

THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 117 MEETING 5 WINE NOTES

Argentina- all TWS

What's not to like about Argentina? The nation that has delighted the world with clacker balls, corned beef, silly trousers, rather tasty BBQs with a piquant herby green sauce and an hilarious episode of Top Gear. And wine, especially Malbec. As with everywhere else- introduced in the 1550's by missionaries, then changing with waves of immigration. Firstly, in the early 1800's when Spanish rule ended and then after the railway reached the foothills of the Andes in the 1880's. This eased the passage of French, Italian and Spanish farmers bringing Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Muscat and Torrontés along with verve, passion and polo. Meanwhile in Patagonia Y Wladfa (The Colony) was being established, bringing unusual habits with seaweed, sheep and consonants¹. In the early 20th century Argentina was the eighth richest country in the world and had the third highest per capita consumption of wine 90l/year (but way behind the sovereign individuals of Maloney and O'Mahony). Her riches were squandered. Populism, protectionism, nepotism, hyperinflation and military juntas resulted in triple digit inflation, 100,000 desaparecidos and so eventually a need for a nice military distraction and or psychotherapy². Which brings us to another grey, windswept land of wellies, rotting Land Rovers and frightened sheep. So, whilst the handbag wielding dominatrix of Grantham may have snatched the milk carton from my 1970's schoolboy hand, she also, by removing the junta, returning democracy and economic sanity to Argentina, not only put a temporary hold on child abduction, torture and fodder for excruciating 'musical theatre', but also single handedly transformed Argentina's wine industry. Another feather in the cap for Merseyside, as it had been in 1967 at Camel Laird's in Birkenhead³ that HMS Conqueror, the only nuclear-powered submarine to have ever sunk a surface vessel by torpedo⁴, had been laid down. This was the catalyst that allowed what had been high-capacity, terrible quality domestic production to benefit from investment in infrastructure, flying winemakers and produce some cracking wines. The wine producing areas are found to the east of the Andes at

¹ Liverpool played no small part, as it from here on 28th May 1865 that the clipper Mimosa set sail for Patagonia with 153 Welsh passengers intent on preserving the Welsh language and culture in a land free from the sorts of persecution by the English depicted in Llewellyn's 1939 How Green Was My Valley. *"About her neck a piece of new cord, and from the cord, a board that hung to her shins and cut her as she walked. Chalked on the board ... I must not speak Welsh in school ... And the board dragged her down, for she was small, an infant, and the card rasped the flesh of her neck, and there were marks upon her shins where the edge of the board had cut. Loud she cried ... and in her eyes the big tears of a child who is hurt, and has shame, and is frightened."*

² A very odd thing about Argentina is the numbers of psychologists, psychiatrists and Freudian / Lacanian analysts. Huge- more than anywhere else, even Hampstead (at school the psychotherapist next door used to get very cross when we were noisy on the playground and I suspect that the gentlemen who visited the Portman Clinic (then the only forensic psychotherapy service in the country) got very excited when a crocodile of boys in shorts and blazers walked down Fitzjohn's Avenue on the way to the Swiss Cottage swimming pool).

³ See Meeting 5 of the 116th Session. McCormick Minor- The Lairds of Birkenhead

⁴ Well two Mark VIII torpedoes (designed in the 1920's and still in service in the 1980's) rather than the acoustic homing Tigerfish, which were notorious for never giving 'a banger' in tests- literally never. Don't you just love British military procurement? Makes new hospital delivery look slick though, so can't be all bad.

high altitudes and the Mendoza region lies in sight of Mt Aconcagua, the highest summit of the Americas. The climate is semi-arid with annual precipitation somewhat less than a fine August Bank Holiday in Betws-Y-Coed⁵ and so irrigation is used with expertise. Soils are loose, sandy and alluvial, the air dry and pure, and so fungal diseases are rare (unlike in Betws-Y-Coed).

White- Teho La Consulta Semillon 2020 13% £25.50

Capable of aging until 2029, keeping a semillon going for 9 years is quite an achievement. Grown at 1100m⁶. 60-year-old vines, concentrated, bright, greengages, citrus, floral and a bit of minerality. Oak aging in used 500l barrels. Made by a small producer- 55Malbec from old vines on alluvial soils overlying some limestone in the Unco Valley.

**Red- Weinert Carrascal Asamblaje Especial NV No.2 Malbec blend 14%
£33/magnum**

Funny stuff. 40% Malbec, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot. From 36-60 year old vines again at high altitude, 950m⁷ but non-vintage- instead a blend of 14 vintages from 2004-2022, bottled in 2023. The idea is to have a wine with a mixed of aged, tertiary flavours such as tobacco, cedar and leather- as well as younger fruit. Weinert is very well regarded, has an excellent set of policies regards workers' pay and its wines are often compared to traditional Riojas and even Lebanon's iconic Musar. Malbec is the grape that Argentina is now best known for, its home is in the Cahors region of France, south of Bordeaux and the Gironde where it was popular as 'the Black Wine', exported through Bordeaux to England in the 13th century and was a firm favourite of Edward II⁸. Trade with England was badly affected by the Hundred Years war (obviously). Malbec was often used to beef up Bordeaux, providing colour and body, but now a Cahors fails very badly at a head-to-head tasting with an Argentinian Malbec at the same price point and can be very much like chewing a bunch of sticks (exceptions do exist- try anything from Clos Triguédina).

Dessert- Chateau Pech la Calevie Monbazillac 2022 Semillon 13% £14.95

Made in a similar way to Sauternes, in a vineyard well suited to forming noble rot, but sold at a fraction of the price. An ancient estate that has been in the same family for more than 200 years. Well reviewed in The Independent "*I never understand why we*

⁵ 10" or about the length of a takeable trout (if held straight up in the air).

⁶ 15m higher than Snowden, but given that the earth is a geoid and not a sphere many kilometres further away from the core.

⁷ Or about the height of Y Garn, one of the Welsh 3000's in the Glyders which is famous for people getting lost, going round and round in circles and ending up in Nant Peris and nowhere near Ogwen at all- or vice versa. I'm sure the rocks are magnetic; there's GPS spoofing going on and that the locals go up in the middle of the night to rearrange all the rocks. Never ever go anywhere near the Glyders when you can't see the top. Stay next to the pie shop at the Ogwen Valley car park- much safer.

⁸ He of the unfortunate incident of the red-hot poker in the nighttime- see wine notes session 117 meeting 2- that said there is no real contemporary source to suggest that he was murdered in that manner.

don't see more Monbazillac...honeyed nectar is full of bright ripe peaches, soft tangerines and hints of warmed marmalade".⁹

Madeira The Society's Full Rich Madeira, 3 Years Old (Tinta Negra Mole) 19% £17.50

At a previous meeting one of the Silva minors asserted that it was only permissible to make a Loyal Toast with port, madeira or water. Is this true? Well maybe in the RAF, but it looks like that it is perfectly acceptable to use any liquid that is not a cocktail. Should I stand? Yes, unless it is a mess diner in the Royal Navy (exempted by Charles II on account on banging you head in ships- alternatively someone else but for the same reason) or if you are in one or other cavalry regiments (The Queen's Royal Hussars don't drink the loyal toast and ignore the national anthem in their Regimental Officer's Mess¹⁰, some other cavalry regiments remain seated- why? Because their loyalty is beyond question- which sort of makes me wonder about the loyalty of all the others...) also not if you are in fact the King, at Lincon's Inn or some Cambridge colleges, potentially after eating swan.

Madeira- fortified wine, fermentation stopped by the addition of grape spirit, but then subject to heating and cooling is estufa tanks to replicate the effect of crossing and recrossing the tropics. This leaves a wine with exceptional longevity (meaning 100+ years) even when open. I enjoy a glass every now and then, it's not just for cooking tournedos Rossini and making cakes with. Nor is it of any use in persuading young ladies to look at your stamp collections¹¹. Once very popular, especially in America where it played a surprising role in the American Revolution. Following dispute in Boston over duty to be paid on 25 pipes of madeira customs officers seized the sloop Liberty- riots followed. The wine was also used to toast the Declaration of Independence, which is sort of the complete opposite of The Loyal Toast.

This one is very reasonably priced, will not benefit from further aging and should go well with cake and or chocolate puddings (always a tricky pairing) as well as with blue cheese. They also have a nice selection at Delifonseca.

Magnums

Does size matter? Maybe, maybe not. The EU has strict rules on permitted bottle sizes: 10cl, 25cl, 37.5cl, 50cl, 75cl, 1, 1.5, 2,3,4,5,6,8,9 and 10L (and 18.5cl for trains and

⁹ Mind you- would you trust anything published by the KGB?

¹⁰ Which is at the Regents Park Barracks on Albany Street NW1- just behind the RCP. It's shared with others including the SAS reserves. So, if you see a group of bearded ruffians drinking in a corner of a pub in Camden Town, please do not spill their pints, better stick to the nicer bars on Marylebone High Street. Even better still Vagabond Wine on Charlotte Street- 100 wines by the glass- Silva minor minor (apparently called Joe) spent 3 months living further up the street in the summer and spent a lot of money there, it had been given to him as an act of charity by Microsoft, seemingly for organising a table tennis league and mini-golf.

¹¹ 'Have some Madiera M'Dear' - Falnders and Swan 1959 *'And he said as he hastened to put out the cat, the wine, his cigar and the lamps..She lowered her standards by raising her glass, her courage, her eyes and his hopes..She made no reply, up her mind and a dash for the door'* Lines that would now quite certainly get you cancelled as opposed to a contract with Parlophone Records.

planes). Why the rules? IDK- work for idle eurocrats no doubt. From my point of view the most significant Brexit Benefit freeing us from the shackles of Strasbourg is the liberty to drink from any sized bottle I want- what about a nice English pint?

The most significant thing about magnums is that they are bigger than regular bottles- so look cool. But also, you can't spread them round the tables quite as much, which may cause incidents. It is claimed that bottle size affects aging- with large formats resulting in slower and more subtle maturation for fine red wines. Is this true? I really don't know, sounds like bullshit to me. Silva minor major did go to a tasting of champagnes in quarter, half, full, magnum and double magnum sizes. Non-vintage champagne does get a fair bit better with a year's bottle age. But, can he remember anything at all about what he 'learned'? Well, he can remember just about as much as several members can after Burns night. For example, I can remember that I fell over and got lost. I cannot remember where my nice down vest, merino hat (essential to keep my bald head warm), gloves or dignity might me. Nor can I remember how I got home. However it seems that my difficulties pale into insignificance compared t the travails of others, for example my guest trundled home at 6am and spent the next 24 hours in a state of neurological shutdown / distress (I tried to ask him how anyone would notice but- he got quite tetchy.

Emergency Wine Update

We have been very abstemious with regard emergency wine. Before the Burns Night we had 19 spare bottles of house red and about 3 white. By the end of the night- less. But we still have ample for the last two meetings, and I propose to find a suitable substitute either en Primeur at about £5 before duty and VAT or at around £8-12 retail, 14% or so. I'll do extensive research over the summer.

Errata

Unfortunately last session's notes had two silly mistakes. Firstly, they were mislabelled as the 3rd meeting. Secondly, I omitted Ariaraj's inclusion of Uruguayan Tannat.