

THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 117 MEETING 2 WINE NOTES

And Then Five Come Along at Once (all from TWS)

Postdating the Chilean vineyards by over a century, South African wines still date back over 350 years to 1659. Planted as prophylaxis against scurvy rather than eternal damnation and, quite bizarrely, by the Dutch. Something that perhaps we should regard with horror, and rightly so because, as with Chile, the first few centuries of production were, with a couple of exceptions filth. The Constantina estate (1685)¹ shined briefly but has risen again. After an initial flurry most vineyards were converted to other crops including alfalfa as feed for the ostrich feather market- which is a wonderful segue to another rout of the French in The Hundred Years War- Crécy. In the early 1900's vineyards were planted again- but still the wines were dreadful- some poured away and much distilled. South African wine came into its own in the 1990's, with flying wine makers, clean vinification and the popular grapes you all know. I find that South African wines have a more 'Old World' character than their South American and Australasian cousins, which I enjoy. Two grapes of note are firstly Chenin Blanc, which in France is mostly associated with the Loire (where rather unfortunately Joan of Arc did her worst) and South African CB's are something of a benchmark. Secondly Pinotage, a cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsault. Although the second most commonly planted grape after CB and quite versatile, it has its critics, including me, which is why there isn't any tonight. It can turn a red into a rather sickly banana and nail polish flavoured waste of my hard-earned English pounds. But South Africa has many fantastic reds from other grapes and of course if you look carefully there are some good Pinotage's- just be careful in Tesco's (Kanonkop is good). Luckily though South African produces not only red, white and dessert wines but also Cape Tawny. And so, to celebrate the first attendance of our new member Craig we have five nice South Africans.

White- Botanica Mary Delany Collection Chenin Blanc, Citrusdal Mountain 2023 13.5%, £27

Made by Virginia (Ginny) Povall in the north of Stellenbosch and from near 70-year-old vines. Vinified in stainless steel as well as large French oak barrels. Very well reviewed in The Observer and by Tim Atkin and Jancis Robinson. On the nose hay and wild flowers. Apple, peach, pear, lime and passion fruit. Fancy label, a decoupage of *Pancratium maritimum* by- Mary Delany, née Granville 1700-1788. Twice married and twice widowed she was a noted letter writer, botanist, artist and friend of George III, Burke, Swift and Georgina Cavendish (Duchess of Devonshire, who pioneered the ostrich feather craze). The picture was made from cut and glued tissue at the age of 75- eat your heart out Matisse.

¹ It is a classic sweet muscat with a difficult history of success, failure, success, failure and now success. Much like myself but with the success bit. It is rather expensive. Beloved of Napoleon (If you can't quite remember who that was see the Corsican wine notes Session 116 meeting 5). He apparently had hundreds of gallons a year shipped to St Helena, and as Bollinger features in the novels of Flemming so did Constantina in Dickens, Jane Austen and Baudelaire: *"Even more than Constantia, than opium, than Nuits, I prefer the elixir of your mouth, where love performs its slow dance."* Which is the sort of sweet nothing it's probably best that our surgical members avoid saying in theatre.

Red- Meerlust Estate Red Stellenbosch 2021 14% bought en primeur (by me) at £55 at case of 6. So with duty, VAT and 1 lot of cellaring- £15.20. Now retails £18-20, older vintages more.

Meerlust- a yen for the sea. The Myburgh family purchased the estate in 1756 and this is by far the longest family run vineyard in the Cape (or most places really). Until very recently (1960's) only sweet white wines were made in a style that I suspect nobody here would be wanting to drink. The family pivoted (pivoting, to pivot, a pivot- count the number of times Evan Davies says this on PM, if you start saying this in management meetings- take a long hard look at yourself) after trips to Bordeaux and Hannes Myburgh's time working at Lafite. So, in 1980 they 'crossed The Rubicon' and developed South Africa's gold standard Bordeaux blend- Meerlust Rubicon which is a Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc blend with some Petit Verdot for colour. Rubicon is usually £35-35 on release. We have The Estate Red- this used to only be available intermittently-when the estate declassified Rubicon, and once or twice they declassified the entire harvest (2011 for example). But now they make the Estate Red every year- which is a very good thing. Like many good things it was even better when it was £10. What it is slightly different from normal as this is dominated by Cabernet Franc, which is usually a minor variety in Bordeaux (with some exceptions- for example Cheval Blanc and Angelus). This makes a brighter paler wine, a little peppery. Grown up red wine with oak, tobacco, plums, cassis, leather, smoke, bell peppers. And not a mouth full of sugar à la Jam Shed or Blossom Hill.

Dessert- The Liberator 'The Francophile' Natural Sweet Chenin Blanc, Paarl 2018 11.5% £8.50. a half bottle

It is also Chenin Blanc- but that's about as much as I can say. Another anonymous wine-source unknown. Bought as a small parcel by a UK wine merchant and bottled rather than blended. Jancis Robinson says; *"Intense caramelised-apricot aroma. So intense and so rich, sweet but very fresh. Not especially complex but concentrated and with good balance between sweetness and freshness."* 160 g residual sugar.

Port Boplaas Cape Tawny, Western Cape NV 18% £21

OK- not actually Port. But a blend of classic Port grapes- Tinta Barocca and Tourgia Nacional, extended barrel maturation makes it Tawny. The Nels family (original French Huguenots) have been exporting this sort of thing to the UK since 1880 (and I'd guess a fair bit came through Liverpool). Should be warming with walnuts, almonds, spices, caramel, honey and citrus.

Cases In Case of Emergencies

Emergency White Casa Silva Chardonnay Semillon Valle de Cochagua 2023 14%. A bit over £10.

Emergency Red Chateau Courac Cotes-du- Rhône 2020. The Wine Society £9.75 14.5%

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

The Battle of Crécy 26 August 1346 & The Origins of Modern Warfare & Ostrich Feathers

In 1328 Charles IV of France died without issue and his closest living male relative was Edward, the son of his sister Isabella². Philip of France took a different view. Since 1066 the Kings of England were also, as Dukes of Normandy, vassals of the French throne- and Philip and his great council said that the English lands in France should be taken back. Edward III, biggest lad to ever sit upon the English throne, decided that attack was the best form of defence and so led a ridiculously small force across The Channel, landing more or less next to what would become Utah Beach on D-Day. At the time of course England was very much poorer than France and with a very small army. Joined by men from Flanders (who had been economically blockaded by a wool export ban and who had then financed the invasion) Edward led his troops across Northern France causing mayhem³. The Flemings, fearing that the money was running out did a runner. Edward prepared to defend at Crécy. The French led by Philip VI numbered somewhere between 20-30,000 (or more), the English maybe 7-8,000 and so, with the odds so obviously in their favour the French attacked. Whoops. The French vanguard of Genoese crossbowmen were supposed to be the warmup act. But, because of a thing called maths this didn't work. Crossbow: range 180-200m, rate of fire 3-4/min (stings a bit if it hits you). Longbow⁴: range 300+m, rate of fire 12/min (pierces chain mail armour). Try that in a round of Top Trumps. It had been rainy, the longbowmen had put their strings under their hats. The crossbow strings could not be easily removed- so were soggy and stretchy. Also, the Genoese hadn't quite been arsed to get their pavises out of the baggage train and so ran away. *"Kill me those scoundrels, for they stop up our road without any reason."* Cried Philip- so his knights did and then started up the first of many muddy fields. Things did not go well. Three quivers of 24 arrows with more in reserve resulted in the first battle in the history of the world (well maybe European history) in which mere men at arms, commoners, defeated mounted knights and with projectiles rather than in hand-to-hand combat, changing warfare forever. The longbow was the hypersonic missile of its age, and the French were befuddled. A mêlée followed and Edward's son, Edward Prince of Wales (The Black Prince) was left aged just 16 to command the vanguard. He was beaten to his knees and a cry went to his father for help. The reply: *"Let the boy win his spurs."*⁵ And so he did. The French had a rotten time. Things may not have been helped by one of their commanders having been what is called 'a diversity hire'- Blind King John of Bohemia. A brave man- who when told by his attendants that the battle was lost and that he should flee said: *"Absit, ut rex Boemie fugeret, sed illuc me ducite, ubi maior strepitus certaminis vigeret, Dominus sit nobiscum, nil timeamus, tantum filium meum diligenter custodite."* (*"Far be it that the King of Bohemia should run away. Instead, take me to the place where the noise of the battle is the loudest. The Lord will be with us. Nothing to fear. Just take good care of my*

² Isabella- the She- Wolf of France, married to Edward II who was the close chum of Piers Galveston and victim of the curious incident of the red-hot poker in the nighttime.

³ A chevauchée- a raiding, burning and general pillaging.

⁴ Longbows weren't just long- they were also very thick- the draw weight increasing by the cube of the diameter Rogers, C. J. (2011). The development of the longbow in late medieval England and 'technological determinism.' *Journal of Medieval History*, 37(3), 321-341.

⁵ I've tried to explain this to my 16-year-old when he wants a lift to David Lloyd, Crosby or Formby. He grunted.

son." They did. He didn't last long. Fighting continued into the night with more the next day. English contemporary accounts record 40 English deaths, French -who knows? Maybe 30,000 killed and captured with 10,00 dead and 2,500 heraldic coats as booty. Dead were one King (Blind John), 9 princes, 10 counts, a duke, an archbishop and a bishop. And Philip VI was hit in the face with an arrow (but ran away). Very few if any prisoners were taken on the first day.

As with Agincourt this tale also resulted in many of the helpful catchphrases we use today. Of Philip's mistake with the Genoese (the French actually though they had betrayed them). *"Teamwork makes the dream work...There's no I in team"* to which the traditional repost has always been *"But there are three in sanctimonious dickhead, and a U in ****⁶"* Also *"Am I missing something? Maybe it's a good idea if all the battlefield commanders can see?"⁷*

OK- what's this got to do with South African Wine? Easy- ostrich feathers. The Prince of Wales was awarded the crest and (German) motto of John the Diversity Hire *"Ich Dein"* – *"I serve"*.



⁶ A word that the last couple of still firing neurones in my orbitofrontal cortex prevent me from typing

⁷ To reduce the risk of human error this has now been incorporated into Atul Gawande's Battlefield Commander's Safety Checklist