

## TASTING NOTES

**XX CLUB**

SESSION 115.6

6<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024

### SIMPSON'S RABBIT HOLE PINOT NOIR 2022

Made from 100% Pinot Noir grown in vineyards yielding 35 hectolitres/hectare located at Barham, which is close to Canterbury in Kent, is the best English Pinot Noir Wine I have tasted to date. The Clones used for the wine are Burgundian, the "home" of Pinot Noir, and are the low yielding (for maximum concentration) Clone 115 (85%) and 777 (15%), with the grapes being hand picked during the 2022 harvest. Once the stainless steel fermentation tank is inoculated, the grapes are pumped over, once a day, for two weeks, however a small proportion is vinified by the more traditional pipéage, which involves punching down the cap, by which means more Tannins are extracted, but this shouldn't be overused as the resulting wine will show an astringent edge.



Rabbit Hole Pinot  
Noir 2022

Once the primary fermentation is complete, the wine is drained off its skins into two year old French oak barrels ready for the all important Malolactic fermentation, and at Simpson's Winery, Wine makers Den'e and Adrian use Bacteria rather than Yeast. The Bacterium used for this wine is called Oenococcus Oeni. There are a number of technical advantages to doing this. After a further four month barrel ageing, the wine is lightly filtered and was bottled in Spring 2023 allowing a year in bottle prior to release. The use of two year old French barrels matters because new oak flavour is not, particularly, desirable or wanted in what is a relatively light wine.

The result is a wine exuding a true sense of place, a single vineyard, which has been created from fruit specifically selected for its maturity and concentration. This wine has a wonderful ruby/garnet hue displaying perfumed damson with notes of wild strawberry and sweet spice aromas. On the palate there is ripe red cherry, with hints of violet and mocha, perfectly balanced with an elegant structure of soft, caressing tannins. However, no Tasting Notes of my creation would be adequately comprehensively complete without the Chemistry !

Alcohol: 13% Vol.

Residual Sugar: 1.1 grams/Litre.

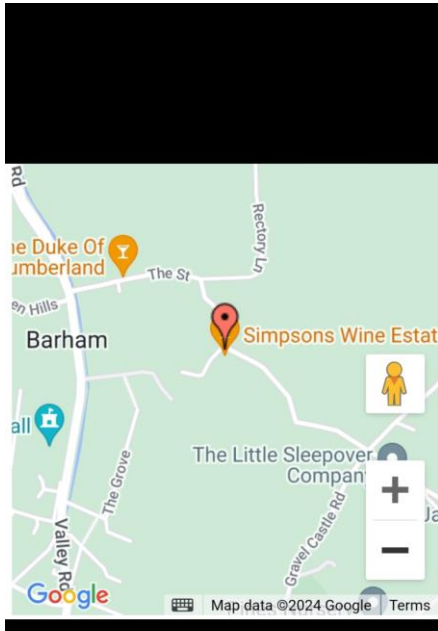
pH: 3.26.

Total Acidity: 4grams/Litre H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>. 6.1grams/Litre Tartaric Acid.

The European convention is to express Total Acidity in grams/Litre of Sulphuric Acid (H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>), but in South Africa Total Acidity is expressed as grams/Litre of Tartaric Acid. Both expressions represent exactly the same amount of Total Acidity.

The notes of Cherry are, of course, due to the presence of Cyanhydrin Benzaldehyde.  
Closure: Cork- which allows for laying down and cellar maturation. £ 28 75cL

### SIMPSON'S GRAVEL CASTLE CHARDONNAY 2022



Gravel Castle  
Chardonnay 2022

This wine is made from 100% Chardonnay harvested from two vineyards called Roman Road and Railway Hill, the latter having been a railway junction, which is actually on a hill, visible from the vineyard where the Pinot Noir vines are located. It derives its name from the nearest road which, as you can see from the map, is Gravel Castle Road.

The vines are, once again, Burgundian Clones, this time Clones 96 and 548. The grapes

are hand picked before being *gently* pressed and the juice cold settled for 24 hours. Once racked, the juice was inoculated with aromatic yeasts. The wine then undergoes a full Malolactic fermentation in order to soften the acidity and increase mouthfeel. Like the Pinot Noir the Winemakers have used the same process, not using yeast.

The wine is unoaked (which is quite common with Chardonnay Wines) but spends extended time on the Lees to give it a yeasty, bready character, in lieu of Oak, to support the fruit, to give savoury notes and ample texture to the crisp citrus and stone fruit flavours. It was aged on fine yeast Lees prior to bottling in the spring of 2023. Consequently it displays delicate aromas of white melon and orange blossom, with superb mouth-watering minerality, citrus peel, quince and fresh green apple flavours with a lingering, textured palate.

Yield: 60 hectolitres/hectare.

Alcohol: 12.5%

Residual Sugar: 1gram/Litre.

pH:3.31

Total Acidity: 4.44grams/Litre H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> 7.1 grams/Litre Tartaric Acid.

Closure: Screw Cap

£18.50

## GRAND NEUVE MONBAZILLAC 2020

This Gold Medal Award winning wine originates from Monbazillac, a small town south of Bergerac in the Dordogne region of France which has a long history of producing excellent quality sweet wines. This example is a sweet, luscious and crisp dessert wine from the Périgord region of South West France.

Located in Pomport near Bergerac, in the heart of the Périgord, Domaine de Grange Neuve has been a family concern for five generations and it has grown from a small farm with just 4 hectares of vines in 1898 to a vineyard of 70 hectares today. It is run by Anthony Castaing and his wife, Eglantine who are dedicated to making wine that respects tradition whilst not neglecting technological advances, both in the cultivation of the vines and in the winemaking techniques.



The vineyard comprises 26 hectares of red grape vines (Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon) and 44 hectares of white grape varieties (Sémillon, Muscadelle and Sauvignon Blanc), the average age of which is 25 years.

The wines produced bear similarities with the wines of Sauternes which is not too far away both with regard to the grape varieties used and the way the wines are made, but don't on the whole carry the same price tag!.

This wine is made from 80% Sémillon with a little Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle (percentages vary) but all the grapes are hand harvested at a late stage of maturity, in three successive "trials" to ensure that only the most mature grapes are picked. The grapes therefore have a bit more Glycerol than otherwise. After fermentation, the wine is matured for 24 months.

The result is a fabulous, sweet and luscious wine with a particularly fresh nose capable of displaying classic Botrytis Marmalade and ripe nectarine. The flavours on the palate are rich and nicely honeyed (the honey, of course, is due to Phenylethyl Acid), with a finishing twist of bitter orange. It has a good backbone of fine acidity leading to a pleasantly clean finish.

Alcohol: 12.5%

£ 12.90    50cL

## KROHN 2017 LATE BOTTLED VINTAGE PORT



Since 2013 Krohn has been part of the Fladgate partnership- alongside Taylor's, Fonseca and Croft. Wiese and Krohn was founded in 1865 by two Norwegians, Theodor Wiese and Dankert Krohn, in their early years shipping to Scandanavia and Germany.

In the century and a half since then, Krohn has built up an outstanding reputation. Much of their success is due to the immensely high quality of their vineyards- the magical, and unbeatable, combination of terroir, locality, aspect, incline and low yielding vines. Their Quinto do

RetiroNova Estate in Sarzedinho which is in the

Rio Torto Valley is all Grade A vineyard, and where vinification takes place.

I have selected this Port, from the 2017 Vintage which is one of the highest rated vintages of the last 20 years (98 points, Wine Spectator-unusually declared, back to back, with the 2016 vintage (96 points)) and only equalled by the 2011 and 2007 vintages. It is an LBV, but the bottle I drank had sediment, so preferably decant it. 2017 was a warm, dry summer with a long ripening period giving wines of great structure and ageability, especially as the Winemaker, in this case is none other than David Guimaraens.

Grapes are sourced from Quinta do Retiro Nova and neighbouring Estates. The blend is, as you might expect, Touriga Nacional, Touriga Francesca and Tinta Barroca- notably Tinta Roriz is absent. Tinta Roriz is the same as Tempranillo, the Roija grape. Touriga Nacional is dominant, here. After partial fermentation and subsequent fortification, the wine is barrel aged for a further 4-6 years before bottling.

It is a lovely deep ruby in colour with spicy black fruit aromas.

The palate has obvious and vibrant plumb and blackberry characters layered with even more spice, fresh acidity and (to my palate) particularly firm tannins, so it has a full and rich style with quite impressive length.

Alcohol: 20%

£ 18.90 75cL

## MEET THE SIMPSONS (the real ones !)

Owners, Charles and Ruth Simpson planted their first 10 hectares of Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier and Pinot Noir on their Estate near Canterbury in 2014. The vineyard sites occupy glorious positions on the sunny, sheltered slopes of North Downs of Kent.



In September 2016, Oz Clarke, the renowned Wine Expert and Wine writer, opened the custom-created Winery, located within walking distance of the vineyard sites and equidistant between them.

That is true- I have been there.

The proximity of the Winery to the vines is critical to the creation of top-flight sparkling and still wines. At Simpson's Wine Estate the Winemaking Methods have been carefully chosen so as to promote the purest expression of the fruit and their Kentish Terroir, with as little intervention as possible. As winemakers in the most dynamic wine region of Southern England, unhampered by the weight of Old World Tradition, Charles and Ruth believe that they are able to take a fresher approach to the craft, handpicking from both time-honed

traditions and the latest and most modern Technology.

Oz Clarke was brought up in the next village to Barham, so was an obvious choice to open the Winery- as a child he used to play in the fields that are, now, vineyards.

Charles and Ruth bought Domaine Sainte Rose in 2002, running it, successfully, for many years, before setting their sights on buying land, back



in England, that now comprises Simpson's Wine Estate. This now extends over 30 hectares and with no bought in grapes all of the production is under their control. Elham Valley is in the North Downs of Kent, between Canterbury and Dover.

The Estate is on gently South Facing slopes with chalk 30cm below the surface, surrounded by woods which make a warm pocket around the vines.

As regards Terroir, Chalk has a unique ability to be free draining, and to absorb a lot of water, so the vine's roots don't get waterlogged, but the finest roots always have access to water, even in the driest summers. In addition, there is at least some moderating influence of the Sea, which is, roughly, eight miles away, on the coast. This helps even out the harshness of the winter and the heat of the summer- a feature absent in Champagne.

**Although Southern England is around half a degree Celsius cooler than** the Champagne Region of France, the Autumns tend to be warmer.

The Roman Road Vineyard, which is named after the route that the Roman Soldiers took across Kent (roughly equivalent to the A2, today) and the Railway Hill Vineyard gets its name from the (long gone) Canterbury to Folkestone Light Railway.

These vineyards are on a chalk bed that runs across Kent, from the Sussex Downs, South of Canterbury and under the English Channel (The White Cliffs of Dover), and across into the Champagne Region of France. There are also moderate breezes that traverse the Elham Valley that keep the vines healthy (air movement helps prevent both rot and mildew, as well as helping to prevent "frost pockets" in winter).

Personally, I can't think of a better example to describe "Terroir".

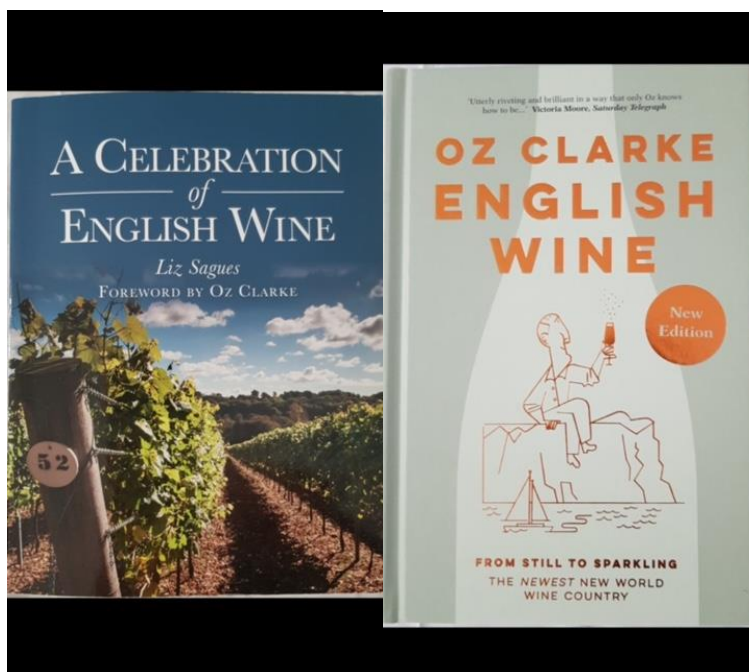
### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Firstly to Phil and Debbie at Noble Green Wines of Hampton Hill for sourcing all the wines, especially for me.

Secondly, to Molly at Simpson's Wine Estate for getting in touch with the Winemakers, thereby providing me with the much needed Technical Details.

Lastly, but by no means least, Kath Hayden for helping to "configure" my Tasting Notes.

## FURTHER READING:



Volatile compounds and corresponding odours	
Ethyl acetate	Pricked wine, volatile wine
Isomyl acetate	Banana, pear drop
Phenylethyl acetate	Tea rose
Phenylethyl acid	Honey
Acetoin	Almonds
Phenylethyl alcohol	Rose
Anisaldehyde	Hawthorn, may blossom
Benzoic aldehyde	Bitter almonds, nut kernel
Cinnamic aldehyde	Cinnamon
Phenylethyl aldehyde	Hyacinth
Phenylpropionic aldehyde	Lilac
Cyanhydrin benzaldehyde	Cherry
Ethyl caprylate, apyrate, caproate	'Fatty acids', soap, candle wax
Diacetyl	Rose
Ceraniol	Liquorice
Glycyrrhizin	Geranium
Hexanediol	Grass
Hexanol, hexanal	Iris
Itone	Rosewood
Linalol	Camphor
Linalol oxides	Mown hay
Paratolylmethyl ketone	Acacia, heliotrope
Piperonal	Peach
Undecalactone	Butter, hazel nut
Vanilla	Vanilla