



AWE Inspiring News

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Chairman's Column
by
Heather Dougherty

It is already becoming something of a cliché to talk about the age we are living through as the “post truth” era: a time when conviction and shouting the loudest apparently trump (ahem) the facts.

As members of a professional association we find ourselves on the side of the experts – a term that has recently acquired more questionable connotations. I feel confident that clients and students will continue to come to us, not just because we know our stuff, but because we provide expert opinion and guidance on what is, for many people, a baffling and over-complicated subject.

Our now yearly publication, 100 AWEsome wines, is unashamedly making use of that combined expertise to offer a practical, independent guide for wine consumers – and even fellow experts. Having just helped to proof the upcoming 2017 edition of 100 AWEsome wines, it has certainly whetted my appetite to explore some of the wines on the list that are new to me.

Here's to the (wine) experts!

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The Bonsai Vines of Pepe Mendoza

by Paul Howard

Alicante in Spain is now emerging as a high-quality wine region, led by winegrowers like Pepe Mendoza. Why is this happening now? Furthermore, how do his vines resemble Bonsai?

The Alicante wine region

When Alicante is mentioned, we usually think of the Costa Blanca and Benidorm. That conjures vistas of beach resorts and second homes. All those ex-pats and tourists lapping up the Mediterranean sun. Alicante is part of the Levant, so-called because it's where the sun gets up in the morning. Meanwhile, Alicante isn't famous for wine, even though it has been made there for thousands of years. But that's changing.

Vinos Alicante PDO

First of all, the Alicante wine region extends inland from the lowland coast up into the high mountains. The coast has that balmy Mediterranean climate. However, in the Sierra to the north-west near Villena things are far more extreme. High altitude brings cold nights and freezing winters, yet there is no respite from the summer heat. Only the dry winds from North Africa bring some afternoon relief from the relentless sun.

This land is, therefore, a parched semi-desert scrubland. It's common to go eleven months without rain, only to receive the annual rainfall as a two-day deluge. Soils are poor, a mixture of sand and clay with a high rocky limestone content. Rivers are temporary. Consequently, it's a harsh environment where access to water is always challenging. However, it also has precision winegrowing potential.

One of the advantages here is that aridity. It means there is little risk of fungal diseases. In the words of Pepe Mendoza, "organic farming here is standard." Another plus is that cold nights enable the vines to preserve acidity in the ripening grapes. That means the wines have a remarkable freshness. There's vintage variation too. The harvests of 2010, 2011 and 2014 were particularly good. Not so in 2013, when there were snow and ice in September.

Consequently, this is a long way from the common perceptions that Alicante is only about sand, sun, and sangria. These beautiful mountains are only sixty kilometres from the beach and so only an hour away.

Alicante's commercial history

The Alicante wine tradition is to export vast amounts of low-cost wines. Local varieties such as Monastrell (a.k.a the French Mourvèdre), Bobal, and Garnacha made intensely coloured robust reds, while Moscatel made whites.

Being Spain, you'll also find the ubiquitous Tempranillo, but there is also a wealth of rarer local grapes such as red Mando and white Merseguera and Verdil, which are now making a comeback. More recently, international varieties have become widely planted.

Hence the big producers and co-operatives have long had the capability of producing different wines in every conceivable style to meet their customers' price and quality specifications. It's been a happy hunting ground for supermarkets! In past times, Alicante wines were used to beef up the weedier products from more Northern European climes too.

However, more recently there has been an emergence of fine wines from Alicante and its near neighbours València and Utiel-Requena. There are similarities in these developments to those other wine regions previously known only for bulk volume production. Sicily, the Languedoc and Murcia spring to mind.

Now there is an investment in new wine growing techniques and skills, a focus on the vineyard and indigenous grapes, and the search for terroir and identity. Alicante is becoming an exciting and confident wine area to visit, with some of the best value wines in Spain.

Bodega Enrique Mendoza

In Alicante's journey to quality, Bodega Enrique Mendoza has become one of the leading wineries. It is a member of the Grandes Pagos d'España*, a private association of only 30 individual wineries that comprise some of the best producers from all over Spain.

It began with Enrique Mendoza, a wine investor, who established the winery in 1989. It has a coastal site of 5 hectares at Alfaz del Pi for Moscatel and wine maturation, which is just ten minutes by car from Benidorm. However, the main vineyards of 80 ha are in the mountains near Villena at Finca El Chaconero. While Enrique owned old Monastrell vineyards at Villena, his route to quality was by planting international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah, Petit Verdot, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

These international grapes quickly took the winery to recognition in Spain, particularly for a Bordeaux-style blend called Santa Rosa.



Pepe Mendoza © Paul Howard 2016

But the next phase of the revolution came when Enrique retired, and his son Pepe Mendoza took over. He is professionally trained, widely travelled and hugely experienced. His focus is different from his father's because he champions the local varieties, especially Monastrell, which is particularly food-friendly. Of course, he continues to make excellent wines with those international varieties too.

Bonsai vines

I stood in these mountain vineyards at around 600 meters altitude on a freezing winter day. Then I could see why Pepe Mendoza refers to his vines here as being like Bonsai. These stunted, low growing bush vines are 40-90 years old, with spindly trunks. They have become entirely adapted to the local conditions. Akin to a small iceberg, most of the plant is underground, with roots growing down up to seven metres into the barren earth in search of that elusive water.

These vines are planted at a relatively high density for this region, with 1,500 plants per hectare. Putting that in perspective, Burgundy is often 10,000 plants per ha. It's all down to the lack of water. Pepe Mendoza limits these dry-farmed vines to only 6-8 bunches of thick-skinned grapes per plant. The resulting yields are very low, but the quality is high.

The younger vineyards are cordon de royat wire-trained. Once again the vines are tiny, and even these are 25 years old. Pepe says that they will be much better in another ten years! Youth is clearly a relative concept in these parts. Pepe seems to have a deep communion with each of his vines. I wouldn't have been surprised if had said that he had names for each and every plant.

Because the farming is organic, Pepe uses only natural compost. Preparations of cinnamon, dandelion and chamomile are sprayed against insects, while pheromone traps restrict an invasive grape moth.

The resultant wines display freshness, subtlety and balance, rather than an over-abundance of alcohol, harsh tannins and raisiny concentration. While there are some reserva wines, most are released young.

Alicante has no history of quality based on long ageing as happens in Rioja, and is all the better for it. "Here concentration is easy, but balance is difficult," said Pepe.

And after that, it was back to the Finca to thaw out and try his wines.

The wines

On arriving back at the Finca, a large fire was blazing away merrily in the cosy tasting room. As an extra treat, home-made venison and wild boar sausages griddled over the fire were served with crusty bread. Of course, these bocadillos were the perfect welcome on a bitterly cold day. Time for the wine.

The first two wines are "radical, natural wines" made for the Mendoza family. They are not commercialised, although I hope they will be. They are no-sulphur and matured in traditional terracotta amphorae:

Moscatel. 12%. *My concerns with so many white wines made without sulphur are that they often replace fruit character with dull apple cider flavours. Not so here. This wine is a cloudy orange colour but has retained a floral orange-flower Muscat scent. The palate has an intense candied orange taste. It starts dry and ends gently sweet some minutes later.*

Monastrell. 13%. *Dark purple, wafting perfume, slightly smoky. Dry palate of cherries, pastry and cream, like Strudel. Very well balanced, moderate alcohol, elegant, delicious.*

The following four wines are all 100% Monastrell. There is none of the earthy flavours, rustic tannins or monster alcohol that can plague inferior wines:

La Tremenda 2014. 14%. *The "entry level" Monastrell, made with those 25-year-old "young" vines. Cherry red colour. Juicy, creamy texture, fleshy sour cherry fruit, smooth tannins and hints of pomegranate, toast and*

spices at the end. Given only six months maturation in old US oak barrels. € 7 in Spain, \$10 US, in the UK it's £10.95 at Ultracomida. A tremendous bargain, pun intended!

Estrecho 2011. 14%. Single vineyard, bush vines. Given 15 months ageing in 500-litre barrels and 2,000-litre foudres. Far more purple power, a very different expression. A gorgeous wine, black cherry and plum with some balsamic and pine resin appearing on the finish. €18 in Spain, \$20 in the US, and currently unavailable in the UK.

Estrecho 2014. 14%. Already lovely. Or keep it for ten or twenty years. It starts with an abundance of black and red cherries before a bitter cherry finish. Silken, creamy texture and focused intensity. Those balsamic and pine notes are already present. Even better than 2011, Pepe thinks this will be a classic. The release is in early 2017.

Las Quebradas 2010. 13.5%. Again, a single vineyard. This is the ultimate Monastrell. Charcoal and bonfire aromas mixed with deeper dark plummy fruits. Juicy yet delicate palate, stony minerality and final hints of cocoa powder on a very long finish. Slightly less alcohol and such life and vigour! Outstanding. €25 in Spain. \$35 in the US and not currently available in the UK.

Now the wine that put this Bodega on the map:

Santa Rosa Reserva 2011. 13.5%. A blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Syrah, 15% Merlot. Made and aged for 17 months in small new French oak barriques. It has a herby, garrigue nose, polished tannins, and great

balance. The palate is meaty and dense with hints of leather and liquorice peeping through black fruits. Let me point out that this is an excellent modern wine. In the end, these international grapes don't speak of the region or terroir in quite the way the Monastrell does. €18 in Spain, \$35 in the US and not currently available in the UK.

And finally:

Moscatel, Pasa Plus 2012. 8%. An excellent dessert wine, with 300 g/l of residual sugar. An orange-fleck tawny colour. The chocolate-orange and balsam nose leads to a massive bitter orange palate with dark chocolate and coffee. It tastes like the best Jaffa Cake ever. One of the finest Moscatel's I've tried. Barrel sample.

To sum up

In conclusion, meeting Pepe Mendoza was memorable. Then he showed just how good Spanish hospitality, the Alicante region and Monastrell could be. My personal thanks are also due to Mar Alonso of IVACE and Eladio Martin of PDO Alicante for organising the visit.

The UK importer is CandDwines. Consequently, I'm going to ask if they will bring the Monastrell wines into the UK.

Location: Ptda. El Romeral s/n, Alfaz del Pi 03580, Alicante, Spain

Photos & text © Paul Howard 2016



*Note that Grandes Pagos de España isn't the same as the similarly titled but controversial Vinos de Pago. The former is a private association. The latter is an official classification for individual wineries, ratified by some (but not all) Spanish wine regions.

Wine Vision: A Recap

by
Marisa D'Vari

Founded in 2013, Wine Vision is one of the leading business strategy and innovation forums on the international wine calendar. Recently held in Sonoma County, it offered many high profile sponsors and a wide range of high-ranking speakers from top organizations.

The conference was well-planned and rather dynamic, organized to give a relatively cohesive overview of new trends. Ray Isle, the popular American wine columnist from Food & Wine, was an affable moderator and kept things running on time. Both Robert Joseph of Meiningers and Ian Harris of WSET (both companies were sponsors) were friendly faces in the crowd and took part in some of the panels.

Though all the presentations were informative, the delegates seemed particularly intrigued by the escalating power and reach of wine-focused videos on Facebook. Rob McMillan of Rabobank gave a rather insightful presentation on the Millennial Generation and Gen X, suggesting it might be quite a while until they can take over from the big spending Baby Boomers, now decreasing in number.

The organizers provided plenty of opportunities for delegates to network with one another and the speakers.

For example, the networking lunch on the first day featured modest cuisine (potato chips, sandwiches, ice water) but provided the opportunity for delegates to rush to the “themed topic” table of their choice in order to chat with an expert and other table participants about a particular issue. I raced to Table 11 to hear Wine Intelligence CEO Lulie Halstead speak about branding. Topics offered at other tables included subjects such as doing business in China, natural corks, closures, alternate packaging, etc.

Francis Ford Coppola, Kendall Jackson, Rodney Strong, and MacMurray Ranch wineries all sponsored events for the delegates, providing yet more opportunities for participants to mix and mingle. Our hosts were all very generous and down to earth. The concluding lunch at the MacMurray ranch was a blast into early Sonoma Valley’s past.

The setting was the old (reburbed) barn, the salmon was locally sourced, the fabulous wine free flowing, and the food was passed family-style, like we were all home at the ranch. Wine Vision participants could also take part on an additional full day tour of local wineries including Lambert Bridge, Ridge, Robert Young, and Stone Street Wineries. For whatever reason, only six people (including myself) chose to partake and we were treated like royalty.

Unlike last year in Rioja which reached a more European crowd, the delegates were overwhelmingly American and seemed to be California locals (save for the odd Hungarian here and there). It was great to meet some new friends and I look forward to learning of the location and program for 2017.



Photos & text ©
Marisa D'Vari
2016

No Short Cuts!

by
Kevin Ecock

A few years ago I wrote a piece for Inspiring News where I mentioned that Santa Rita was working hard on attempting to understand a vineyard pest called *Magarodes Vitis* or Ground Pearl.

I wrote that in the Maipo Valley where Santa Rita has some of its finest vineyards, *Magarodes Vitis*, 'seems to travel from one vineyard to another via flood irrigation techniques. It debilitates vines. With as many as 10 genera and 15 separate species ground pearls are found all over the world. Chile, and the Maipo in particular, has its own troublesome type. New rootstock development and an increased understanding of the pests' interaction with the roots of vines were among topics discussed'.

Recently I met with Eduardo Alemparte, Technical Director at Santa Rita, and asked him how research at Santa Rita was progressing with regards to *Magarodes*. I was pleased and surprised to find that they have abandoned all hope of eradicating the pest and have decided instead to work alongside it!

Eduardo tells us that Santa Rita has committed itself to 'over-delivering on its wines at every price point'. This, he says, 'was always going to be difficult as many of the vines that had been planted in the early 1990's were losing vigour or were in the process of dying'. Working

with new consultants, Phil Freese (USA) and Yerko Moreno (Chile) Eduardo's team at Santa Rita has developed its thinking following on from a consulting period with Brian Croser (Australia).

Now it is all 'analytics and new plantings based on a \$20million investment titled the WiSE project'. Named after Wine and Seed the project reaches into the heart of Santa Rita's Maipo vines with the distinct aim of 'growing wine' rather than 'planting vines'. Its ideals are lofty and very detailed. For instance, there are new clone selections, new management systems, new watering patterns for different soil conditions, hundreds of hectares are being replanted (1.2 million new plants in 2016 including 14 different combinations of Cabernet Sauvignon in the Alto Maipo!).

It's an extensive programme that has at its heart a commitment to work with *Magarodes Vitis* rather than against it. Eduardo tells us that their new plantings take consideration of the pest and are planted with the intention of having increased vigour to replace that lost to it. To an extent it's a biological and ecological balancing act. When asked whether their *Magarodes* will simply enjoy its new freedom, go forth and multiply, Eduardo was frank in saying that they 'hoped not'!

Santa Rita will over time extend its WiSE project to its other vineyards and to its wineries also. This is a 'cutting-edge' project where the lines blur between what is New World and what is simply New. *Magarodes Vitis* will be pleased as it has now been granted a position where it will be allowed to contribute to the quality of a future generation of wines where in the past it was held responsible for the very opposite.



Photos & text © Kevin Ecock 2016

Wine Fraud:
Presentations by Maureen Downey, Siobhan
Turner and Sheri Sauter-Moreno MW
of Chai Consulting
by Richard Bampfield MW

I was lucky enough to attend one of a series of London presentations on Wine Fraud presented by the admirably straight-talking Maureen Downey - as Decanter says, "possibly fine wine's answer to Sherlock Holmes". What follows is a summary of some of the key points of her presentation.

Early discussion centred on different types of wine fraud and the role of the authorities. Depending on country or area, the relevant authority could be Interpol, the FBI, local gendarmes or police.

In the US at least, the authorities are more likely to prosecute for evasion of taxes rather than selling counterfeit wine. Customs *should* play a role in preventing transport/import of counterfeit wine, but have had little impact so far.

It is a complex picture. Theft is a big part of the issue - wines could be stolen to *hide* fraud (the wines may be counterfeit in the first place). Then there is insurance fraud - collectors who know they have counterfeit wines might intentionally destroy them to recoup losses through insurance.

Downey does not think this is purely a criminal and therefore law-enforcement issue. She thinks the industry, the media, the IMW and the public have all ducked the opportunity to come down on the wrong-doers and those supporting them.

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The scale of the problem

- * 70% of fine wine imported into China is fake
- * 70% of Lafite sold is fake
- * 44% of Chinese do not know if the wine they are buying is fake or not
- * Fine and rare wine (wine that is traded on the secondary market) accounts for 5% of the world wine market.
- * It's possible that 20% of fine wine sold worldwide is fake. This is consistent with other product categories, such as watches, jewellery, etc.
- * Based on 2015 auction figures of US\$346 million - if 20% is counterfeit, that is worth US\$70 million.
- * Rudy Kurniawan created and sold counterfeit wine which would now have a market value of US\$550 million between 2002 and 2012.
- * Americans are a captive market for counterfeit wines because they chase points and they want instant collections. They are self-taught rather than through wine merchants and are happy to buy what they desperately want without checking it out first.
- * 2008 - Hong Kong drops duty on wine imports.
- * Counterfeit products, not just wine, are culturally accepted in China. It is therefore hard to clean things up - of course, counterfeit products still have value.

Limited supply + unknowledgeable sellers + eager and wealthy buyers = a perfect market for counterfeit products.

A big problem is that those who profess to have drunk many older wines have drunk them in recent years - so therefore there is a high probability they were fake. So there are very few people left alive who really know what these wines might have tasted like.

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Assorted tips on spotting fake bottles

- * AC only came in in 1936 and lots of further appellations followed over next 50 years. Meursault, Puligny, Chassagne were not AC until 1970. So the presence of an AC on the label can indicate whether a bottle is genuine or not.
- * Fake labels can often only really be spotted if you have the genuine and fake next to each other. Colour of font, etc. For example there are counterfeit bottles currently circulating of Roumier Chambolle-Musigny 2013.
- * Cut-outs of neck tags are a common clue - they are often poorly executed.
- * Counterfeiters often add extra information because it may give the impression to the unwary buyer that it is a special bottle. They will also intentionally low-fill the bottles and tear the label specifically so that it doesn't look perfect. Reserve Nicolas and Mahler-Besse additions are especially common.
- * The colour of glass is very important - ones needs to know in which years Châteaux used brown, green, antique green, etc.

- * “Unicorns” - bottles that don’t exist except in the imagination of the creator or the buyer e.g. Domaine Ponsot Clos St Denis 1945 - he didn’t make this wine until 1980’s. The excuse counterfeiters give is that the wines are secret or family bottlings. The latter, even if genuine, cannot be authenticated by Chai Consulting - so may have limited resale value.

- * Understand the likelihood of large formats. e.g. 5 litre bottle format did not exist prior to 1978. It was 4.5l before that.

- * Verticals are especially dodgy - they normally contain at least one fake, normally the off-vintages that no-one would keep.

- * Petrus labels are ribbed so it is important to feel the texture of the label.

- * In 1978, Bordeaux bottle sizes changed.

- * Kurniawan-created cream labels have a concorde watermark. These are sourced from the Philippines and no Bordeaux producer sources paper from there.

- * Modern printed labels have metallic properties that can be spotted.

- * Ink can smear if a label is withdrawn from the printer too soon.

- * Watch out for dot matrix printing on older bottles! And, on counterfeit labels, often the ink has not actually sunk in - it floats on the surface and can actually be chipped off.

- * Authentic labels tend to have more clarity.

- * If a template on a computer is overused, over time the printing will have undulations and uneven gaps between the letters/numbers.

- * Normally if you see machine glue stains (vertically and horizontally on label) the label is genuine.

- * Dirt and varnish are applied to labels by counterfeiters

to imitate mould and age.

- * Labels can be baked to simulate ageing. If baked labels are piled on each other when stacked, the image of one label can be ghosted/copied onto another.

- * Genuine modern labels are really beautiful - the quality of the print and metallic light is very good. Counterfeits are fudged, pale imitations.

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The 16 key markers Chai Consulting look for when evaluating authenticity

- * provenance

- * information - AC, legal, tax and import issues, company structure, placement. Food packaging regulations - size of font, what appears on front label, etc. e.g. size must be on package. Pregnancy warnings, sulphite warnings, recycling symbols. In 1976, tin capsules were outlawed in California, so most Bordeaux producers changed over to aluminium.

- * labels - paper quality, age and finish. Watermarks.

Recycled paper is only a recent development and are not normally used by quality producers

- * print methods - professional, home computer, stamps, micro writing.

- * ink - colours, permeation, quality, method, production era and how it has aged. Ink jet printers are relatively easy to spot.

- * other labels - vintage, neck tag, import and strip labels, retail and sales/marketing related stickers (Sothebys, etc).

- * ageing - false vs natural ageing. Tea and tobacco, stains, intentional cuts and tears, rubbing and sandpaper. Baking of labels.

- * capsules - tin, lead, aluminium, wax, plastic. Art, embossing, re-use, wear, consistency - does it fit with the rest of the bottle or the rest of the case. Bad corks might be masked by gluing a capsule on. Residue from prior use.

- * corks - length, brand, inked/stamped, age, adulteration. Cork masking (gluing the capsule as above). Top producers use top quality. Short corks suggest counterfeit.

- * glue - or, sometimes used by counterfeiters, rubber cement.

- * glass - production method, legal requirements of country of bottling, production standards, glue, dirt (to mask), consistency. 1, 2 and 3 piece moulds all came in at different times.

- * sediment - authentic sediment is black, whereas counterfeit sediment can be shiny, glittery. Kurniawan would ask sommeliers to save bottles with sediment so he wouldn’t have to recreate sediment. Sediment is a key clue - for a start, in an old bottle, there should be some! And it is likely that different grapes and producers may produce sediment of different textures/consistencies.

- * special bottling - esp Mouton 45 RC “Reserve du Chateau”

- * original wooden cases - e.g. Mayer never had wooden cases

- * consistency - often self-evident.

Names of people/merchants/auctioneers who have been connected with wine fraud

Christophe Axel Mayer - a Danish merchant who bought a lot of Kurniawan wine

Gil Lambert-Schwarz - "The Swedish Nobleman's cellar".

All false, much bought from Mayer

Hardy Rodenstock

Khaled Rouabah

John Kapon

Acker Merrall & Condit

Spectrum

Vanquish

Antique Wine Company

Baghera

Dragon 8

White Club

*

Some regularly seen counterfeit wines

* Vandermeulen and Barton & Guestier bottlings

* Gentaz Côte-Rôtie

* 1982 and 1985 Le Pin, but recent vintages are much harder to fake.

* Recent vintages of Leroy are also very hard to fake.

* DRC did not sell barrels of wine to Vandermeulen after 1911 - so it is easy to spot fakes if indicated after that date

* De Vogüé and Jayer are highly counterfeited.

* Most frequently faked vintages - anything 1700's and 1800's.

* Years that were important in history - 1811, 1900, wars, treaties, discoveries, etc.

* Most recent fraud - DRC 04, 05, 06, 07, 08.

Burgundy from 2012 and 2013.

Anti-fraud measures and technology currently used by producers

Overall, Downey thinks a multi-method approach to anti-fraud is best.

* high quality printing

* hidden writing

* serial numbers

* distribution tracking

* holograms

* QR codes - though MD thinks more marketing than anti-fraud

* RFID chips - a computer chip that will go over the capsule on top of the bottle. So it will be clear if pierced by Coravin.

* Proof tag

* TCM (The Chain Method) authentication database

* Chai Wine Vault by Everledger - recently launched by Chai Consulting. It uses blockchain technology, as used by Bitcoin. It is already used in the diamond industry to establish and track provenance, identity, ownership chain, etc. It includes 90+ data points, including images, etc and certifies authenticity and provenance through the life of the bottle. The aim is to create a global wine vault of certified bottles. If a vendor subscribes to this, they can post the details online so that any potential purchaser can view the record.

Useful resources

winefraud.com

winehog.org

jancisrobinson.com

wineberserkers.com

Snapshot of Piedmont - Fall 2016

by Marisa D'Vari

With the recent multi-million dollar acquisition of the historic Vietti winery in Barolo, increases in the price of the region's wine and its vineyards are certain to rise. If you love the region's wine, however, you can find excellent examples of Nebbiolo, Barbera, and Arneis from smaller Barolo producers as well as from overlooked quality areas such as Roero DOCG.

Roero DOCG is a gorgeous region of north-west Italy, offering romantic hillside views, beautifully preserved castles and Romanesque churches. Its producers are putting an increasing emphasis on high quality wine. One example of a producer making very high end Nebbiolo in Roero is Malvira, created in the 1950s by the determined Giuseppe Damonte, who knew the quality the area offered before it was made into a DOCG. The emphasis at Malvira is on single vineyards, each with a unique soil that lends itself to a specific varietal. They rival the famous names in Barolo terms of aroma, flavors, balance, and complexity.

Barbera: Getting the Respect it Deserves

Ask a Piedmont local their favorite wine, and "Barbera" may be the likely answer. Virtually every winery produces this varietal, usually matured in different ways to suit a particular taste and price point. One of the most memorable Barbera wines was the rich and complex

Cascina Castlet Superiore, Barbera d'Asti DOCG, from the Litina vineyard. I also very much liked the rich, jammy 2015 Barbera D'Alba Valdisera, a cooperative wine from Terre del Barolo. The large family owned Tenuta Carretta produces a wide range of fine wines, including the excellent 2011 Mora di Sassi Barbera d'Asti Superiore from Nizza, with rich, sharply focused aromas of black fruit.

Arneis: The Producer's Pride and Joy

Virtually every producer takes special pride in producing Arneis, the local, rather neutral white varietal. One excellent example is the Arneis from Antonio Coscia, fourth generation winemaker/owner of his family's Costa Catterina winery. His brown eyes sparkle as he pours me a delicious glass of Arneis wine he has named Arselv,

individual terraces. Tenuta Carretta has elegant rooms as well. The agriturismo concept is beneficial both the wineries and the guests, as wineries can benefit from the extra income as well as the publicity, and guests can enjoy the pleasure of living in a winery setting.



Antonella Arrigo & Antonio Coscia of Costa Catterina



Above: Sara Vezza Saffirio of Josetta Saffirio
Left: Giacomo Damonte of Malvira



Eduardo Merlo of Sylla Sebaste



Paolo Gallo of Montalbera

The Ruché Grape: Ready for Its Close-up?

In the past, the Ruché grape has not received very much attention. It is a rather obscure local varietal that shares some similarities with the major Piedmont grape Nebbiolo in that it tends to produce very tannic, light coloured wines with pronounced aromas and bouquet. The sleek, modern Montalbera winery is doing incredible things with this variety, especially as it produces 70% of the Ruché grape in the world. The 2015 Laccetto (which means "the accent" in Italian) is made from 90% of overripe, late harvest grapes and 10% of grapes that have been dried in the cellar in a sterilized and controlled room. The Ruché wine is quite delicious - it falls somewhere between a Nebbiolo and an Amarone with its rich, brandied cherries flavor.

meaning "sympatico" in Italian. Arneis is also a favorite of the Malvira winery, which produces wine from the Arneis grape in sparkling, still, and sweet (late harvest) styles. If that wasn't enough, Giacomo also makes an Arneis wine without sulfur (with the label proclaiming this), and pours me a taste of an aged Arneis from their Saglietto vineyard.

Increasing Agriturismo and Restaurants

Among other trends in the region is the increasing amount of Agriturismo (bed and breakfasts) producers are building adjacent to their wineries. One of the newest are the cozy rooms recently built by Costa Catterina, which is run by owner Antonio's lovely wife Antonella. One luxurious example of a glamorous agriturismo is Villa Tiboldi which is owned by Malvira, with breathtaking views from

More wineries all over Piedmont are building restaurants, or forming associations with them. Malvira has the kind of upscale restaurant favored by the glitterati, offering its own wines as well as favorites from the Piedmont area, as does Tenuta Carretta. Sylla Sebaste has formed a relationship with a local, well respected chef who creates seasonal multi-course menus for visitors to the winery.

It has been said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. But for the most part, the local Roero winemaking families are focusing even more narrowly on what they do best: growing good grapes and making good wine.

Photos & text © Marisa D'Vari 2016

AWE Inspiring News - Winter 2016/2017 ↑

The Wines of Faugères by Rosemary George

Review by Heather Dougherty

It is heartening to see an entire book (of some 200 pages) being devoted to just one part of the vast wine producing area that is the Languedoc.

Why Faugères? Rosemary answers her own question in the introduction to the book: "Because it is there. Because it is the nearest vineyard to my Languedoc home. Because I love the wines and the sheer variety of the wines within this small area.....The wines of Faugères should always have a distinctive freshness which places them amongst the finest of the Languedoc."

She is certainly the most qualified writer to embark on a guide to the area, having nearly thirty years' experience of visiting the area and tasting its wines. Much has changed over that time, but the bedrock, literally, of its success is the schist-based soils which characterise the area.

The book proceeds in an orderly fashion with chapters on the history of Faugères, then detailing current viticulture and winemaking practices, before a comprehensive run down of the producers in the appellation.

There is no doubting Rosemary George's knowledge of and affection for the area, which leads me to my only

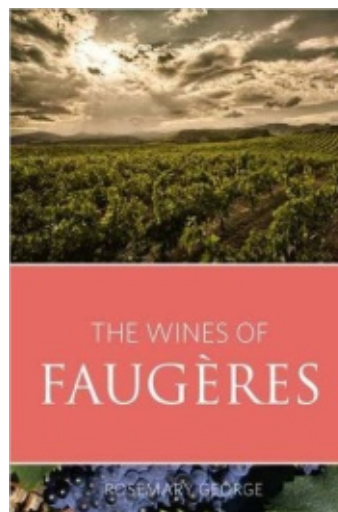
gripe: I would love to know more of her own insights and opinions throughout the book, especially in the producer profiles.

The chapter, Faugères today, is useful reading for anyone wanting to know the state of the appellation's wine scene – and here Rosemary does bring her own feelings to the fore on the low price of the Faugères co-operative's Mas Olivier brand.

The Wines of Faugères is a fine and comprehensive survey of what it is that makes this small appellation distinctive and worth attention. When preparing for tastings on the Languedoc in the last couple of years, I have mentally willed Rosemary to update her Wines of the South of France, originally published in 2001. The good news is that she is now embarking on a book on the wines of Languedoc as a whole.

Published by Infinite Ideas, £30

© Heather Dougherty 2016



Exploring & Tasting Wine: A wine course with digressions by Berry Bros & Rudd Wine School

Review by Heather Dougherty

Do wine educators really need to read a wine education textbook? Possibly not, but the best books of any kind can pique one's interest.

This is an attractive and well-produced book, aimed firmly at keen amateur wine explorers. There is an introductory section on tasting wine, which attempts to avoid being over-prescriptive, while providing sufficient useful guidance. There are some particularly good graphics throughout the book, such as a kind of aroma wheel to help tasters to bring some focus to their tasting terms. More original is a "target" system for contrasting the relative prominence of particular elements of wines, based on their fruit ripeness, acidity, tannin, alcohol, oak and complexity. It brings an immediate, user-friendly, way to understand the difference, for example, between a Northern Rhône Syrah and a New World Shiraz.

The book can be used in a variety of ways – by following the practical pages, users can work their way through a basic wine course in a pretty brisk way. Chapters (or Sessions as they have it) focus on groups of grape varieties rather than wine styles. There are recommended wines to taste for each session.

There are two other sorts of pages scattered through the book, which are perhaps more suited to reading with a glass of suitable wine in hand. The background pages give more information on things like regions of origin and other grape varieties to seek out. Then there are discussion pages, often written by one of Berry Bros barrage of MWs, which address topics of interest to wine drinkers: “the great decanting debate” caught my eye, as did “biodynamic and organic: can you taste the difference?”

All in all, this is a handsome volume that is well thought through, informative and engaging. I’m sure even the most skilled educator would learn something from it.

Published by Pavilion, RRP £20

© Heather Dougherty 2016



The Story of Champagne by Nicholas Faith

Review by Heather Dougherty

This is an updated edition of Nicholas Faith’s book, originally published in 1988.

The Story of Champagne lives up to its title – this is no champagne textbook, but an in depth narrative focusing on the historical, geographical and human elements that have resulted in the sparkling wines we know today. This kind of detailed background is hard to come by in most books on champagne, which tend to focus more on the producers and their wines.

The Story of Champagne will be a welcome and useful resource for anyone wanting to delve into the back story of one of the world’s most prestigious wines. This is a book that you can genuinely read with pleasure, rather than simply refer to in the manner of an encyclopedia.

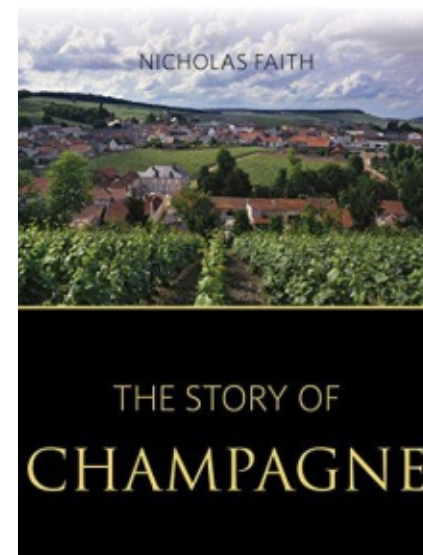
The history section finishes with a chapter, Interesting Times, which is clearly is an update since the first edition, covering, among other things, the emergence of increasing international competition, the irresistible rise of rosé and the growth in single site/vineyard champagnes.

There is a small section on notable firms, which is diverting to read, but there are many more detailed guides to producers if that is what you are looking for. And I would take issue with Faith’s opinion that Jacquesson’s “wines are generally reckoned to be soft and easy to drink”.

My favourite chapter is the one dedicated to The Enjoyment of Champagne, where Faith really communicates his love of champagne and attempts that slippery subject: how it feels to drink it. It is good to be reminded that this is, after all, what makes us all so interested in wine in the first place. At one point he says “If that doesn’t leave you wanting to open a bottle immediately, then you will never learn to love champagne.” Reader, it worked.

Published 2016 by Infinite Ideas. £30

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Member News

We welcome the following members since July 2016

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Please also note the following amendments to members contact details:

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Pippa Hayward (has changed her email address)

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AWE Inspiring News

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