

THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 117 MEETING 3 WINE NOTES

New Zealand

White- Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough 2024 (13.5%) & 2025 (13%) £21.95- Costco

We have enjoyed this at least once before¹. The best Sauvignon Blanc in the world? It might be and people say it is, some say it isn't. But it is the most Googled Sauvignon Blanc and the words "*iconic*" and "*seminal*" (O'Mahoney- in polite society this means somethings else) are thrown around with abandon. I think I first had some on honeymoon in upstate New York (however I may well be wrong and might have had it from Costco, when I lived opposite Costco, but there again I might be wrong, or right, memory is a funny thing isn't it?). After a few days in Manhattan, we moved to a cabin in the woods. No running potable water, a longdrop with an amusing twist, no door, no light and a walk across the meadow- "*cave ursulum*", and an equally amusing shower, a pipe that came off the roof over a nice flat bit of rock. The cabin was near the Ausable river, one of the US's premier trout streams (funny that). Anyway- Martin the owner of our and the other 4 cabins spread over several hundred acres of woodland was interested when we talked about the empty bottles of wine that he'd decorated most of the window ledges- all top notch and inscribed to commemorate the minor triumphs: "roof", "refrigerator" (gas powered- no electricity). He invited us to his farmhouse for Champagne served from Lalique Angel glasses². He'd been a printer in New York, and it seemed like he'd been at the cutting edge during the late 60's- 80's when he'd lived in the Chelsea Hotel, knew Andy, Sid and Nancy "*you never knew who you'd meet that evening*" and in the late 90's and in his 70's only advertised his corner of the wilds on the internet and seemed to be making his way through almost as many marriages as wines, dodging crockery along the way. Not content with plying us with some quite palatable fizz he insisted that he and his then wife take us for dinner the next evening at the best restaurant in Lake Placid³, where a former New York Times wine writer had a wine shop- complete with Cloudy Bay. Back then Cloudy Bay had a significant degree of perceived scarcity. The first vintage was in 1985 and when the second arrived in the UK it met with great acclaim from Oz Clarke. For years "*do you have any Cloudy Bay*" was a question to be asked in UK wine shops of repute. Tight allocations even allowed some retailers, confident in the depth of their customers pockets, to mark the wine at twice the normal price (Jeroboam). I've found quite a bit of variation between vintages and

¹ Araiaraaj, 13.11.2021 Session 113 meeting 2, the 2020 at £23

² Members will recall that these featured in Rushdie's magical realist masterpiece. Of Rekha Merchant "*Everyone agreed she had a strong personality, drank like a fish from Lalique crystal and hung her hat shameless on a Chola Natraj and knew what she wanted and how to get it, fast*". The glasses were symbolic of her material success, yet pointless and empty existence, the counterpoint of Western materialism, Eastern heritage and spiritual emptiness, all motifs that recur throughout his novels. If you'd like to buy just one then that's between £150-350 retail, although there does seem to be a set of 6 for a bargain £950- but, are they real? Don't be a Martin and break one on the tap doing the washing up pissed.

³ We also dined at three of the best New York restaurants, The Four Seasons (see notes 117.2), The Café des Artistes and Windows on the World. All now closed or blown up. I don't think any of these catastrophes were our fault, but all three? And the Carnegie Deli?

have only just noticed that there are 3 bottles of 2024 as well as the 2025. So a chance to experiment.

2024- 40 th Anniversary	2025
Driest in 100 years. Early frosts and reduced yield. Summer, warm overall-earliest harvest with low yields- but low disease.	Cooler overall, largest bunches ever, much later harvest. Lots of thinning required
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quite restrained on the nose, less tropical than previous vintages• More citrus-focused: makrut lime, pink grapefruit, lemon, apricot, orange blossom• Powerful and vibrant with green-fruit flavors• Notable saline/mineral edge• Fresh-squeezed lemon acidity• Powerful impact on nose and palate entry but not particularly long• Just off-dry• Some tropical notes present but subdued	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open and expressive on the nose• Peach, elderflower, makrut lime, freshly squeezed lemon• Bright and layered with lemon curd and white nectarine, with hints of sea salt and dune grass• Steel-cut citrus acidity• A sense of poise and refinement• Leaner profile with elegance• More herbal, less flamboyant• Less overtly tropical

Red- Te Kairanga Runholder Pinot Noir, Martinborough 2023 12.5% £14.38 Costco

Temperamental, naughty and capricious, a challenge. That's Pinot Noir. Capable of producing wines of extraordinary complexity, age, youth, depth and straightforward fun as well as vast riches. Also, dull nonsense, dishwater, disappointment and financial ruin. From its Burgundian⁴ home winemakers have tried their hand at it throughout the world (more or less- not in the hotter bits of Australia). It is traditionally grown around 45' North- or now South. But some places are experimenting with high altitudes. In New Zealand, after initially poor results on account of the rather useless clones that were imported from Switzerland, it has now flourished and is the largest red and second largest overall variety. Martinborough tends to fruit and spiciness, and this one is in part made from the Abel clone, allegedly smuggled into New Zealand from Domaine de la Romanée Conti in the 1970's⁵. Picked by block, 10 months oak aging, minimal fining and filtering. Best young, slightly under room temperature (although in my house right now this might well be about -10). Subtle, red fruit, a bit of spice.

⁴ Now although in 1431 Henry VI was crowned King of France it's difficult to say that Burgundian wine is rightfully English, his actual rule was limited, although the Burgundian dukes had sided with the English. But difficult is not impossible.

⁵ The story goes- Kiwi traveller nicks them from the vineyard and hides them in a welly, customs officer Abel intercepts them, but as a wine enthusiast he confiscates rather than destroys them as the dreadful biosecurity hazard that they are. He quarantined them, then shared with growers in Martinborough.

**Dessert- The Ned Noble Sauvignon Blanc 2022/24 Half Bottle, Marlborough 11.5%
£14 (or 13) Majestic**

I'm writing these notes before I've bought this wine- hopefully they have some in Warrington. I think we've had this before as well- but I can't find the note. Botryised grapes, orange blossom, peach, beeswax, honeycomb. Sticky.

Port Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas Vintage 2019 20% £27.59

Grumpy members may have observed that this session I've been quite abstemious when it comes to Port. Not today. Although £27 for us- elsewhere it's more like £38. Taylor's Port seems to be very complicated, and this is from what was originally a Fladgate vineyard. When Taylor's don't declare a vintage for all their wines they decide whether to declare for specific estates or quintas, and so Vargellas Single Qunita 2019. Although good to drink now this might well be capable of extensive aging and if I'd not bought the last two bottles I could have got lots and we could have continued to drink it for the next 20-30 or even 40 years. But I did, so we can't and even if there had been more and if I had, we couldn't on account of all being dead in 40 years anyway. If only I could stop living in the pluperfect subjunctive? Deep purple black with a narrow red rim and magenta highlights. The keynotes here are elegance and finesse. The nose is polished and precise, displaying very pure, bright fruit with predominant notes of raspberry and cherry and an attractive fresh grapiness. Surrounding this core of fine fruit are subtle botanical notes of bracken and underwood and scents of wild herbs and flowers. The palate is compact and racy, with wiry linear tannins galvanised by a powerful charge of acidity. Widely available and very well reviewed with an acceptable 95 from Wine Spectator.

Hommage to Ariaraj

Instead of a battle I thought I'd summarise the wines curated by sommelier emeritus Ariaraj: A remarkable breadth of international wines spanning France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, England, New Zealand, USA, South Africa, Argentina, Hungary, Chile, and Australia. Notable French regions included Bordeaux, Medoc, Sauternes, Monbazillac, Bourgogne, and Moulin-à-Vent; Italian highlights were Barolo, Barbaresco, Chianti, Valpolicella Ripasso, Friuli, and Gavi; Portuguese tastings focused on Douro and Alentejano; Spanish entries featured Rioja, Rias Baixas, and Jerez; while German, New Zealand, and English wines added further variety. **Reds:** Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Nebbiolo, Corvina, Syrah, Malbec, Gamay, Tempranillo, Sangiovese, Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Black Muscat, Grenache. **Whites:** Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Albarino, Cortese, Friulano, Furmint, Madeline Angevine, Riesling, Turbiana, Fernao Pires, Viura, Palomino, Gros Manseng. **Dessert/Fortified:** Muscat, Malvasia, Trebbiano, Semillon. Price points from £5.49 to £40, with most between £10 and £20. Classic reds, aromatic whites, and a strong showing of dessert and fortified wines.