

THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 117 MEETING 3 WINE NOTES

The Wild Wild West- All TWS

In the early 80's Paul Masson's Californian Carafe brought American wines into the living rooms of unsuspecting millions. *"They're really jolly good"* he extolled in his louche West Coast manner. A decidedly odd way of introducing a wine of uncompromising mediocrity and served in a urine bottle sealed with a foil cap to avoid the intellectual challenges of wielding a corkscrew. But luckily for us there is much more to Californian wines than that. Unluckily the exchange rate makes them really jolly expensive. Whilst the Spanish missionaries did plant some vines for sacramental purposes larger scale production was established much later than the vineyards of Chile and South Africa. They came into their own in the 1960's and then achieved victory in the judgement of Paris¹. There is a lot to enjoy. When I was an SpR I tried to drink as much Ridge Zinfandel as possible, usually after getting paid for a court report. But I now struggle with the skull numbing hangover that inevitably follows a bottle of Geyserville whether at 14.5 or 15%. Oh well. A huge variety of styles and varieties are produced with classics from Stag's Leap, Mondavi, Clos du Val. Cult wines sell for thousands and a few years ago I met a former finance bro who now advises tech billionaires on their wine collections. Nice work if you can get it. He was skiing in the US telemark team in a World Cup race². We discussed wine fraud, the dubious reliability of provenance, holograms, RFIDs, bret, GLC and, inevitably, litigation. Like me also had a side line as an expert witness, although none of his involved terrorism, decapitation or necrophilia/necrophagia, so I won. Both of this evening's wines are from 'new' wineries, but ones that have established / are establishing excellent reputations. Now, the question I know you are all asking yourselves at this point is: *"How can Silva conceivably find a tenuous link to a magnificent English victory in The Hundred Years War"* – unfortunately I can't. But, given that we will be having canapes, custard and crackers (with cheese) the obvious link is the Battle of The Greasy Grass, June 25-26 1876 and, although not in California, it was only about 850 miles away, practically next door really.

White- The Society's Exhibition Santa Barbara County Chardonnay 2022 13.5% £17

Davy Crockett- King of the Wild Frontier. A staple of 1950-60's weekend TV where our eponymous 'hero'³ was played by Fess Parker. Fess also considered running for congress- but had a much better plan- to open a winery. In Southern California and

¹ Infamous blind tasting in 1976 in which French oenophiles decided that Californian wines were better. The statistics were disputed and there were a few subsequent rematches- things went worse.

² Silva Minor beat him, also a Russian and German and a Frenchman. One of Silva minor's friends from school and Uni incorporated his tech company in San Francisco the night before he graduated in 2024 and after his second round of several \$M funding seems to be well on his way to needing his own wine consultant. I'm not jealous.

³ Actually, like almost everything that is interesting in life it's more nuanced than you might think. Although 'Davey Crockett Indian Hunter' started out as a Scout East of the Mississippi in the actions against the Creek- by the end and whilst a congressman was the only one to oppose The Indian Removal Act (to remove all Indians from East of the Mississippi) and with an interesting feat of cognitive gymnastics was both an abolitionist and slave owner. He died at the Alamo- but I prefer the Battle of The Greasy Grass.

frighteningly close to Michale Jackson's⁴ Neverland, the vineyard grew from 5 to 1500 acres, now owned by his children. Californian Chard can sometimes be a bit too oaky for some- although this does have its place (try a Bogle or District 7 for quite reasonably priced offerings). This is supposed to be only mildly oaked, grown at a relatively high altitude, fermented in Hungarian and French Oak (not Californian- which is more porous and has a looser grain- resulting in that bolder vanilla and butter). Orchard fruit, malolactate fermentation and probably best with air and at cellar rather than freezer temperatures.

Red- Frog's Leap Napa Valley Zinfandel 2022 14.5% £34

Frog's Leap make absolutely excellent wines. I've enjoyed all the one's I ever had: Merlot, Cab Sauv, Sauvignon Blanc and this. If you managed to put the Flux Capacitor back into the Delorian and get back to The Pool Room in New York's Four Seasons restaurant, maybe you could have had a bottle or two as you relaxed among the Picasso tapestries and listened to the echo of Norma Jeane's second rendition of Happy Birthday Mr President. Alternatively, you just might have a vision of Patrick Bateman just before things get a bit lairy in his immaculate apartment with its white Barcelona chairs and lots of blood. It is classy stuff. Only established in the 1980's (with founders having earned their spurs at Stag's Leap) and again with I think a very pretty label. From the Rutherford area of the Napa Valley where the tradition is of winemakers sharing advice and expertise, in a collaborative rather than individualistic ways, "*for the greater good*", which is frankly unamerican and should result in congressional hearings. Zinfandel is the quintessential heavyweight Californian wine. With all the subtlety of a drunken hippo this usually steams out of the bottle with a cornucopia of mouth filling red fruit, cherries, blackberry, spice. This one is a 'field blend' so the majority is Zin, but with Petite Sirah and Carignan, no irrigation, a drought year and old vines- so concentrated. Assembled from various parcels in Napa. This one should be capable of lengthy aging, although this risks accusations of necrophilia and I'd have to do a presentence report- which wouldn't be pretty. Almost all fermented and aged in concrete. pH 3.28, 14.5% and some enjoy quite cool. Alternatively have a suck on a White Zinfandel in a silly glass full of ice and make me cry.

Dessert- Jurançon 'Ballet d'Octobre', Domaine Cauhapé 2020 13% £13.95

Having blown the meeting's budget on the Frog's Leap – a more modest price point. Made from October-picked petit manseng, this has fruit, freshness and perfectly balanced sweetness. From the Southwest of France just above the Pyrenees. No oak. Should go well with our apple crumble and custard. Would also work with cheese and fruit.

Port -The Society's Tawny Port 19% £12.95 TWS From the Symington family. Port blend. Youthful fragrant and fruity, good with figs and nuts, much like O'Mahoney. We've had it before- we are having it again because a) it's really good and b) it's really good value and c) I blew the budget on the Frog's Leap.

⁴ Martin Bashir's interview sets out the wide range of cognitive distortions that I used to hear from a group of gentlemen every Wednesday afternoon over coffee and biscuits, upstairs in the probation offices next to Minshull Street Crown Court-and luckily far far away from the nearest primary school.

Cases In Case of Emergencies

Emergency White Casa Silva Chardonnay Semillon Valle de Cochagua 2023 14%. A bit over £10.- Also some of October's White- Cassa Silva Cool Climate Sauvignon

Emergency Red Chateau Courac Cotes-du- Rhône 2020. The Wine Society £9.75 14.5% Also some of October's Casa Silva Quinta Generacion

Emergency Dessert Wine- Casa Silva Late Harvest Semillon / Sauvignon 2023

The Battle of the Greasy Grass (Little Big Horn) June 25-26 1876

The Civil War had been won by the Unionists, yet Confederate rebels persisted in the South, attempts were being made to cut army spending, an economic crash left a quarter of New Yorkers unemployed. As increasing numbers followed the advice of The Pet Shop Boys to *Go West!* a series of treaties with the native peoples were made and broken. Having agreed that the Black Hills of Dakota would become the new homeland of the Lakotah (Sioux) a survey party finding of minimal amounts was reported instead as GOLD!!! And so, under the combined leadership of Crazy Horse, famous for his sang froid, and the mystical Sitting Bull who found inspiration by suspending himself from ropes attached to skewers thrust through his back and chest, with 100 pieces of flesh scooped from his arms, neither eating nor drinking for days, the largest ever gathering of Plains Indians set a camp of 7-8000 stretching 2 miles along the west bank of the Little Bighorn.

Custer, with his cinnamon scented pomade, Reno, his belly and liver yellow from his ever-open whiskey, and Benteen seething with hatred for his general came across the gathering. Fearing discovery, they set to battle. About 30% of the troops were raw, never having fired their single shot carbines before, the baggage train with the ammunition was miles behind and, although warned of the size of the camp and his fate⁵ Custer's only concerns were whether he would kill, starve or disarm them all⁶ and then return East in time for the nation's centenary and the prospects of high political office, yet more glory, and a chance to clear his massive debts. Assured that the 7th could handle anything it met he had refused offers of Gatling guns. 700 weary cavalymen and scouts faced approximately 2000 warriors armed with 17 shot repeating Winchester rifles, bows and arrows, stone clubs and strong medicine. In the immortal words of Maloney just before a big night out: *"what could possibly go wrong?"*

Reno, already mostly pissed, led the first attack, descending into the valley and along the western bank to approach the wakening camp. His 140 mounted troops were seen, the Indians were in large numbers and not running away. Reno's skirmish line was outflanked. He finally lost his shit when his face was covered in the exploding brains of the scout Bloody Knife⁷. *"All those who wish to escape follow me"*. Leaving many behind he fled over the river and up a steep and increasingly claret stained 8' bank of clay,

⁵ Half Yellow Face (or Bloody Knife) to Custer- "You and I are going home today by a road we do not know"

⁶ If the camp was engaged, the warriors would surrender if the women and children were taken hostage.

⁷ Half Lakotah himself two young girls severed his head and took it back to their mother to be told it was that of their uncle. Whilst the face was unrecognisable his distinctive braids (which were used to carry it).

retreating to 'Reno's knob'. Benteen had been sent south, away from the camp, to ensure no one escaped- but by Benteen's reckoning to keep him from his own glory, his troops then reached Reno. Although they could hear gunfire to the north, where Custer had taken his troops, they remained in place and a detachment including Sargent Kanipe (pronounced canape) was sent back for reinforcements and ammunition- instructions from Custer's note c/o John Martin (Giovanni Martino) *'the last white man to see Custer alive'*.

Crazy Horse took his time, prayed, put on his war paint and then led warriors up the bluffs to Reno's knob. Reno and Benteen's troops were not annihilated, but it's fair to say that a fine time was not had by all. Many completely lost it. Private Neally hid behind a crate of crackers, he survived the battle, but perhaps not the shame of being called henceforth *'Cracker-Box-Dan'*. The ponies were shot and used as cover. The assault stopped as the Lakotah struck camp and moved off, a biblical scene.

Meanwhile Custer was along the bluffs 3 ½ miles ahead but just what happened is a matter of speculation. He may have attempted to engage the encampment from the north but driven back and up to 'Last Stand Hill'. Suffice to say that his entire troop of 210 was killed. The Lakotah accounts were that this took *'the time for a hungry man to eat a meal.'* Among the 300 or so army dead (52%) were Custer's brothers Boston and Thomas, his brother-in-law James Calhoun, and his nephew Henry Reed. To prevent problems in the afterlife the bodies were dismembered, decapitated, emasculated and their skulls smashed by women swinging 4kg rocks attached to rawhide. Custer was found with gunshot wounds to his chest and left temple, a cut to his thigh and an arrow had been inserted in his penis. He had not been scalped, and it is thought that he had not been recognised or even been known to be present. Although known as Long Hair he suffered from the dreadful affliction of male pattern baldness and his appointment at the Liver Building had been cancelled. 31 named warriors and several women and children are known to have perished and in 2005 Northern Cheyenne storytellers said that it had been Buffalo Calf Road Woman who had struck Custer from his horse.

L-R Crazy Horse Sitting Bull Buffalo Calf Road Woman Custer Reno Benteen Bloody Knife



Although in part fought with bows and arrows and stone clubs the last known warrior to pass away was Dewey Beard (Wasú Máza), he had also survived the Wounded Knee Massacre and died in 1955. Charles Sitting Man had witnessed the events as a child and died in 1961, the year of Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight.

Of course, inflicting a massive defeat against the US Army is the most self-destructive thing that a people can do.