could match his own description of the best wines as having "the sappy, bright-eyed optimism of an early summer hedgerow".

In Jamie Goode's closing speech, he did not hold back in encouraging the British wine industry to: "Stick to sparkling wines... The UK can make good still wines, but it can make world class sparkling." His full speech can be read at: <http://wineanorak.com/ICCWSclosingremarks.htm>.

One of the most intriguing sessions of the three days was on wine sensory evaluation in which the keynote speaker, Professor Charles Spence of Oxford University, related various studies that showed different lighting and music are proven to change the perceived taste of wines. In a simple experiment with the audience, he showed that the quality of bubbles in sparkling wines sound different – from audio clips, we were surprised to be able to identify easily whether sparkling water, Prosecco or Champagne was being poured. Delegates have recently received the results of a more complicated study with the audience about the effects of playing music on perceptions of a wine's

taste and quality. We were played various soundtracks while tasting wines and completed a questionnaire about the wines. From 154 participants, 142 of which were wine professionals, the study concluded: "We see that fairly experienced wine tasters, regardless of their years of wine tasting experience, are also influenced by music when it comes to wine evaluation."

Canada for 2020

The symposium will move to Canada for the 10th edition to be held in July 2020 at Ontario's Brock University, which is home to the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI). The Canadian bid headed off other pitches from Chile, New Zealand and Australia. As the location of the sunny English Channel is swapped for the might of Niagara Falls, the Canadian organisational team have a tough act to follow.

News briefs...

Deaths

This year has continued to be a sad one for the deaths of prominent winemakers. In France, within a few days of each other, we said goodbye to three producers. Elsewhere in Europe, Jerez lamented an early death for Lustau's winemaker, and a pioneer of Sicilian winemaking passed away. In the UK, we marked the passing of Sir Brian McGrath MW.

Charles Rousseau of Gevrey-Chambertin, Burgundy, died on 12th May, aged 93. He started working with his father, Armand, in 1954 and took over after his father's untimely death in a car crash in 1959. He expanded the wine estate from 6ha to today's 14ha acquiring a string of Grand Cru vineyards. As a fluent speaker of English and German, he launched into export markets earlier than many other estates. Today Domaine Rousseau is run by Charles' son Eric with his own daughter, Cyrielle (not Corinne as

written on Decanter.com). Speaking to Decanter.com, CWW member Gérard Basset MW said: "A legend has died today but his wines are always there to make us dream."

During the night of 14th May, **Aimé Guibert** of Mas de Daumas Gassac in the Languedoc died, aged 91. Well-known to many of us who attended tastings in London in the 1990s, he was a pioneer of fine winemaking in the Languedoc, creating his estate from nothing. His early releases of the Mas de Daumas red wine were compared by the French press to Château Lafite-Rothschild, something that Guibert, an inveterate sales and marketing man, seized upon with glee. With his wines well known also in the US, he caught the interest of the Mondavis, but fell out with Robert and Michael Mondavi when they made an offer to buy the estate. He was later one of the stars of Nossiter's film *Mondovino*. The estate remains in the hands of the Guibert family. For more, read Wink's obituary on Wine-Searcher at <http://goo.gl/aBgi7v>.

The *chef de cave* of Champagne Gosset, **Jean-Pierre Mareignier**, died on 17th May, aged 60, after a short illness. He had been Gosset's cellar master for 33 years, and his father had worked there as vineyard manager, so he was considered almost one of the family. Decanter's obituary can be read at <http://goo.gl/Xx1uzF>.

Manuel Lozano, the much-decorated head winemaker at Bodegas Lustau, passed away at the age of 61 on 26th April due to complications related to a medical procedure. He had served as Lustau's head winemaker since 1999 and was not only responsible for the vineyards and sherry production, but also for Lustau's brandies. During his tenure, among many other awards received by Lustau, in 2015 Manuel won the IWC's Best Fortified Winemaker title for a record seventh consecutive year. Born into the world of gastronomy to restaurateur parents in Jerez, he developed a love of wine and especially sherry at an early age, studied viticulture and oenology and worked at several sherry bodegas before joining Lustau.

Pioneering Sicilian winemaker and founder of the Donnafugata Winery, **Giacomo Rallo**, died suddenly on 10th May at the age of 79. He founded Donnafugata in 1983 together with his wife, Gabriella Anca, and was a key figure in the modern Sicilian wine movement that saw quality greatly enhanced and the rise of the Nero d'Avola grape variety, in particular. He was born in Marsala and graduated with a degree in law but later switched career paths to join the family wine business. Today the winery is run by his wife, together with his son Antonio and daughter, Josè.

The Institute of Masters of Wine lost an early member

with the death, aged 90, of **Sir Brian McGrath MW**, not only a stalwart of the UK trade having been a director of Grants of St. James's and of Allied Breweries, but also a courtier, working as private secretary to the Duke of Edinburgh for many years. He was the father of Patrick McGrath MW, managing director of Hatch Mansfield, and the two were the only father and son pair of Masters of Wine. For anyone interested in the workings of courtiers in Britain, read his interesting obituary in *The Telegraph* at <http://goo.gl/edE2uB>.



Far left: Charles Rousseau with his daughter Corinne and son Eric; Aimé Guibert - photos by Mick Rock. Left: Giacomo Rallo, photo by Siffert. Below: Manuel Lozano, photo courtesy Lustau.



Europe's vintage prospects

French vineyards suffer with the weather: As we write, there's a heatwave in France, which one only hopes is holding back the advance of some of the downy mildew that has been plaguing the cooler vineyard areas of France. However, that heat means an increased risk of attacks of oïdium or powdery mildew. It's been a very difficult growing season so far for most wine regions in France with some reporting up to the equivalent of six months of rain in June alone and reports of coulure (berry shot) in many areas.

Winter was mild on the whole and an early spring meant early budding, building the fears of spring frost. These fears were not unfounded and an extremely cold spell hit between 25th and 27th April, causing severe frost damage, most particularly in the Loire Valley (worst hit was Touraine); in Champagne from the Côte des Blancs southwards; and across Burgundy from Chablis down to the Mâconnais – its severity was likened to that of the 1991 frosts.

If this wasn't enough there had already been a hail storm in mid-April in the Mâconnais and then Chablis was hit badly in mid-May. At the end of the month it was the turn of the beleaguered Beaujolais region to be hit by hail, and both Cognac and Madiran were struck too. French press reports indicate that only 15% of France's vineyards are covered by insurance for loss following hail or frost damage.

Expect low yields everywhere – in Chablis, Touraine and the Mâconnais, at least 50% below average – with a risk of price rises for areas that can get away with them.

Mixed fortunes in Austria and Hungary: The night of 25th April, followed by further sub-zero nights, saw dreaded late frost wreak havoc on fledgling vine buds in many vineyards across the Central European region. A statement from Austrian Wine reported: "Along with radiating frosts due to clear nights and the development of cold air masses, there were multiple examples of frost damage from frigid airflows, whereby in many regions higher-situated and qualitatively superior vineyards were severely damaged."

However, Austrian Wine told *Circle Update* in July that the damage is not as bad as was initially feared. "Vienna

shows little damage, in Niederösterreich (with losses earlier estimated between 15% and 60% depending on the sub-region) an average harvest could be possible, with Grüner Veltliner developing better than expected," it said. Meanwhile, Burgenland is expecting a smaller harvest than usual but nothing like the original 50%-70% losses predicted in the early days following the frost. However, the outlook is less rosy in Steiermark. Around 80% of Styrian vintners are expected to produce up to 30% of their average output.

Neighbouring Hungary also reported alarming levels of frost damage, but like Austria the situation does not appear quite as grave as the original prognosis. Many winemakers have spoken of strong secondary growth. Robert Gilvesy, owner of the Gilvesy Winery in the region of Badacsony, on the northern shores of Lake Balaton told *Update* in July that two lower lying plots had what looked like drastic damage. "We earlier thought these areas had 80-90% loss. However, the fine weather and resilience of the vines shows now maybe a 20-30% loss," he said.

On 13th July, the smallest Hungarian region of Somló was hit by a severe hail storm that saw golf ball-sized hailstones beat down on the fledging grapes, devastating this year's crop and even causing damage to the vines. There are also reports of fungal diseases in many parts of Hungary with heavy rain and hot temperatures providing ideal conditions for downy and powdery mildew to develop.

The 2016 Southern Hemisphere vintage

CWW member Amanda Barnes reported on Decanter.com that the effects of El Niño led to the worst loss of grapes pre-harvest in **Argentina** since 1957, with production expected to be down by 27% compared to 2015. Nevertheless, winemakers were sanguine regarding the vintage's lower alcohol and freshness of the wines. Amanda's full report can be found at <http://goo.gl/RrQHhZQ>.

El Niño also caused widespread problems in **Chile** where there was a lot of rain at harvest with yields down by 25%, compared to 2015. Eduardo Alemparte, director

of viticulture at Santa Rita Estates, told the *The Drinks Business* that 2016 was "one of the most oenologically challenging vintages in recent times". He said that El Niño greatly influenced the vintage, causing serious delays in grape development. To make matters worse, heavy rain fell on Casablanca, Colchagua Valley, Maipo and in the key red-grape picking period of 14th to 17th April.

In **South Africa**, a challenging and very hot growing season resulted in a total wine grape crop expected to be 6.7% smaller than in 2015, while the grapes were healthy with concentrated flavours and promise good wines, according to VinPro, the representative organisation for close to 3,500 South African wine producers and cellars. "The weather was very warm, especially from the end of October towards the end of January, which restricted the growth and constituted lower bunch masses and smaller berries. However, the dry conditions led to the vineyards and grapes being very healthy overall," said VinPro.

New Zealand Winegrowers reported a good-sized harvest of high quality fruit, which should reduce supply fears. "This year's vintage of 436,000 tonnes of grapes will be a welcome boost for markets, growers and wineries," said New Zealand Winegrowers CEO, Philip Gregan, in a press release. The 2016 harvest marks a 34% increase on the small 2015 crop for New Zealand, but still comes in short of the record-breaking 2014 vintage. "The 2016 Vintage will definitely keep us on track to achieve our goal of \$2 billion of wine exports by 2020," said Gregan.

The Hunter Valley suffered from very heavy rains in January, but apart from this **Australia** also appears to have had a good vintage. Overall, most regions are believed to have harvested early from very good to outstanding fruit, albeit from a hot, compressed growing season. Australian winemaker, Sue Bell, quoted by Max Allen in an article for Jancis Robinson's Purple Pages, said the vintage was not just an early vintage but that the grape varieties came in "arse-about-face", causing considerable logistical problems. "I picked Cabernet Sauvignon in Padthaway the same day as I was having Nero d'Avola picked for rosé in the Riverland 400km to the north," she told Max.



Left: The new landmark in Bordeaux, the Cité du Vin (who supplied the photo) has finally opened.

will be staged in Marseille, from 30th January-1st February. Since visitors seem to attend more of the so-called 'off' tastings outside the main shows than the real things, this will only serve to dilute numbers still further.

Meanwhile, seeking to emulate the success of Vinisud, VinoVision is a new trade show for northern French wine regions to be staged for the first time in Paris from 12th-14th February 2017, just one week after the annual Salon des Vins de Loire in Angers. VinoVision has been created by l'Association des Vignobles Septentrionaux (the association of northern vineyard regions) which groups together the promotional organisations of the Loire, Burgundy, Champagne and latterly Alsace. At the show they will also be joined by Beaujolais, Jura, Savoie and Bugey. The fair's website is at www.vinovisionparis.com.

A ten-fold increase in point scoring: Just when you thought that 100 points was the upper limit for wine evaluation and was already a stretch, along comes Wine-Lister with a new 1,000-point system! Launched in May by Ella Lister, a former investment banker, www.wine-lister.com takes multiple factors into account when evaluating a wine. So rather than only the quality being assessed, based on scores from leading critics, other factors come into play. The economics behind the wine is also evaluated, such as its liquidity and price metrics. Further, the brand power of the wine vis-à-vis its global presence, popularity with the public and the trade is taken into account.

The Wine-Lister team includes CWW's very own webmaster Simon Woolf, who combines his wine and IT skills in his role as data architect consultant.

Does any member wish to volunteer to test out the site and write a feature on it for the next issue of *Update*? The site offers a 14-day free trial.

Implications of the UK's Brexit vote: With the dust a very long way away from settling regarding Brexit and the pound still rock bottom, it is still too early to assess what impact the vote and its aftermath will have on the British wine scene.

While the UK will likely lose full access to the single market, potentially raising the price of imports from EU countries, Australia has already proposed free trade with the UK.

It is possible that English and Welsh wine could become more competitive in the UK. The English Wine Producers organisation issued this statement: "We face a new chapter in our nation's history and undoubtedly with that will come changes and opportunities. The UK wine industry remains excited and optimistic about its future..."

The Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) has said it is looking forward to working with newly-elected Conservative prime minister Theresa May and her new cabinet. "The WSTA has a track record of working closely with government and we are confident that Mrs May and her team will want to build on this and to continue to fly the flag for the UK's fantastic wine and spirits industry," said Miles Beale, chief executive of the WSTA. Beale also said that Brexit secretary David Davis' initial views have been encouraging. The WSTA hopes for a progressive budget from the new Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond – one that will encourage trade and lead to growth and jobs.

Circle member Suzanne Mustacich has written a detailed article for *Wine Spectator* exploring not only the downsides of Brexit but also various opportunities it potentially serves up, quoting important industry players. She reports that there is little in the way of fear in Bordeaux that the UK will become isolated due to Brexit. "If anything, cool heads prevail in Bordeaux, perhaps because the roots of trade between the English and Bordelais extend back to Eleanor of Aquitaine. They've weathered the Napoleonic wars, trade wars, World Wars and economic crashes," she writes.

In Suzanne's article, Gary Boom, managing director of London-based wine merchant BI (formerly known as Bordeaux Index), sees a great opportunity in the UK establishing a tariff-free setup with China, which would see UK merchants clean up – EU members currently face a 30% wine tariff into China. BI has already made a killing of sales of first growths due to the drop in the pound – one million pounds were traded on the morning of the result. Suzanne's article can be read at <http://goo.gl/djW4wD>.

Other select news

The long awaited opening of Bordeaux's Cité du Vin:

As the hail lashed some regions, France was in the grip of national strikes and demonstrations were being held in Bordeaux against pesticide use in vineyards, the Cité du Vin was officially opened by French president François Hollande on 31st May. All eyes were on the politician as he joined the Bordeaux mayor, Alain Juppé, a former prime minister of France, who just happens also to be a future presidential hopeful. The cultural centre for wine, which cost a mere €80m to build, is seen very much as Juppé's baby. Jane Anson previewed the centre in May for *Decanter.com* (<http://goo.gl/9PxiwO>). In tune with a topic being much researched right now, that of sensory perception and wine, the centre includes a multi-sensory space and this summer is offering workshops challenging visitors to a tasting of wine and virtual food (Ed: really?), claiming to awaken all the five senses. For more details and visiting conditions, see details at www.laciteduvin.com.

A clash of southern French wine fairs and one for the north:

For the last few months organisers of Vinisud (the professional wine show for southern France and the rest of the Mediterranean wine regions) and of Millésime Bio (the organic wine trade fair) have been in conflict over dates for staging their fairs at the Montpellier exhibition centre. The result has seen Millésime Bio move to Marseille and an overlap of dates. To summarise: Vinisud will take place from 29th-31st January 2017 in Montpellier and Millésime Bio

Forthcoming wine events

In our listings we include major generic tastings and events. Nearly all trade tastings and other events in the UK can be found on the Wine & Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) website at <http://www.wsta.co.uk/resources/trade-diary> or by downloading its app for iPhone/Android at <http://www.wsta.co.uk/download-app>. There is also a useful diary with events for the UK on-trade that may be of interest at <http://imbibe.com/events>.

In the table opposite you will find key London tastings, mainly generic, up to the end of this year. This should be of help even to those travelling in from outside. These are tastings that, as members of CWW, you should be able to attend easily, even at the last minute.

Below you will also find a list of major international conferences and trade fairs for Autumn 2016 and advanced dates for 2017.

Please save the date for the CWW Christmas party to be held in London at One Great George Street, sponsored by the Washington State Wine.

International conferences and trade (or part-trade) fairs 2016-17

DATE	Event/ description	Location	Contact name/email OR website for details and registration
28th-29th October 2016	The Epicurean	London, UK	www.epicurean.online
7th-9th November 2016	ProWine China	Shanghai, China	www.prowinechina.com
15th-16th November 2016	Vinexpo	Tokyo, Japan	www.vinexpotokyo.com
5th-7th December 2016	Wine Vision	Sonoma, CA, USA	www.winevision.com
19th-21st March 2017	Prowein	Düsseldorf, Germany	www.prowein.com
22nd-24th May 2017	London Wine Fair	London, UK	www.londonwinefair.com

London tastings July - December 2016

DATE	Event/Tasting	Contact name/email OR website for details and registration
25th July	Wines of Turkey tasting	banuergan@winesofturkey.org
8th September	Intrepid South Africa	jo@winesofsa.com
12th September	Great Sherry Tasting	angeline@bespokedrinksmedia.com
13th September	Mercado Chileno Chile tasting	karensutton@wiseinc.co.uk
20th September	Artisan Aussie Wines	kirsty.savory@wineaustralia.com
21st September	SITT (Specialist Importers Tasting)	lisa.bullen@wrbm.com
22nd September	The Bunch annual tasting	charles@leaandsandeman.co.uk
22nd September	Cru Bourgeois selection	info@phillips-hill.co.uk
27th September	The Dirty Dozen tasting	ben@indigowine.com
11th October	Wines from Rioja 10 x 10 tasting	rioja@thisisphipp.com
18th October	Central Otago tasting	vikki.kircher@centralotagopinot.co.nz
19th October	Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux tasting	sue@spearcommunications.co.uk
20th October	Sud de France Rising Stars tasting	duboullay@suddefrance-dvpt.com
26th October	Fizz - the sparkling wine show	ben@campbell-johnston.com
1st November	New Zealand new release tasting	victoria.kennedy@nzwine.com
14th November	Real Italian wine and food	a.kelly@ice.it
1st December	Circle of Wine Writers Christmas Party	andrea.warren@btinternet.com





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Estadística
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