

THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 118 MEETING 1 WINE NOTES

Australia (and the continuing adventures of Leo Mason Aged 23½) All R&H Fine Wines

R&H Fine Wines, Queen Avenue¹ (not Alley) off Castle Street now also Allerton Road and Crosby. Bouji wines, tastings and Queen's Bistro (handy for a mid-trial lunch if you are giving evidence at the Crown Courts but try not to compete with the KCs booze wise). This evening's selection was made quite easily- I just rang them up and asked for 10 Australian Whites (SBS), 10 Reds (CBS) and 2 bottles dessert and 2 fortified (either Port or Australian), explaining the proclivities of club members and budget of exactly £464. Meanwhile- Australia - a difficult place to grow stuff. The world's oldest and most degraded soils, unrefreshed by volcanoes or uplift for 100 million or by glaciation for over one million years. Weather and rains that are the capricious gift of the ENSO (El Niño Southern Oscillation) and the little water that does fall often leads to salinification. Also, the only continent with no indigenous plants or animals that can be domesticated. So living is tough and requires enormous skill. Vinyards came late- and the first two bunches of grapes were cut on 24th January 1791 in the Governor's Garden (now the site of an Intercontinental Hotel). Of course, Aussie White was incredibly popular in Liverpool (and may still be). 100ml of Yate's Original Australian White Wine (a sweet Muscat strengthened with grape brandy), sugar, lemon and hot water- a Blob. The Blob Shop (46 Great Charlotte Street) has provided me with a steady stream of medico-legal work over the years. The typical presenting complaint being- uxoricide after a long session on blobs then perhaps 7 or 8 pints followed by a row in the kitchen, tears but thankfully very rarely, if ever, a wheelie bin. For those with an interest voluntary intoxication is not a defence to murder²³. In general terms the Great Charlotte Steet Triangle (loosely defined by Weatherspoon's, McDonalds⁴ and The Blob Shop) is in my opinion best avoided⁵.

¹ Groom will at this point insist that the band Queen took their symbol from that on top of the Queen Insurance building- no they didn't.

² This is a very old idea- as Aristotle set out in Nichomachean Ethics Book III ch 5, 1113b, 31- the drunken offender should have his punishment doubled. More recently- In November 2010 Dowds, a 49-year-old college lecturer stabbed his wife 60 times (mostly to the neck) whilst drunk and argued since Alcohol Intoxication is a recognised mental disorder then diminished responsibility was available. The Appeal Court disagreed. It is of no more legal significance as far as s.2 of The Homicide Act is concerned than say- bestiality or sadism (R v Dowds [2012] EWCA Crim 281). Mind you an acquaintance of mine went all the way to Hong Kong to argue that a banker who had tortured two Indonesian sex workers to death over three days was indeed diminished on account of alcohol intoxication, narcissism and sexual sadism. Involuntary Intoxication- once you start you can't stop- can be put to the jury as a defence, R v Tandy (Tandy strangled her 11-year-old daughter- it was found that Tandy had had control over her drinking- she was convicted of murder and took her own life in prison some years later by hanging). Sometimes Forensic Psychiatry can be a bit depressing.

³ However, if any members do find themselves in a bit of bother and need my assistance, I'm sure I can be flexible and offer 'mates' rates' as a professional courtesy.

⁴ It was outside the Church Street McDonalds that in 2008 Joey Barton (probably football's greatest philosopher and commentator) punched one man 20 times before attacking a teenage boy leaving the lad with broken teeth. Luckily Kevin Keegan gave character evidence to say that Barton was in 2008 'far more responsible than he'd been at Man City'.

⁵ I'm afraid that this includes The Lobster Pot.

White- Cape Mentelle Sixteen Hectares Sauvignon Blanc(85%) Semillon(15%) 2024 (13.5%) Margaret River Western Australia £20-25

Wine came to the region in only 1967, Mentelle was one of the founding vineyards and dates from 1970. A Bordeaux blend (no over oaked Chard for us) harvested from the estates three main vineyards including the original 16 hectares at Wallcliffe. Free draining and ancient sandy soil. Lemon and lime, jasmine, lemongrass, a bit of salt. Green apple. Should pair well with white fish and sauce or perhaps some lightly spiced Asian seafood.

Red- Majella, The Musician Cabernet(60%), Shiraz(40%), Coonawarra, Australia, 2022 14.5% £15.80-18.00

A multi award winning wine from a multi award winning small winery, this time from South Australia. Again, with distinctive soil- terra rossa, coloured by haematite. Other wineries nearby include the giants of Penfolds and Yalumba, but Majella is still family owned and a modest 60 hectares first planted in the late 1960's and with one entry in Langton's Classification of Australia's best wines. Much like SBS- I always forget how much I enjoy a Cab Sauv-Shiraz blend. Primary fermentation in stainless steel, pumped over. This is oak aged for 6-10 months (10% new barrels) Minty, eucalyptus, spice on the nose with black fruits (cassis, blackberries), chocolate and subtle tannins. The blend has accrued 17 trophies and 38 Gold, 33 Silver and 55 Bronze Medals.

Dessert- Two radically different styles

1. Stella Bella, Pink Muscat, Margaret River, Australia 7%

Cheeky boutique winery which seems to pamper its grapes, hand-picked, cooled, pressed and a bit of skin contact. Cool fermentation to just 7% so lots of residual sugar and a little kick of CO₂. Imagine you are reclining in the garden of an exotic harem- Rosewater, Turkish Delight, orange blossom and musk, bowls of cooled strawberries and a delicate happy ending. Muscat Rose à Petits Grains.

2. Stanton and Killian Rutherglen Muscat, North East Victoria, Australia, 17% approx. £18 a half bottle

NV (average age 5-7 years). Fortified but- we will **not** be making this into blobs. From the home of Aussie stickies- Rutherglen muscat has its own classification (Rutherglen Muscat, Classic, Grand and Rare) with increasing age and residual sugar from 3-5 years and 180-240g/L to 20+ and 270-400g/L. All out of Muscat à Petits Grains Rouge. Late harvested, raisiny, marmalade, golden, figgy and caramelly but also some Turkish Delight, rose. (Can be used as a cocktail base???- I don't think so).

Both should go with a panacotta.

Port Niepoort Tawny (or Ruby) about £22 Douro, Touriga Nacional 20%

At time of press a final decision has yet to be made, so, in my usual, pithy, succinct, aphoristic, stripped back, lean, raw, punchy, efficient and brilliantly clear and perspicacious style- a table.

Characteristic	Niepoort Ruby Port	Niepoort Tawny Port
Colour	Deep, vibrant ruby-red and purple hues.	Lighter golden-brown or amber colour (hence “tawny”).
Ageing Process	Aged for a short period (typically 2 to 3 years) in large wooden vats or stainless steel tanks with minimal contact with oxygen.	Aged for extended periods in small oak barrels (“pipes”), allowing for deliberate and continuous exposure to oxygen (oxidative aging).
Flavour Profile	Bold, direct, and bursting with fresh red and black fruit flavours like blackberry, cherry, raspberry, and dark plum, often complemented by hints of dark chocolate.	Mellow, smooth, and complex, featuring nutty and caramelized notes like toasted hazelnut, dried fig, apricot, toffee, and spice.
Best Pairings	Rich chocolate desserts, berries, or blue cheeses.	Nutty desserts, caramel tarts, apple pie, or hard/salty cheeses.

Hopefully blue cheese and figs. Figs are in season right now and I am in a battle with the local blackbirds as to who has first dibs on my Rouge de Bordeaux, a highly prized fig best grown somewhere other than Mossley Hill. Except this summer, with 5 heatwaves I’ve managed to have more than one ripe fig already. I’ve also discovered that figs do indeed give a nasty phytophotodermatitis- it’s the furocomarins- on skin when exposed to sunlight they bind to DNA and cause cell damage (or death). My dermatologist wife showed about as much sympathy as is usual.

The Continuing Adventures of Leo Mason Aged 23 ½

“Hello- Shirley 6671.”

“Is that Mrs Elizabeth Mason, mother of Leo Mason?”

“Yes...”

“This is Mr Grumble of Shaw Savill- your son has gone missing from the Southern Cross⁶ in Sydney”

“Ohhhhhh Leo...”

⁶ SS Southern Cross- laid down in Harland and Wolff Belfast for the Europe to Australia service. The first passenger ship over 20,000 gross tons that had the engine room (and funnel) near the stern- leaving amidships for the comfort of passengers. Although designed for the immigrant run- all public spaces had AC, the cabins hot and cold running water and lights that switched on gradually- mimicking sunrise. Two outdoor and one indoor pools as well as a two-storey cinema provided entertainment. The bar was well stocked. It was a long way to Australia. 76 days there and back via Trinidad, Curaçao, the Panama Canal, Tahiti, Fiji, Wellington, Auckland, Sydney thence Melbourne, Fremantle, Durban, Cape Town, Las Palmas and back to Southampton. (Leo only went ashore in South Africa once-it could easily have gone worse). The ship was latterly a cruise ship in the Med, Alaska and the Caribbean before being broken up near Chittagong in 2004.

So went the telephone call between the shipping office in The City and my grandmother in Hall Green sometime in late 1963. Members who can remember things will recall that Leo also accidentally missed his ship in Montevideo (a few years later) and ended up washing his pants for a week in a Salvation Army Hostel. But things were not quite so straightforward in Sydney.

Surely, he was dead in a ditch! So, granny called my mother, then a young teacher in the first term of her new job in Barnsbury School for Girls Islington. Early 1960's Islington was not 2020's Islington- there was an undercover policewoman on the school roll. She'd moved from Liverpool (St Malachy's all aged primary Beaufort Street Dingle) and was living in bed-sit-land, Nassington Road, Hampstead. 1960's Hampstead was not all Ian Gilmour, Harry Styles and Ricky Gervais. So, after pleading with the headmistress my mum found her way to the shipping offices of Shaw Savill in The City. Fearful, anxious and palpitating, she trod the stair but was greeted with scorn and derision. "Missing, lost? Pffft." Why- he'd drawn all the money he could and had taken his belongings ashore- he'd never work again. So, what had happened to Leo aged a tender 23? The details remain shrouded in mystery. Suffice to say the blame was (mostly) Leo's, drink had indeed been taken, behaviour could, as they say, have been better. The ship's response was apparently severe and unreasonable- and so the young rascalion jumped ship, for the first time, and deliberately. He stayed in an hotel- in relative comfort but was taken before the magistrates tout de suite. He had of course entered illegally- a criminal (and with great irony). The ship's owner's solicitor was in a muddle and so no action was taken. But within a week he'd found another ship home- The Aramaic⁷ and landed in Hull in early December 1963. Wiser?

The Southern Cross in Sydney



SS Aramaic



⁷ A large general cargo ship- built Germany 1957, scrapped Taiwan 1982 and ironically also owned by Shaw Savill.