THE TWENTY CLUB SESSION 118 MEETING 2 WINE NOTES

South Africa (and the continuing adventures of Leo Mason Aged 23½)
All TWS

White- Beaumont Hope Marguerite Chenin Blanc, Bot River 2023 13.3% £29

Rated a mere 93 in Parker's Wine Advocate and 94 by Tim Atkin. From 50+ year old vines on an estate dating to the 1700's. On the nose- dried apricot, marzipan[1] and spice, on the palate- orchard fruit, fresh honey (rather than not so fresh honey??) also minerality and sage. Extremely long finish and I think by far the most intense Chenin Blanc I've had. Fermentation including both partial malolactic and pied de cuve fermentation (the winemaker's equivalent of a sourdough starter, a batch of grapes is harvested early and prefermented to ensure that there is sufficient and active natural yeast from the vineyard so that it is the desired yeast that grows rather than nasty bacteria). Matured on its lees in 400l old oak barrels with regular and vigorous bâtonnage (a long metal tool is inserted through the bung hole to mix the sediment back into suspension, triggering yeast autolysis, releasing polysaccharides, mannoproteins[2] and amino acids-giving a creamier mouthfeel) and capable of aging another 10-12 years. Very little residual sugar (2.4g/L) and at pH 3.9- bone dry and crisp. Seafood especially scallops, but also hog roast, pasta with blue cheese and walnuts (perhaps pop in a bit of PSB and crispy guanciale). Last session we had the Botanica Mary Delany CB (with a very pretty label), I thought that was a wonderful wine- I think this one is even better.

Red- Minimalist Connect the Dots Syrah, Western Cape 2023 13%. Bought en primeur- equivalent of £18ish- now £22-33.

Blended from 4 vineyards, 28% whole bunch fermentation, foot stomping and although partially aged in oak- virtually no oak influence. Relatively light on its feet, a splash of fruit, black olive, earth and pepper. Great value and my attempt to 'just sample a bit' from one of my own bottles with my Coravin didn't quite work. The winemaker Sam Lambson only does Syrah, which is a bit odd- but the best people always are. He leases and farms some vineyards, buys in as a negociant, and his winery is in Cape Town itself. He experiments with different approaches to handling the grapes, some vintages were destemmed- but no longer. Apparently 2023 was a tricky and wet year in the Western Cape (a major road was washed away). I think this would suit quite a wide range of meats. I'm very partial to game and am hoping for something under pastry. I do realise that some have very strong opinions of what does and absolutely does not constitute a 'pie'. Silva minor primus still can't talk about Yorkshire without a 4–5minute rant about a purported 'pie' that was served to him as a pub lunch on an HF family walking holiday in the Dales about 10 years ago. In fairness I've also been bitterly disappointed by food in Yorkshire- as evidenced by the screenshot of my typo-riven Tripadvisor review. Last time we had an SA Bordeaux blend (although unusually dominated by Cab Franc).

[1] A prize for anyone (other than the Secretory) who can tell me what the French for marzipan is (without using a dictionary / the interweb).
[2] I have zero clues as to what these might be. I'm sure there's a gag here somewhere.

Dessert- Boplaas Red Muscadel, Calitzdorp 2025 15.5% £13.95

In the late 1600's French Huguenots fled. If any of you have seen Ken Russell's 1971 The Devils[3], a frenzied aria of sexual jealousy, mass hysteria, political intrigue and horrific torture, then you'll understand why running far far away was a good idea. Some went to South Africa, some brought vines with them, and some of the vines were these red muscadel- an exceedingly rare variety of Muscat de Frontignan. Traditionally vinified in lagars *(vide infra)*, manually punched down caps. Rose petals, Turkish delight, wild strawberry[4]. pH 3.59

Fortified Boplaas Cape Tawny, Western Cape, NV Tinta Barocca, Touriga Nacional, Souzao. 17.5% £21

A 10-year-old blend of classic port grapes. Orange peel, caramel, roasted hazelnuts, honey. Hints of brandy and dried berries. Fruit cake. Silky, rather than luscious, very long. You could try this with Christmas cake or pudding- but we will have some hard cheese. Tawny port- lighter / golden. Fermented in open lagars (open tanks- ideal for treading by foot- enough pressure to squish the grapes but not the pips – so avoiding bitterness) extended aging in barrels, oxidative – nutty. To be served a bit chilled. Residual sugar 90g/L. Various awards including Best South African Port.

Emergencies
Château Courac Laudun Côtes du Rhône Villages 2023 Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre and Counoise[5] 15% For us <£10. Elsewhere- about £17-19.

Bought 12 bottles Feb 2025 for £60 en primeur- which works out at a bit less than a tenner after nearly £3 duty and then 20% VAT. The wine one up from our last emergency wine (which was not the named cru- and is now £11.50)- but because it was en primeur-

[3] An ostensibly sober Oliver Reed plays the popular but libidinous priest Grandier. He refuses to pull down the Loudon city walls and has managed to ensure that Catholics and Protestants live harmoniously. The neurotic, sexually repressed (well not that repressed really) Abbess des Agnes (Vanessa Redgrave – originally planned to be Glanda Jackson but she decided that she'd had enough of playing neurotic sexually repressed women) asks him to become her Ursuline convent's priest. He declines. She discovers he has 'married' Madeline de Brou, a relative of another priest, and becomes enraged with jealousy. Meanwhile Louis XIII's puppet master Cardinal Richelieu has despatched Baron Laubardemont to destroy the city walls and get rid of the Huguenots as part of his aims of religious purity and repressing feudal nobility by removing any fortifications they might use against the state. Arguably all resulting in France not only consolidating, and becoming an absolute monarchy (yes yes that bit had its ups and downs) but also permanently centralising power and developing the very idea of the modern nation-state. A new priest becomes the Abbess' confessor, she discloses Grandier's 'marriage' and hints he has possessed her and is involved in witchcraft. Enter Father Barré, professional witch-hunter. At this point things go a bit dark. Indescribably dark. One of the most controversial films of all time and showing until 12 November at FACT. Restored in 4k with deleted scenes back in. A true story, sort of. NOT approved by The National Viewers' and Listeners' Association. Watch it and you'll never be able to look at the distal end of a femur again. Which I guess is a serious economic issue if you are McNichols.
[4] To explore the semantic bubble of the words Rose petals, Turkish delight and wild strawberries see notes Session 118 meeting 1 (unredacted version).
[5] A dark-skinned red grape, grown predominantly in the Rhône, adds pepper and acidity. In 2000 there were only about 1500 acres in France. One of the grapes allowed in CNdP.

for less! Attractive nose of ripe cherries, herbs and pepper; lovely juicy fruit well supported by fine grained-tannins; dense and long. Silver medal from the Decanter World Wine Awards. Most importantly it has a Coup de Coeur from the indispensable Guide Hachette des Vins. Un vin Exceptionnel! I quote; "*Une touche de counoise (10 %), cépage patrimonial du Rhône sud, apporte une touche racée au trio familier grenache (30 %), syrah (50 %) et mourvèdre (10 %). Au nez se dévoilent des parfums complexes de Zan, de cire d'abeille, de fraise confite et d'épices (girofle, poivre). Cossu, le palais en impose par sa chair et son gras, sans une once de lourdeur, étayé par des tanins serrés et relevé par une finale impeccable de fruit et de fraîcheur. Déjà irrésistible, il le sera d'autant plus après un peu de garde.*"[6]

The Continuing Adventures of Leo Mason Aged 23 ½

Apparently, Leo only visited South Africa once. He thinks in 1961. Much like young Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail and Peter the kind captain had told them (Leo and his shipmates) *"you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into District 6….now run along, and don't get into mischief…"* At that point Cape Town was changing. District 6 was in sight of the docks, historically mixed, and for the time being a 'vibrant' area of music, activism and shebeens[7]. So obviously they went there and obviously they met not Mr McGregor- but a group of bad rabbits who had designs on their wallets. They ran away as fast as their little legs could carry them. Whether young Leo made it back to his ship with or without his shoes and blue jacket is unknown. But Leo was not very well during the evening (and morning), camomile tea or not.

Another escape occurred on 12 December 1899, from a Boer PoW camp in Pretoria by a young war correspondent. Whilst our protagonist had had a commission with the 4th Hussars[8], he left his regiment and became an accredited correspondent with The Morning Post[9]. In Natal in mid-November '99 the armoured train he was accompanying was ambushed by Boer commandos who may (or may not) have been commanded by Louis Botha[10]. The engagement lasted over an hour during which our hero helped load wounded onto the still functioning locomotive, which managed to escape. Taking cover in a ditch, he was captured and considered that he had been quite improperly imprisoned. This suited him very badly, he became bored and restless, even though it was the sort of prison where you could be measured for a new set of Tweeds. Which he was. At first a mass breakout was planned, then a simpler idea, with just two fellow prisoners, Captain Haldane and Sergeant Brockie. Before the escape he paid his tobacconist's bills (very fond of a smoke) and wrote to the Boer Minister for Defence; *"I have the honour to inform you that as I do not consider that your Government has any right to detain me as a military prisoner, I have decided to escape from your custody."* The sentries were vulnerable to a blind spot. The first night's patrols changed, they were thwarted. On the second, two guards stopped to chat, and he went over the 10' wall.

[6] Rough translation- "very nice."
[7] In 1966 it was declared Whites only and subject to forced clearances. Shebeens, miscegenation and all.
[8] In which he took part in the last British cavalry charge at the Battle of Omdurman (02.09.1898 Sudan).
[9] As a non-combatant he should not have been taken prisoner.
[10] No relation to the 1980's Spitting Image puppet depicting a bigoted racist, but also PM of South Africa and a bigoted racist.

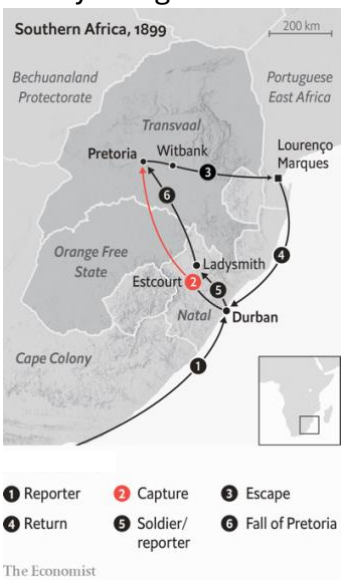
The others, he said, could not follow[11]. He wandered through Pretoria, hopped a train, got off, then trekked aimlessly in the bush until quite by chance he knocked at the door of a mine manager, the only Englishman for twenty miles. Having been hidden in the mine, where he had rats, but also a bottle of Scoth and some cigars for company, he was concealed amongst woolsacks on a train heading to Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) Portuguese East Africa. Two and a half days later he arrived. A hot bath and a triumphant return to Durban followed. He rejoined the army and took part in both the Battle of Spion Kop and the Relief of Ladysmith. In the closing stages of the war he returned to Pretoria with his cousin, they demanded and received the surrender of the Boer PoW camp guards.

He wrote up his experiences. In it he made some perhaps curious observations about the Boers. On the one hand: "*What men they were, these Boers! I thought of them as I had seen them in the morning riding forward through the rain—thousands of independent riflemen, thinking for themselves, possessed of beautiful weapons, led with skill, living as they rode without commissariat or transport or ammunition column, moving like the wind, and supported by iron constitutions and a stern, hard Old Testament God.*" On the other he wrote that a Boer Guard had told him: *"Is it right that a dirty Kaffir should walk on the pavement without a pass? That's what they do in your British colonies. Brother! Equal! Ugh! Free! Not a bit. We know how to treat Kaffirs…They were put here by God Almighty to work for us. We'll stand no damned nonsense from them. We'll keep them in their proper places."* Upon which he reflected: *"He and I had no more agreement.…Probing at random I had touched a very sensitive nerve. What is the true and original root of Dutch (Boer) aversion to British rule? It is the abiding fear and hatred of the movement that seeks to place the native on a level with the white man."*

The book appeared in 1900, dedicated to the railwaymen of Natal. Its author never lost his taste for a good story, telling it his own way, whisky or cigars[12].



NEVER EVER EVER HAVE A CHIP BUTTY IN INGLETON



[11] A matter of fact that remained in bitter dispute. He said that he waited- they had the map, compass and over half the rations. They said he went a night early, leaving them behind.
[12] *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*. London: Longmans Green and Co. 1900 Churchill W.S.