AWE Inspiring News

Issue 48

Chairman's Column

by

Heather Dougherty

The wine awards season is upon us and many English wines have done especially well at this year's big competitions – DWWA, IWC, and IWSC. You can check on your favourites in each competition on these web pages:
http://www.decanter.com/decanter-awards/
http://www.internationalwinechallenge.com/canopy/search.php
https://www.iwsc.net/result/search

But 2017 has been a year of mixed fortunes for many UK vineyards, with late frosts leading to a possible loss of up to 80% of the crop in some areas. And this issue is of course not restricted to England's vineyards – the frosts also killed off nascent vine buds in many parts of France, as far south as Fitou.

Years like this serve to remind us that growing grapes and making wine is a precarious business – and that success can rub shoulders with business-threatening problems. Many producers who have had their wines garlanded with medals at competition may, when the time comes to market their meagre supply of 2017 wines, find themselves in the invidious position of not having enough wine to fulfil demand.

We are lucky, then, to be part of the wine business, without the inherent risks that are part and parcel of actually making the stuff. Perhaps we should all make a point of seeking out wines from vineyards who have faced frost damage this year to buy, to show at tastings, as our way of supporting them.

I wish you all a peaceful and relaxing summer.

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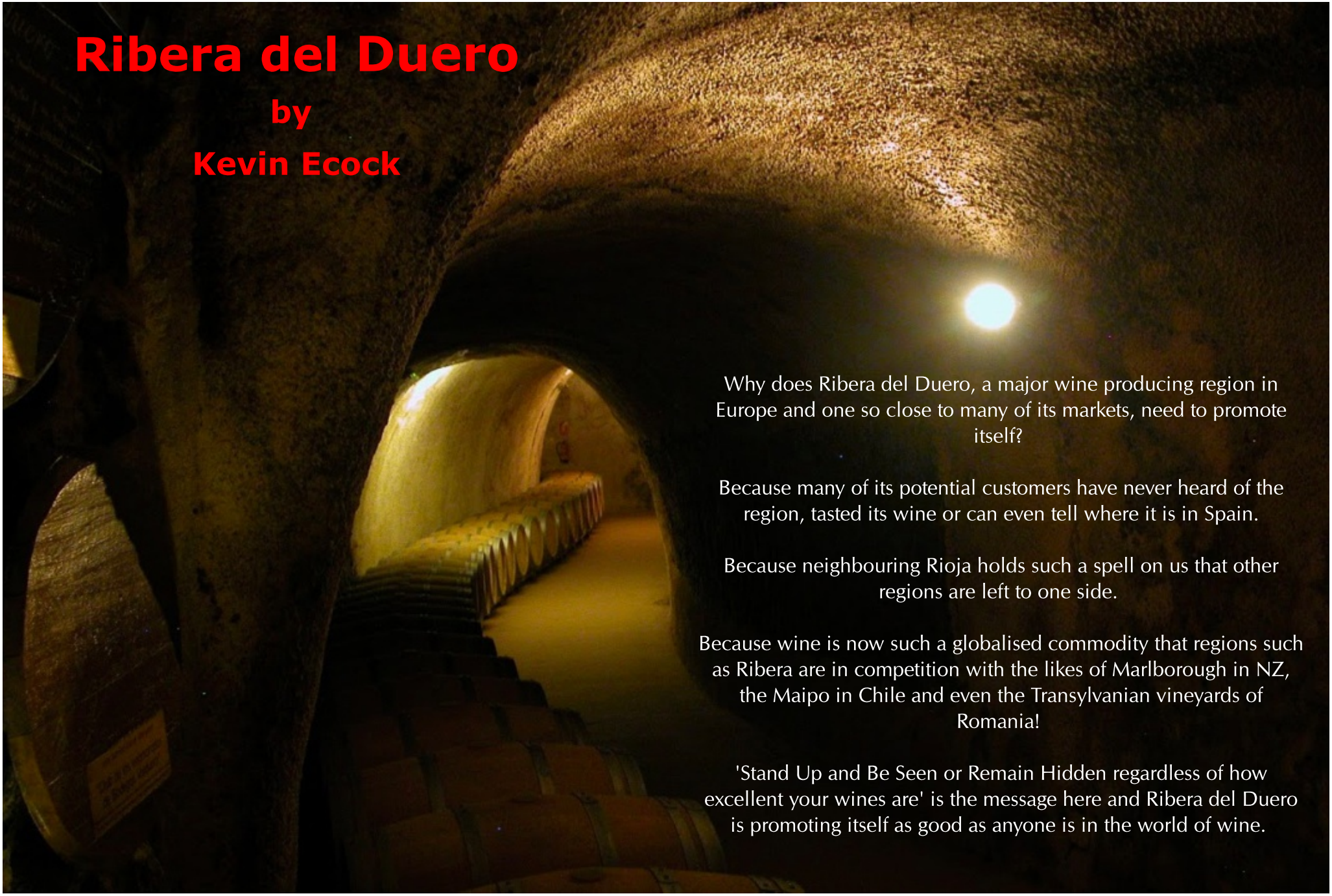
Ribera del Duero

by

Kevin Ecock



Why does Ribera del Duero, a major wine producing region in Europe and one so close to many of its markets, need to promote itself?

Because many of its potential customers have never heard of the region, tasted its wine or can even tell where it is in Spain.

Because neighbouring Rioja holds such a spell on us that other regions are left to one side.

Because wine is now such a globalised commodity that regions such as Ribera are in competition with the likes of Marlborough in NZ, the Maipo in Chile and even the Transylvanian vineyards of Romania!

'Stand Up and Be Seen or Remain Hidden regardless of how excellent your wines are' is the message here and Ribera del Duero is promoting itself as good as anyone is in the world of wine.

Ribera has had its share of ‘Wine Fame’ through a few iconic brands ... (and by winning the odd very important competition..!) Vega Sicilia has been in existence since the 1860's. It was planted with a blend of the Bordeaux varietals, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon alongside the local red variety then known simply as Tinta del Pais or 'country red'. This local varietal is today better known as Tempranillo and in Ribera grows as a unique form and is referred to as Tinto Fino. Vega Sicilia today commands 200 hectares of the very best vineyards and after its purchase, by the Alvarez family in 1982, established itself as one of the most sought after estate wines in the world.

As 1982 was also the year that the DO Ribera del Duero was founded it shouldn't come as a surprise that the permitted grapes for the region include many of those planted at Vega Sicilia. (The modern love affair and investment in the wines of Vega Sicilia is post-1982 and can be attributed to the Alvarez stewardship alone.)
The DO allows one white grape, the Albillo, and the red grapes Tinto Fino, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec and Garnacha Tinta.

An additional Bordeaux influence on the region came by way of a Dane who was, it is told, on his way to make wines at Ridge in California when he stopped off in Ribera del Duero. Perhaps he needed some Spanish. Perhaps he was curious. Perhaps he felt something only a skilled winemaker could 'feel' from a region.
Most likely it was all three plus some more when Peter Sisseck joined a new venture at Hacienda Monasterio in 1990 and began making wine, initially from grapes bought in, and then in 1995 from vines planted from cuttings taken from some of the best vineyards in the region, including Vega Sicilia!

The region had still to become famous and land could still be purchased (or leased) on the very best sites. Peter Sisseck took control, in his own name, of a small plot of old vines and in 1996 travelled to the Bordeaux primeur tastings with wine from his 9 barrel 1995 vintage. Robert Parker gave them a 96-100 rating and the Pingus label by Sisseck became an overnight wine phenomenon. It was considered one of the most unique wines ever made - Anywhere!

While all of this ‘Fame’ was going on a few other producers were beginning to flex their respective Ribera del Duero credentials. Pesquera and Emilio Moro can both trace their commercial success to the years post gaining DO status. Another group called Ribera Duero was a major cooperative in the region. Its members allowed the DO to use the name and renamed themselves as Bodegas Protos.

This was subsequently privatised and today commands a very impressive new winery and line up of wines. Indeed, from a region in the 1970's that had about 4 wineries and a lot of underutilised land, Ribera del Duero today boasts a crowded and bustling trade where quality land is scarce and its wines sell at a premium.

It is a region that has attracted investment from a host of famous winery names (especially the Rioja Houses) and now makes some of the finest wines in all of Spain. It is also one that has a long way to go as it continues to find its way in the world of wine.

Right: Peter Sisseck - contemplative brilliance © Kevin Ecock 2017

What 'Makes' Ribera del Duero?

Climate: 'Unique' doesn't come better than a high 800 to 1100m altitude that produces a truly impressive diurnal range during the growing season and an annual variation from plus 42 to minus 20 celsius!

This ultimately produces an intense concentration of both fruit and structure into the grapes which are then translated into memorable wines. Mind you, this also introduces excessive vintage variability. It's a hard old place where temperatures may exceed 42C in the summer but can be icy cold all winter along .....

Soils: The Duero has over many millennia cut an impressive East to West channel into some fine calcareous strata that slope face-on into a warming southerly direction. In addition, the river has meandered sufficiently over time to deposit a fabulous collection of mixed gravels across the region. The grapes not only do well on these soils they positively thrive in the best of them.

Grapes: The local Tempranillo (Tinto Fino) is effectively a clonal variation of what's found elsewhere in Spain. In Ribera it hangs in loose small clusters as small, tough berries. José Moro explained to us that at Emilio Moro they have gone further and selected not just their own clone of the regional Tinto Fino clone but also use only selected natural yeasts of their own that they feel are most suitable for their grape. This, José believes, 'maximises personality and a unique characterisation'.

Above: Soils of Ribera del Duero © Kevin Ecock 2017

José Moro - Exceptional Educator © Kevin Ecock 2017

People: Ribera del Duero is beautifully tilled, pruned and 'kept'. Nearly everything is by hand. This is a tough place to work in and without absolute faith and dedication on behalf of its people Ribera del Duero would not have achieved what it has.

On the Consejo sponsored study trip that I attended we visited a snap shot of wineries in the region. These included Conde de San Cristobal, Bodega Emilio Moro, Cepa 21, Legaris, Bodegas Valduero, Martin Berdugo, Hacienda Monasterio, Pingus and Bodegas Protos

Conde de San Cristóbal: Drop dead gorgeous location! Owned by Marques de Vargas out of Rioja. Founded as recently as 2000. Limits production to two red wines, Conde de San Cristóbal and Raices Reserve Especial, each of which is dark brooding, have brilliant structural elements and will age well.

Emilio Moro and Cepa 21: José Moro is a fabulous individual with a very engaging personality. He enthuses like no other! His family history defines the Emilio Moros wines produced from south facing vineyards and vinified to celebrate tradition.

From the youngest expression (lifted primary fruits) in the Finca Resalso to very impressive Malleolus (25 to 75year old vines; mulberry and liquorice style)> Indeed, Emilio Moro allows us to explore his terroir with two extraordinary expressions with his Malleolus de Valderramiro (clay soil, 90 year vines) and his Malleolus Sanchromartín (chalk soil expressed as finesse and elegance).

Conde de San Cristóbal © Kevin Ecock 2017

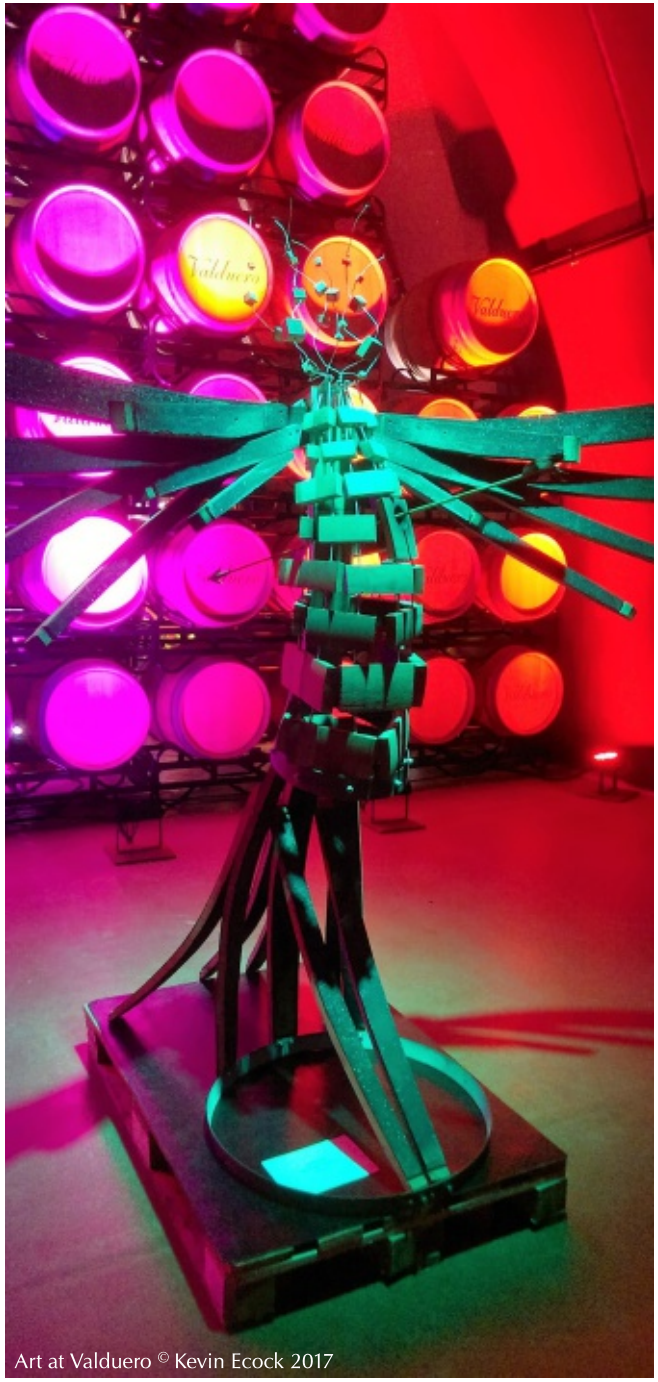
Cepa 21 is a super-modern winery built by the Moro family with the intention of growing and vinifying grapes from north facing slopes. These cooler sites produce wines with a completely different fruit set to the traditional Emilio Moro style. It's all quite brilliant to see and to taste. Cepa 21 seems almost simple at first with vibrant and exciting fruit. Then it throws a superb minerality onto the palate with a searingly exact acidic profile. The best expression of all however comes through in Mallabrigo, a cold 20 year old vineyard, whose wine entices with softness and a mock sweetness and then delivers an impressive quality.

One of the features of our trip was to see so many wineries using 500 litre barrels. When we visited Legaris we saw these and a bank of amphora shaped concrete tanks. The winery is part of the Codorniu group and is adamant that while they continue to use oak it is no longer considered important to the finished wine. The Legaris Crianza is a big commercial success while the excellence of both the Legaris Reserva 2011 and the Legaris Special Selection 2014 show the potential of this winery.

Bodegas Valduero was a surprise! Planted only with Tinto Fino and Albillo it was purchased and developed in 1984 and is family owned. The winery was built into curved hanger like tunnels and covered in earth. A series of twisting tunnels holds the ageing barrels and in one area there is a room dedicated to the art of deconstructed wine barrels! Valduero makes the most sensational Albillo based white wine, Blanco Viadero Albillo (it's worth finding!) and a selection of very impressive red wines where the younger wines are so soft and delicious they pair well with both meat and fish dishes. A few of the older wines, such as the Valduero 6Anos, defy their age by tasting many years younger than they actually are. Great attention to detail in the vineyards has produced very fine wines from what is a most impressively eclectic winery.

Cepa 21 © Kevin Ecock 2017

The Martin Berdugo winery had the unfortunate luck to be struck by lightning in 2013 – it burnt to the ground! Today the winery is a new and innovative space supplied by the same vineyards that were planted by the family over 200 years ago. The current release Barrica 2015 was the first wine to be barrel aged in the new winery while he Crianza 2013 was housed in a temporary 'pop up' cellar situation! Berdugo excels in excellent fruit definition and produces quintessentially modern styles where fruit and subtlety are to the fore. Love the labels!


Art at Valduero © Kevin Ecock 2017

Hacienda Monasteria was already planted with American rootstock and 'behaving as a chateau style winery' when Peter Sisseck joined in 1990. Today the winery works off organically certified vines with 100has planted on slopes and while it holds onto Merlot vines for 'romantic reasons' it currently favours only Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon.

We were treated to a generous twelve vintage vertical tasting. Winemaker Carlos de la Fuenta was keen to tell emphasise that his greatest challenges today are to age in the barrel wines where the fruit must always come to the fore and to ripen grapes with low alcohol potential ie 'to grow less alcohol!' His wines, made alongside Peter Sisseck, are magnificent and each express the land and vintage conditions with precision.

The Pingus winery is one such precise place. It's small, compact and very attractive – indeed the natural untreated oak roof/ceiling is beautiful craftsmanship. Peter Sisseck is softly spoken and generous with his knowledge. While his very simple credos need to be elaborated to perfection in both winery and vineyard he is adamant that the Ribera region is so contrary that his initial success with the 1995 Pingus was 'the right wine at the right moment' and he has yet to replicate the brilliance of that wine!

He tells us that age of vines matter and that a vineyard needs to grow and to mature towards its on potential. His original idea was to work towards the purest expression of Tinto Fino that was possible and the he has found since that time is required to achieve that goal. Flor de Pingus was produced to answer volume requirements for the US and today Pingus is his single vineyard wine while Flor de Pingus can be viewed as his Village wine. More recently Peter has developed the PSI label where he works with owners of old and sometimes tiny vineyards so that they can develop their land organically and biodynamically, to improve the quality of their grapes and, hopefully, the region as a whole. Ambitous. He has used old maps, new maps, spy satellite photos….. 'every vine is individual and must be treated by the same people every year'.

PSI 2016 is delightful where my notes show a very high fruit colouration, great structural strength and a ton of violets and other bright young things that have a fabulous future together.

Other tasting highlights included Flor de Pingus 2016 – exquisitely balanced wine – and Pingus 2016 where the fruit keeps a respectful distance ie not a showy wine! and excels with textural and structural integrity. An excellent vintage.

We also visited Protos but had no time to taste. What a modern winery joined at the hip to its old and incredible cellars. Finally, we also had a lecture and an extensive tasting of regional styles at the Consejo de Regulador's impressive new offices.

Thanks to the Consejo de Regulador di Ribera del Duero for an excellent educational visit.

Soave

by
Laura Clay

I sat my WSET Diploma 26 years go. The information in the study book on what I now know to be one of Italy's most historic wine regions constituted very little but which nevertheless included what are now considered to be inaccuracies. Added to which, the grape was mispronounced in the classroom which meant that the few times I have needed to say it out loud I have done so incorrectly.

Oh, the shame. My wine career direction meant that I have had scant cause to use it, fortunately, but, sadly, no desire or means to reconsider what had been unfairly touted then as a pretty uninteresting area and wine.

An invitation to visit the region came a day after I had had one of those WOW wine moments with a bottle of Soave. Had it come the day before, stupidly and inadvisably, I would have turned it down.

Aside from the fact that Soave is a beautiful medieval walled town; apart from the fact that the people are generous and charming; other than the fact that the food is delicious, Soave is well worth visiting for the variety and quality of the wine and its exciting wine scene.

So for anyone like me who needs to make amends on their lack of knowledge or for anyone who needs to renew their acquaintance with Soave, here's what I learnt.

I've already admitted to an embarrassing and shocking lack of understanding of Soave which I am pleased to say I am putting right. I am now aware of its variety of styles, its various DOCs and DOCGs, and even its crus.

I wonder what has driven the tendency towards Chablis so that its crus roll off our tongues with ease and yet I defy you to be able to cite more than three from Soave. Wine trends come and go, of course, but perhaps this could be Soave's moment. After all, one of its boasts is that it produces volcanic wines and these seem to be super-trendy right now.

I've read numerous articles on minerality, I've attended seminars and masterclasses on the subject and even I, a non-scientist, can understand that grapes cannot give minerality from the soil to the wine. But I also know that it does exist in the wines I taste and many of the Soave wines I tasted expressed exactly what I would describe as minerality. And they were usually made from vines grown in volcanic or basalt soils.

I'm not alone. John Szabo MS, whose book Volcanic Wines, Salt, Grit and Power was published last year, is a true believer. He uses the #keepitsalty hashtag and describes minerally wines as sapid. Actually though, the best description I heard in Soave came from a Greek winemaker, from Santorini, who believes there is an energy in the wines made from vines grown in volcanic soils. This resonated with me.

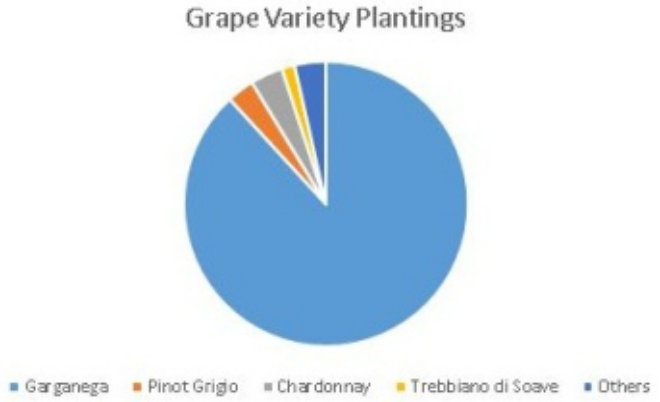
When I looked back at some of my notes over the couple of days of tasting in Soave they were filled with words such as dynamic, lively, fresh, and vibrant. Sarah Abbott MW explained when talking about Soave's crus that the area developed from an underground volcano, that the Classico zone 'hugs' the volcanic area and that Garganega is one of the greatest grapes to express minerality.

FACTS

7000 hectares of vines – 3% of Italy's DOC or DOCG area
2870 wine farms
190 winemakers
51 million bottles annually
Soave DOC
Soave Doc Classico
Soave DOC Spumante
Recioto DOCG di Soave
Soave Superiore DOCG
Soave DOC Colli Scaligeri (the hilly area which falls outside of the Classico area)

HISTORY

Winemaking dates back to Roman times
In the 13th century, there were already viticultural and delimited area restrictions in place
1931 - area was delimited officially (the Classico area of today)
1968 - Soave became a DOC
1998 - Recioto di Soave became a DOCG and Soave Superiore followed in 2001



As well as volcanic soils, the landscape and conversation was dominated by the pergola training system. In fact a masterclass was dedicated solely to the subject. Historically this has been the natural training system for Soave, first grown on trees and then alongside other crops. Solo viticulture is relatively recent.

Much research has been carried out as to whether there is a need for switching to guyot mainly because there is a school of thought that because pergola training is a low density system, the yields are consequentially higher and the grapes therefore must not be as high quality.

Walter Speller is of the opinion that vine growers pushed for a change to guyot to make it easier to mechanise the vineyard leading to a cheaper way of growing grapes, rather than a desire to ensure higher quality fruit.

The winemaker I spoke to admitted that he found no difference in quality between his guyot and pergola trained vines in neighbouring vineyards. He may well do so in future however because the research is showing that pergola is more likely to be the better training system with the current and ongoing change in the climate.

Temperatures have increased by 1.5° in 70 years and there has been a trend since the 1990's of noticeable heat spikes not known 50 years ago and the grape growing cycle has reduced by 15 days. The pergola is beneficial in that it can ensure more shade, which means a cooler, therefore slower, grape ripening, which in turn retains acidity and aroma in the grape. The temperature can be lower in the shade by as much as 4-5°. Certainly on the plains pergola would be the recommended form of training.

Soave soils © Laura Clay 2017

The hillside vineyards are cooler so there is less need for the pergola but on the other hand, mechanisation on steep slopes is more difficult to manage.

Importantly, and topically for 2017, pergola is more resistant to spring frosts. 85% of vineyards in Soave are pergola trained and based on the official research, and that being quietly done by individually producers, it seems Garganega does better with pergola training.

Thank goodness I can now pronounce Garganega because I have fallen a bit in love with it whichever way it has been trained; lighter, elegant and more aromatic by pergola, weightier, riper with age potential by guyot.

Pergola training © Laura Clay 2017

And here's another thing I learned. Garganega can age, you don't have to drink it within a couple of years. In fact Sarah Abbott says 'Good quality Garganega sulks when it is young and just been bottled', and needs time to balance out.

One of my favourite wines of the trip was Coffele Soave Doc Classico Ca' Visco 2002 – there was no oak treatment but the wine had developed a formidable texture; the aromas were still expressive, the acidity still impactful, a wine which, like so many Soave wines, might be described as gourmand. The latest vintage of the same wine was also delicious. And Signor Coffele won me over, too.

Signor Coffele © Laura Clay 2017

Garganega is by far and away the most important grape of the region and the wines produced from it vary by area due to the soil type; to the training; to the blend of other grapes; to the oak treatment; to the pre-sale ageing. There is sparkling – traditional method 100% Trebbiano di Soave was an unexpected joy – and there is, of course, Recioto.

The variety of styles, and perhaps more particularly of price points, shows a real confidence and aspiration in the DOC. It has an identity, helped by its biggest co-operative, Cantina di Soave which accounts for 48% of the production, it needs now to shout about it from the Soave castle battlements. Soave may be one of Italy's oldest and most respected white wines, but today it couldn't be more cool.

Photos & text © Laura Clay 2017
For more information: http://www.ilsoave.com/en/
http://www.ilsoave.com/en/summer-of-soave-italys-most-stylish-white-wine-is-coming-to-london/

Sweeties & Taste Buds

by
Phil Cooke

Some people who are keen on wine do not like sweeties, and I often wondered exactly why this might be. Giving wine courses enabled me to discover the answer.

When I give a wine course the first week of the first term is always devoted to How To Taste. I explain that there are two components: sensations received via the tongue, and smells, via sensors that detect vapours entering via the nostrils or from the mouth. And to give practice I arrive equipped with some heavily-sugared water, lemon juice, and some bitters.

A key experiment is to add sweetness to the very sour until it tastes refreshing. Of course everyone already knew about sweet and sour, but few have actually done this type of experiment before.

I will follow up by showing a slide that shows how a sweet wine, just like Coca Cola, has lots of sugar and lots of acid, with a fine balance, leading to a saliva producing combination. Something we call refreshing.

After the theory, we taste wines and the last wine will always be a sweetie. And as experienced wine educators will know, many will suddenly find such a wine surprisingly delicious. But occasionally there is someone who hates it. When his happens I discuss with them why this was. "Much too sweet", they will say. "And do you like Coke?" would be my follow up question. Invariably the answer is a firm "No".

The first time this happened I grabbed the bottle of lemon juice, and dribbled some into the wine, and asked them to re-taste it. Two or three dribbles later their face lit up, wonderful they said. Over the years the situation has repeated itself.

As someone with a scientific background I automatically think of there being a sensitivity coefficient that describes the ability of sugar to overcome acidity. At small concentrations, a small difference in the coefficient will not be noticeable. But when, as in a sweetie, both sugar and acid concentrations are unusually large, even a small difference in sensitivity will lead to a big difference in taste.

In summary, if someone does not like Coca Cola, they probably will not like a sweetie!


DOMAINE ✦ EVREMOND
Digging Evremond
Seating on the top deck

Digging Evremond:
Taittinger's first steps on English soil

by

Laura Clay & Heather Dougherty

Wine educators don't normally get their hands dirty - either literally or metaphorically – yet we both found ourselves scrabbling around in the mud on a cool, wet Wednesday in May.

The cause was the first planting of Champagne Taittinger's English wine venture in Kent. In a masterful bit of PR, 250 journalists, educators and other members of the wine trade, as well as fellow wine producers now literally have a stake in England's newest vineyard, as they were all given the chance to plant their own vine.

All those who took part will surely take a keen interest in the vineyard's fortunes in the coming years and will doubtless want to buy a bottle of the resulting wine (estimated in 2023 or thereabouts).

Why Evremond?

Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger, president of family-owned Champagne Taittinger, together with its UK agent, Hatch Mansfield, and friends, have bought and prepared 20 hectares of land in Chilham, Kent, planting 100,000 vines with the aim of producing around 300,000 bottles of quality sparkling wine to boost an already buzzing English wine scene.

The estate is named for Charles de Saint-Evremond, a Frenchman who, following his exile to England in order to avoid arrest under Louis XIV, found favour with the English Charles II, who made him Governor of Duck Island in St James' Park. Saint-Evremond was known as a writer and literary critic and apparently also as a lover of the wines of Champagne. He is buried in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

This is not the Taittinger family's first connection with England. When Mayor of Reims, Champagne's capital, Pierre-Emmanuel's father oversaw the twinning of his city with that of Canterbury. There is clearly a strong tie with Blighty, strengthened no doubt by, as Pierre-Emmanuel describes, the ideal 'combination of chalk soils, climate and topography of our site.' And it was truly heartening to witness the entente-cordiale between him and his close friend, Patrick McGrath MW, MD of Hatch Mansfield.

Despite 80 years of wine-making family history, Pierre-Emmanuel, with his wife and daughter (pictured right), paid tribute to English sparkling wine. A number of Kent-based producers were present on the day with their wines available to taste, including well-established names like Chapel Down and Gusbourne alongside newer producers such as Westwell and Simpsons Wine Estate.

There was no sense of superiority – on either side – but a wealth of collaboration for the continued development of English wine. Pierre-Emmanuel talked of French vines in English soil; of Taittinger's French viticultural team working with England's leading viticulturist, Stephen Skelton MW; of the German operator of the German made planting machine; 'Brexit does not exist in our heart', he said. He expects, however, not to export to France for the very good reason that the wine will all be drunk here. Lucky us.

The initial 20 hectare plot will be planted to about 50% Pinot Noir, 36% Chardonnay and the remainder to Pinot Meunier, with a further 10 hectares to follow.

We both hope to raise a glass of Domaine Evremond in the years ahead in memory and celebration of that day in a muddy field in Kent.


CHAMPAGNE
TAITTINGER
à Reims
DOMAINE • EVREMOND
OFFICIAL PLANTING
by
PIERRE-EMMANUEL TAITTINGER
3RD MAY 2017
CHILHAM
Pinot Noir


CHAMPAGNE
TAITTINGER
à Reims

Alentejo

by

Rosie Bainbridge

I've just returned from a tour to this remarkable wine region in Portugal. It was completely unknown to me and took quite a few weeks to organise for my group, but what a surprise: the hospitality, the scenery, historic centres, ancient architecture, and wineries; from state of the art to traditional, from stainless steel to stone lagares, not to mention the host of native grape varieties with un-pronounceable names (Portugal has the 2nd largest number of indigenous varieties not found elsewhere!!) It was an eye-opening, wonderful tour.

It was a five day trip with 10 planned visits. Starting in Lisbon we crossed the River Tagus (Rio Tejo), stopping en route in Setubal, then continuing to Evora and Beja in the Alentejo. Included were small family vineyards as well as world class producers, such as João Portugal Ramos, Esporão (David Baverstock on hand to answer questions) Cartuxa and Herdade do Rocim with a fantastic art collection. All had organised tour programs, and it's hard to choose which came out on top but here are some that were especially interesting.

First stop in the Setubal Peninsular was the historic Quinta da Bacalhôa Palace, built in 1480. Many of the original features and decorative tiles remain, although the building spent many years in disrepair. It was refurbished in the 1930s, and now has a full eno-tourism program.

The vines spread out from the ornamental gardens with views of distant Lisbon. Our tasting began with Cova da Ursa, a Chardonnay grown nearby, with aromas of oak, pineapple and savoury notes, followed by Quinta do Carmo Tinto, full bodied, rich and smooth; and finally the one we were waiting for - Moscatel de Setúbal 2014 with 2 years of ageing, a luscious, golden, complex wine, full of dried fruit aromas, barley sugar, caramel....

Above & below: Bacalhoa Palace and Estate © Rosie Bainbridge 2017

© Rosie Bainbridge 2017

Horse & carriage awaiting at Quinta da Invejosa

Close by in DOC Palmela we were welcomed by our guide Ana at Filipe Palhoça's Quinta da Invejosa, who'd also arranged a horse and carriage ride for us through the vineyards. It was extremely hot and dusty, and all the more welcome was the tasting in the cool of the winery.

The estate began with cellar-door sales of popular bag-in-the-box wines. Since the late 1980s they have re-branded, and are now producing and bottling quality wines. Our tour included the winery, bottling and ageing cellar with 'hybrid' barrels – a combination of American oak staves and French oak heads. We tasted a range of local grape varieties leading with racy Arinto and Castelão rosé, Touriga Nacional 'bag-in-the-box' wine to compare!! And finally premium Quinta da Invejosa Reserva, old vine Castelão from the best plots. This deep ruby-coloured wine exuded plum and berry fruits, with hints of game. It will age, but drank fine alongside the 'black pork' sausage and cheese offered.

Évora, a World Heritage site, was our stop-over for a few nights. Steeped in history, the only way to see it in a short period of time was with a local tourist office guide. João Portugal Ramos, perhaps one of the most famous Portuguese wine makers, was nearby. From his early career as a wine consultant he has built up a very successful wine business in Alentejo – where we toured and enjoyed their 'TAPAS'ing' experience of regional dishes and Marquês de Borba wines. The white DOC Alentejo was a blend of Arinto, Antão Vaz and Viognier; the red, Alicante Bouschet, Trincadeira and Touriga Nacional, a smooth, deeply coloured wine, full-bodied with hints of forest fruit and perfect with the tapas.

One of the most interesting visits was to Adega Cartuxa, 2km from the centre of Évora. It is a non-profit-making winery run by the Eugénio de Almeida Foundation, with programs to regenerate and restore Évora, investing in research, education and cultural projects. It was originally a monastery dating back to 1580, where Carthusian monks lived a life of solitude and prayer.

During our late afternoon tour we passed many sculptures and other artefacts and references to the religious heritage of the estate; we talked in hushed tones, but gained much from our guide Cristina, especially about the charitable work of Cartuxa and their range of premium wines and olive oils.

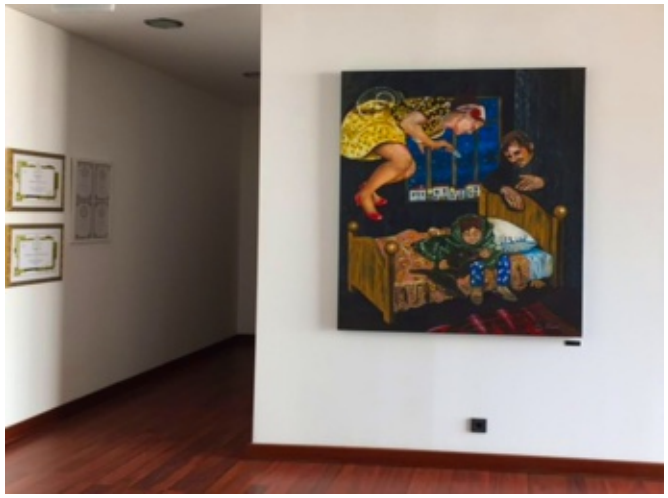
Later, seated around a vast wooden table in the refectory, we sampled wines and 3 types of olive oil from the estate. Again we tasted traditional varieties - white wines from Antão Vaz and Arinto, and an elegant Cartuxa Tinto from hand-harvested Alicante Bouschet and Aragonez, fermented in steel vats, and matured in new French barrels for 15 months - a distinctive wine, complex with dark fruit and a long after taste and a wine we all wanted to linger over.

That evening, dining at the Foundation's new venture - Cartuxa Enoteca we drank (among other wines) their traditionally-made Espumante Rosé brut – a glorious, pink fizz, sharp, with persistent bubbles and soft red fruit. All in all, a perfect range, sampled in historic settings.

Above & below: Adega Cartuxa © Rosie Bainbridge 2017

Reguengos de Monsaraz is the largest of the Alentejo sub-regions. Adega José de Sousa, located in the picturesque town centre, is part of the Fonseca family holdings that began six generations ago. Here we were met by Paulo Amaral, one of the winemakers who, in perfect English, explained the workings of the winery, starting with the ultra-modern part and saving the best, most interesting to last – the lagares and the cool underground cellar where 114 amphorae pots are used to ferment and age wine as in Roman times. The wines were remarkable too, notably, the red José de Sousa 2015, a blend of Trincadeira, Aragonez and Grand Noir – a big, bold, well-structured wine with sumptuous berry fruit, spice and earthiness.

Lagares and wines ageing in amphorae at Adega José de Sousa © Rosie Bainbridge 2017



Herdade do Rocim entrance hall © Rosie Bainbridge 2017

Some stunning, modern wineries have been built in recent times, situated in the rural countryside. Herdade do Rocim is one. A designer winery, opened in 2007 with state-of-the-art equipment alongside modern eye-catching artworks dotted along walls, a terrace with fine views of miles around, and range of visitor programs, but also in keeping with tradition, marble lagares and 1,000 litre amphorae pots.

Our tasting of 6 wines compared traditional with modern. The modern gained most votes – the clay allowed more oxidation resulting in less fruit.

Herdade do Rocim 1,000 litre amphorae © Rosie Bainbridge 2017

Ribafreixo wines at Herdade do Moinho Branco ('White Mill') is another new wave winery, situated at the gateway to Vidigueira, Alentejo's most southerly sub-zone, perhaps surprisingly noted for quality white wines; this is due to the Serra do Mendro range which curbs the summer heat and increases rainfall.

The estate was created from a group of 28 plots of abandoned agricultural land, by South African Mário Pinheiro and Portuguese Nuno Bicó. In 2012 the state-of-the-art winery was built. Their wines (60% white) have gained much acclaim, with varieties such as Antão Vaz, Arinto, Verdelho, Síria, Alvarinho and small quantities of Chenin Blanc!! There were reds too from Alicante Bouschet and Touriga Nacional.

The winery can handle 1,500,000 bottles per year; with high-tech equipment and sustainable regimes, it produces highly distinctive wines.

Ribafreixo - hi-tech winery© Rosie Bainbridge 2017

The Ribafreixo estate has an excellent reputation for enotourism winning the Best Wine Tourism award in 2015. Our tour ended in the gourmet restaurant, which also attracts many locals at lunch time, where we tasted wines and gourmet tapas!!

The Ribafreixo dining experience © Rosie Bainbridge 2017

Vines, cork trees, forest and agricultural land makes the Alentejo region distinctive. With ancient walled towns, monuments and now with so many fine wineries offering tours, dining and sometimes rooms, it's a great place to visit.

The hospitality we were shown was un-rivalled; meals from local produce (meat, vegetables, bread, olive oil, pastries) and superb wines - I'm already gearing up for another visit.

Photos & text © Rosie Bainbridge 2017

Volcanic Wines: Salt, Grit and Power by John Szabo MS

Review by Phil Cooke

The sight of a reference to a recent IMW Tasting of Volcanic Wines triggered me into investigating the subject. I rapidly became intrigued. As wine educators are aware, Italy has some grape varieties native to volcanic slopes. And having managed to taste some mature Aglianico wines, I know they can be just as good as a mature classic.

But to discover that there are many vineyards with volcanic soils, way outside what is regarded as a volcanic region, was a new insight. That such vineyards often produce special wines from non-volcanic grape varieties, was a trigger to discover more. So I jumped at the chance to give a tasting on Volcanic Wines.

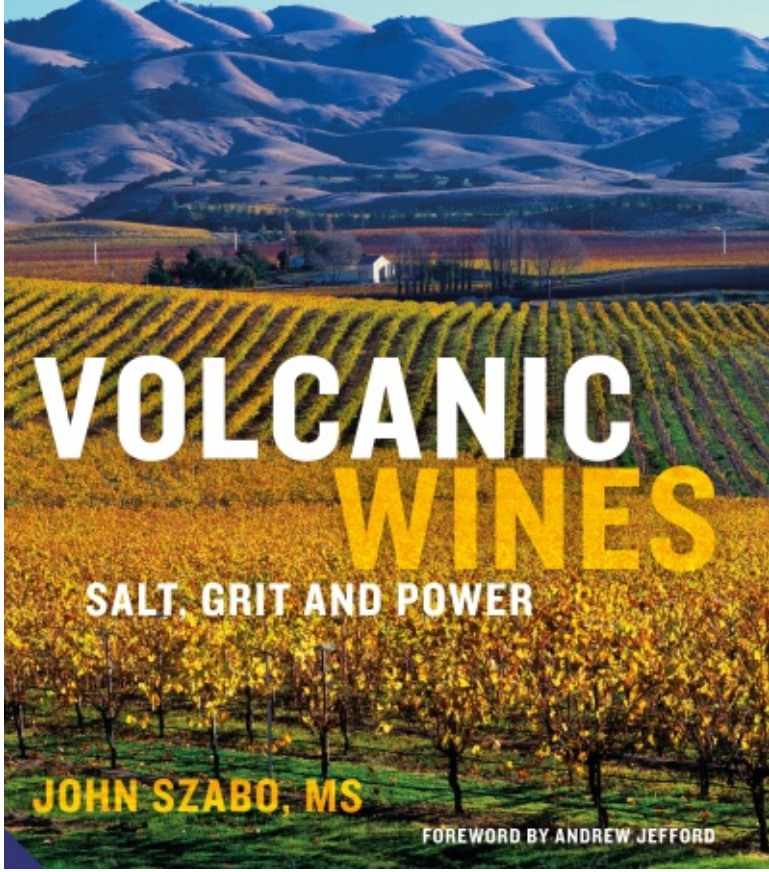
Research was slow until I discovered I could get a new book titled Volcanic Wines, by John Szabo MS. He is a Canadian sommelier who has developed a special interest in the subject. The first section is an excellent overview on the part played by volcanoes in geological history and how they arise on the fault lines created by shifting tectonic plates. It is followed by 8 chapters on major wine areas with volcanic vineyards. Italy is one, but Chile, the Pacific North-West, Northern California, Hungary, Alsace and Germany also feature. And as Andrew Jefford remarks in the foreword, the author has been assiduous in travelling through these wine regions. In consequence, the book includes overviews of many wineries that have volcanic vineyards. This makes the book a valuable resource for anyone wanting to source volcanic wines.

A particularly interesting observation in the book is that the acreage of prestigious vineyards with volcanic soils is several times larger than might be expected based on the percentage of volcanic soils worldwide. Sometimes a well-known wine region is split by a fault line, e.g. Soave. Sometimes, as in Alsace, there is a scattering of small volcanic vineyards. Interestingly one of the star wines in my volcanic tasting was a modestly priced Soave.

Eventually I assembled 4 bottles of each of 8 wines for a tasting for the SCR Wine Society at Bath University. Often 3 bottles are enough, and the 4th flight goes into the SCR cellar. In the event the tasting was oversubscribed at over 50 members, and a 9th wine was added.

The feedback I received was that many had come because they found the title intriguing. And my decision to give some geological background was bang on. So my worries that the title of 'Volcanic Wines' was a bit specialised was completely unfounded. Moreover, the wines were much appreciated.

In Googling the topic one comes across discussions on whether volcanic wines have any similarity in taste, and one recurring suggestion is minerality. There is also a lot of discussion about the use of minerality as a tasting term. Many, like me, do not use the term because we have yet to hear a definition that seems to make sense.



At the recent AGM of the AWE I took the opportunity to discuss the use of minerality with several members. Most, when pressed, do not properly understand what it means: one suggested wet stones, and one who did not know what it meant also confessed to using the term. So it's still a mystery tasting attribute.

At the end of my tasting of 9 volcanic wines, I was fully aware that the wines were above average for their grape variety and price point. But when I came to ask myself if I could identify anything in common there was a tentative yes, but no words to describe it! My best attempt is that all the wines had something in the taste that many wines do not have. And I do mean taste, something on the

tongue, and not aroma. And whilst it is much more pronounced in whites, it is still discernible in the reds.

Here is a possible hypothesis. If one makes a soup it has to be tasted to see if it is correctly seasoned. With practice one can take a taste and decide if there is enough salt. If not, salt is added. You do this not because one cannot taste salt, but because something is missing.

So here is the possible connection, and justification for using the word minerality as linking volcanic wines. The best white wines always seem to have something subtle that is missing in lesser wines. But whatever it is, it's difficult to describe, and almost subliminal. Feedback from members who get around to tasting a flight of volcanic wines will be appreciated.

Summary. 'Volcanic wines' is a new theme for a wine tasting. From my limited experience it's a good title, and I shall certainly by doing more volcanic tastings. But do allow yourself some research time. And allow more than normal time for sourcing the wines. Buying the book by John Szabo MS is a good starting point.

Volcanic Wines by John Szabo. Published by Jacqui Small, an imprint of The Quarto Group (£30). Out now.

The Modern History of Italian Wine - Walter Filiputti (editor)

Review by Paul Howard

There has been a revolution in the quality and availability of Italian wines that tentatively began in the '60s and '70s and continues unabated. What was unclear until this book were the cumulative reasons behind it, and how their interplay led to the transformation of Italian wine. Hence, the Modern History of Italian Wine tells this story.

Today, it is hard to believe that Italian wine was such a backwards industry just a short time ago; without technology, investment or marketing. Mostly, winegrowing was still peasant share-cropping with no incentive to improve. There were a few outstanding wines, but these were known only by insiders and were not on the international stage. They were lost, in a vast sea of mediocrity. Economically, Italian wine was in crisis.

I recall working for Marks and Spencer's in the mid-Eighties. Even then, the only Italian wine they stocked in most of their stores were one-litre bottles of "Italian Red" table wine. There was no clue to the grapes used or the region of production. It was awful; the only merit was that it was dirt cheap. At least it came in a glass bottle rather than a plastic one.

At most, we knew (and avoided) bad examples of Lambrusco, Asti and Soave. We took those to parties and then drank beer. Chianti still came dressed in fiaschi, best used for table lamps. Good wine was French; it always had been and, at that time, looked like it always would be. Even the Italians thought that.

An example: The first edition of the Wine Atlas by Hugh Johnson in 1971 lumped Italy into a very short chapter entitled "Southern and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean." Meanwhile, France got 72 pages for itself, with details of every region. That wasn't because of blindness; it was because there was nothing to say. Fast forward to the present. The 6th Edition devotes 37 pages to Italy.

The journey to excellence has many strands. Examples include the discovery of local specificity and terroir - the sense of place. Now there are regulations on quality and frequent revisions to DOC, DOCG and IGT rules. There is increasing use of local (and rare) indigenous grapes as well as the international varieties.

The adoption of innovation and technology in vineyards and wineries was vital, and often influenced by the New World. The development of skills, not just in winemaking, but in business, risk-taking and competition was needed. The result has been a massive uplift in quality and worldwide recognition.

The finest wines of Italy can now achieve stratospheric prices, and some have become "investment grade." Many Italian wines are no longer cheap. They have also created new categories, such as Pinot Grigio and Prosecco.

Not every wine is good quality, but many now sit easily alongside the world's best.

It's perhaps easy to look back on these developments with hindsight and declare them obvious. That's especially so if you're sitting down in the armchair with a glass of Amarone. But the journey from plonk to world-renowned excellence must have been long and arduous. The path can't have been clear at the time. Indeed, Angelo Gaja, the Barbaresco-meister, is quoted as saying, "to reach paradise, Italian wine had to pass through Hell."

So this book fills the gap between what was and what is, comprehensively and arguably for the first time. It describes this journey in all its intricate twists and turns. In doing so, it tells a compelling story. It melds the experience of different producers and different regions into a coherent whole. With so many interwoven factors, that's no mean feat.

The book divides into sections with clear timelines. It makes navigation easy, and each one has articles written by guest experts. Themes include innovation, oenology, research and science, international markets, heritage, food, sustainability, tourism and marketing. There's an excellent review of the history of dreaded regulation and its usurpers and how it has helped and sometimes hindered developments.

These forces have together created a virtuous circle where the winegrowers are the visionaries and the engine drivers. The farmers became the entrepreneurs.
The section on geography is perhaps the heart of the book, a who's who of two hundred of the finest wineries grouped by region, charting their rise and influence decade by decade. If you have favourites, it's likely they will be there.

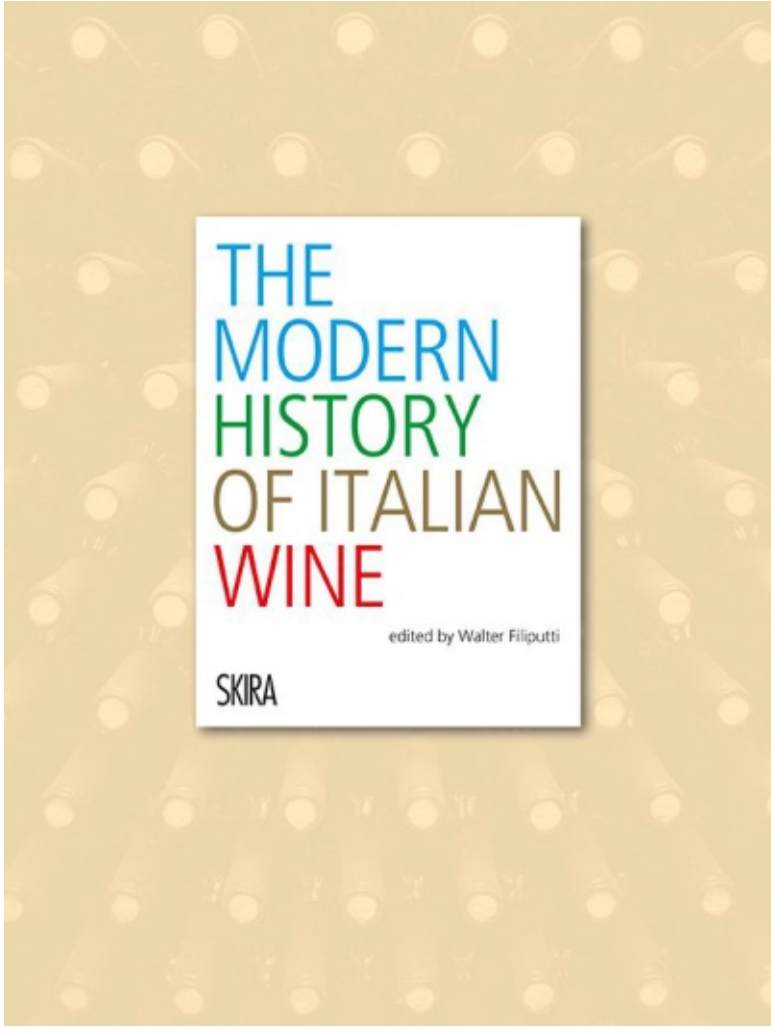
Most of the big themes are here too, though I'm disappointed that Franciacorta, (Italy's only sparkling wine region that can rival Champagne), seems largely overlooked - a plea for more depth in the next edition. It may only be small, but for me, it encapsulates the revolution in microcosm.

I was particularly pleased to see Burton Anderson, (my Italian wine-writing hero, often imitated, never surpassed) credited as the first to shine a light on Italian wines. Nowadays, Italian wine has no lack of wine-writing friends (erm, including me), yet once it had none.

Indeed, the revolution has become a permanent one, as winegrowers and regions continually strive to improve. Even Italian wine labels now look penned by Bertone or Pininfarina. Think of the brio of the Ferrari 488, rather than a rusty Alfa Arna.

The book concludes with an excellent section on Italian winery architecture and design. Perhaps this is the boldest statement of success, ambition and the winegrowers philosophy. They're the new Secular Cathedrals writ large.

The Italians are hardly alone in transforming their wines. Today, it's going on all over the world. In Europe, the Languedoc, Spain and Portugal are replicating this model. Not that long ago, Australian and New Zealand (and English?) wines were the butts of a joke.



Château Chunder is no more. Great wine is everywhere, so the only way to compete is to go on improving.

What's next for Italian transformation that could go in the second edition of this history? Well, I'd love to see clearly defined Grand Cru and Premier Cru vineyards in a similar model to Burgundy in the classic regions of Piemonte, Tuscany and the Veneto. That will probably never be politically feasible.

I would, however, like a section on Italian women in wine though. No longer are they strangers in a man's world and indeed are some of the best winegrowers.

Perhaps most obviously, climate change is the big issue that will affect every region and responses are emerging. For example, in Franciacorta, a return to Pergola training and the inclusion of the Erbamat grape are conscious innovations. How Italy deals with climate change will be critical. In this, they are not alone.

And the greatest Italian wine? There's plenty of room for debate, but I believe it's Tignanello. It didn't just give Chianti a kick-start, it redefined what Italian wine could be.

The Modern History of Italian Wine is a beautifully produced hardback, with good English translation, thick white paper and colour photography throughout. It's a pleasure to read and to learn and has just won 1st Prize "Best in the World" in the Gourmand World Wine Awards European wine book of the year 2017. And quite right too!

The Modern History of Italian Wine, Edited by Walter Filiputti. English Translation, 1st Edition, Hardback. Published by SKIRA Editore, 500 pages. ISBN 978-88-572-2623-1
£27.30 at Amazon

Wine Review

by
Patricia Stefanowicz MW

2016 Bellingham The Bernard Series Old Vine Chenin Blanc, Wine of Coastal Origin, South Africa, 14.0% abv. £11.99 (Majestic)

Pale lime-green hue; tropical fruits with hints of honey and spice on the nose; ripe pear and lemon zest palate supported by bracing acidity, honeysuckle accent and gentle kiss of oak, medium body, long finish. Lovely, well-balanced wine. 40 year-old vines, hand-harvested, fermented with indigenous yeasts, aged in used French oak barrels.

Member News

New Council member
Gilbert Winfield was voting in as Council member at the AGM

Honorary Members
We are pleased to welcome the following as Honorary Members, as voted in at the AGM: Lena Inger; Christopher Fielden.

New email address
Anthony Stockbridge has a new email address:
Email: antstock@aol.com

Corporate member nominees
We are pleased to welcome:
WSET - Greg Cox
Plumpton College - Andrew Atkinson

AWE Inspiring News

This is the newsletter of the Association of Wine Educators. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Association.

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