

THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 116 MEETING 6 WINE NOTES

The Wine Society- Alsace

Continuing our journey around France now we come to the region of Alsace. Unusual for France in that the labelling is varietal: most wine is white - Riesling, Pinot Gris (previously Tokay-Pinot-Gris- a name now banned on account of the EU, although our Brexit freedoms have yet to involve a return to the historic name) Pinot Blanc, Muscat, Sylvaner, and a few others. Edelzwicker or Gentil are blends of noble white varieties. Reds are exclusively Pinot Noir. The Riesling wines are particularly fine and produced in a variety of styles from bone dry through to sweet late harvested wines with oodles of residual sugar, but without the botrytis found in Sauternes. The Gewürtztraminer can be a great choice with Asian food, although I prefer 5 pints of lager, and keep the Gewürtztraminer to go with some Roquefort. The reds are the most northerly in France, but cannot compete with the PN from the Norwegian vineyards of Hallingstad and Lerkekasa. The region (in France, not Norway) has been swapped with Germany on many occasions with families changing their names accordingly. The cuisine includes the dubious delights of choucroute (sauerkraut) and although I'm sure it's fantastic for your microbiome and can be described as *'the perfect hearty wintertime dish'*, the bone in the pork knuckle is, as far as I'm concerned, one of contention (and I am concerned about the whole fermented cabbage thing). However, if any members plan to visit Paris, then a trip to Brasserie Bofinger is highly recommended. A Belle Époque era brasserie grand enough for Mitterand to book the entire first floor to celebrate his election victory as president in 1981. Opened in 1864 by an Alsatian refugee, it is the ideal place to watch other people eating choucroute. They will probably be American tourists talking loudly, dressed in shorts and wearing hats indoors, but you can numb the pain by tucking into an enormous grand plateau de fruits de mer, or just a selection of oysters and maybe some clams and whelks, all washed down by an appropriate selection of Alsatian wines and maybe after some Alsatian beer whilst waiting for a table. But there is only so much pork knuckle, smoked sausage and fermented cabbage that can be eaten in one life. They also do great kids' menu, which my brood enjoyed when we were on the way back from a cycling trip in Switzerland. We had been in our tent for two weeks and stopped off cycling them between The Gare de l'Est and the Eurostar. We were a bit early, so sat on the pavement outside with four cycles, a luggage and a child trailer. So, the dress code is rather more flexible than the Rivoli bar at the Ritz. Getting back to the wine, my first urge had been to have two wines from the same producer (Rolly Gassmann), both with significant amounts of bottle age, which is relatively unusual. However, the 2016 Pinot Gris was a medium and I think that our members tend to prefer dry white wine, and I didn't rock that boat, the dessert and cheese combo may result in enough myokymia as it is.

White- The Society's Exhibition Alsace Riesling 2020 13% £20.

Specially made by Famille Hugel, who should know a thing or two about their business since they've been doing it since 1639. As well as production from their own 127 ha they buy grapes from other respected growers to produce other cuvées. This dry Riesling is well reviewed by both Decanter magazine and The Sunday Times with a smokey lining to

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SESSION 116 MEETING 6 V III MMXXV

the peach, pear and tropical fruit. It should go with quite a variety of dishes including whitefish, oily fish, smoked fish, pork belly, oysters, a not particularly spicy curry (otherwise known as a 'why bother') and for people with no taste buds whatsoever - choucroute. For those of us with patience (I think that is basically me) this has the capacity to develop further complexity with age and should drink for another 10 years.

Red- Pinot Noir de Rorschwir, Domaine Rolly Gassmann 2018 14% £23 (elsewhere £29.50) Pinot noir from another very well-established producer whose estates date to 1676. In 2018 the pinot noir harvest benefitted from heavy rainfall in the spring followed by fine weather and so ripe, powerful grapes with good colour and intensity. Concentrated and ripe with acidity, brambles, red currant on a background of liquorice, smoke and black pepper. No oak. Drink till 2030. A plan is to have this with rabbit but this would also be enjoyable with the liver of a very unfortunate goose or duck. It's worth mentioning that most pinot noirs give as much or even more pleasure to the nose than to the mouth, so remember to have a good sniff and savour with your schnozz.

Wines with dessert AND Cheese.

£110 (wine call) x 20 (it's the Twenty Club) = £2200. Divided by 6 (number of meetings) = £366.66 wine per meeting. £20 x 8 (white wine) + £23 x 9 (red wine) = £367. So it looks like I'm £0.33 over budget. But I've been a pound or two under at other meetings, and we have a float of Ch Courac, and we have some more '*left over wine*' (see notes for meeting 116.5- you will need to refresh this concept). Every time I've been down to the cellar I've hear the plaintive cries from the little unopened bottles, dusty and ignored. They mew: "*don't leave us here in the dark, we're lonely...*" And, I'm not completely sure how this has happened, but we also have a couple of bottles of this session's wine left over as well. And it will all go perfectly with dessert and cheese served together on the same plate. "*An apple pie without some cheese is like a kiss without a squeeze.*" Or so they say in Yorkshire. I suppose they can't be wrong about everything. We have a selection of delightful sweet wines that should complement the sweet and savoury.

1. **Ulysse Cazabonne Sauternes (3rd Release)** 14.5% £21 Botrytised Semillon, some SB: Drink now-2035 (meeting 116.3)- one bottle
2. **The Ned Noble Sauvignon Blanc-** Marlborough, New Zealand 11.5% £13-14/ half bottle- 2 half bottles. As seen on TV, orange marmalade, apricot and ginger. Majestic 2 half bottles
3. **Berton Vineyard Botrytis Sémillon**, Riverina, Australia. Similar flavour profile, may have been on offer at Aldi at one point (at a very good price) but usually £14-17/ half. 2 half bottles

Now that's plenty of wine to go with pie and cheese, but to avoid too much controversy there is also a bottle of this,

4. **The Wine Society's Generation Series Cotes de Castillon Bordeaux 2020** 14.5% £15.50 Drink now-2031/3 (116.3)- Castillon = site of defeat of England in 1453 (meeting 116.3).

And I've blown this meeting's budget on a bottle of this,

5. **The Society's Tawny Port 19% £12.95 TWS** Youthful fragrant and fruity, good with figs and nuts, as ever much like O'Mahoney (we also had this 116.2).