

T H E
W I N E R Y

December Tasting *Fulham* 03.12.24

Every country we import from is represented tonight with latest arrivals. France, Germany, Italy, Spain and California (*yes, we know it's not a country but it is big enough to be one*).

sparkling

Dosage Zéro Pinot Nero Metodo Classico, La Versa (Lombardy/Italy)

25.99

We pride ourselves on working with small growers. There is, however, one exception. It's in Lombardy. Our first visit to Oltrepò Pavese, a bump on the plain 60kms south of Milan, was close to 20 years ago and that's where we found a very switched-on co-op, the Cantina di Casteggio. At that time it was a co-op with 350 members and a massive facility, part run-down *fascista*-style, part Space Age. Try as we might, despite the size of the Cantina, we just couldn't resist the wines. The Cantina had started a 'quality project' in the early 2000s with their best 50 growers, bringing in high-profile consultant Riccardo Cotarella. They must have been looking over his shoulder during his visits as the entire range went from strength to strength even after the contract ended.

Although it was already the biggest winery we had worked with it didn't stop there. They 'merged' with another Cantina in Broni, the next town and, more recently, 'absorbed' La Versa, a century-old Cantina Sociale, specialising in sparkling wine. The combined group now has 700 members spread across 28 villages, 90% of them in the hills (where the quality is finer). There is nobody else to absorb or merge with for miles around.

We were impressed by this sparkling wine: hand harvested, 100% Pinot Noir, the blend includes a proportion of older Reserve wine, no dosage (bone dry), aged for 4-5 years. Nutty, yeasty, floral.



white

Desconcierto Rías Baixas Albariño 2023, Cambados Urban Winery (Galicia/Spain)

24.99

It was super-hot and extremely dry everywhere we went in Spain last year, until we arrived in Galicia. There's a reason why it's so green there: it rains frequently, some might say constantly. We went to visit Antonio Galiñanes of CUW, Cambados Urban Winery, in the heart of Rías Baixas, the spiritual home of Albariño. Antonio showed us three of his small parcels of vines, all very close to the water. One directly on the sea front, another directly on the estuary. He currently has just 2.2 hectares with another 0.7 plot on the way. The first vintage of his wine, Desconcierto Rías Baixas, was 2015. The freshly landed 2023 has notes of citrus zest and a whisper of sea air.

vom roten schiefer Riesling trocken 2023, Clemens Busch (Mosel/Germany) (mag 62.99) 28.99

The Mosel is a river, set in a stunningly beautiful, steep-sided valley, that loops from Luxembourg through Trier up to Koblenz where it joins the Rhine. The vineyards are punishingly steep, dangerous and time-consuming to work. Clemens Busch, who looks like Jesus, is something of a guru to his disciples, the New Wave German winemakers. In the late 1970s he was the first to show that, with meticulous work in the vineyards, 100% organic viticulture, and, if you pick late enough, you can make amazing dry Riesling on a river best known at that time for its sweeter styles. He has been talking about retiring for a decade. We even went to his party in summer to celebrate his retirement and the official handover to son Johannes who has already been working in the family winery for a dozen years. What might retirement look like, Clemens? "I'll still be here but working for 60 hours a week instead of 80."

It's hard not to be impressed as you stand outside Clemens and Rita's 17th Century house on the riverside, looking up at the overwhelming wall of vines on the opposite bank. With three different coloured slates: grey, red and blue, each with their own unique mineral flavour profile, it's easy to get geeky with their Rieslings. As usual, they picked the grapes late from red slate parcels dotted around the Marienburg and allowed them to ferment until dry. Bursting with tightly-packed flavours, the late-picked ripeness of the fruit surges with electricity and exotic, spicy minerals from the red, iron oxide slate.

*white continued***Chardonnay Alexander Valley 2020, Hafner (California/USA)****34.99**

Scott and Parke Hafner have a different business model to most. They only sell to private clients, no retail. It is almost two decades since we were lucky enough to spot a bottle from the 5% they sell into California restaurants at Ralph's Bistro in Healdsburg. Loved it. We phoned the next morning. "Hi, we're from London. We know that you don't normally sell to retail, but would you be interested in selling to us?"

"Sure, why not?"

Hafner's family winery is located in the beautiful Alexander Valley and surrounded by their own meticulously kept vines. While their winery was being built back in the early 1980's, Parke Hafner did a stint at Comte Lafon in Meursault, influencing the style ever since. Lush, ripe Alexander Valley fruit unobscured by oak, with aromas of roasted nuts and a stream of minerality rarely seen in Californian Chardonnay. We picked this up ourselves last Wednesday from the shipping company's warehouse to make sure we had it for Thanksgiving.

*red***Kompà Negroamaro 2020, Cosimo Taurino (Puglia/Italy)****18.99**

Drum roll and trumpets should announce the recent arrival of some classical yet succulent reds from Puglia. We had been looking for a new Puglian for three or four years and visited Cosimo Taurino's stand at Vinitaly in April last year. Cosimo Taurino is a legendary name in Italian wine. In 1970 he was the first grower to make serious, (at that time) modern red wines in the region. He put Salento (the southern tip of Puglia, the heel of Italy) on the map. Taurino's Notarpanaro became the benchmark. The wine was named after the estate that Taurino bought in 1956, previously owned by the Notare (*Notary*), surname Panaro. Cosimo died in 1999, since when his daughter Rosanna and her husband Dr Fernando Antonio Bello have continued to carry the flame. Kompa is 100% Negroamaro, deep and brambly. Old school – we love these wines and hope you do too.

**Château Bonnange 2020 (Bordeaux/France)****(magnums 44.99) 22.99**

Bordeaux. November 2021. We had an appointment in Blaye (the westernmost appellation on Bordeaux's right bank) with Pascal Montaut of Château Les Jonqueyres. What he hadn't told us before was that he had just retired and sold his vineyards. "Come with me and meet the new owners," he said.

We drove to Château Bonnange to taste his wines and theirs. The short version is, we tasted without a price list and the Bonnange 2017 was a revelation – quite an achievement in a supposed off-vintage. If you had told us it was a swanky Pomerol well north of €80, we would not have balked. It turned out to be substantially less.

The sunnier 2020 vintage is much lauded. Amazing depth and concentration from low yields. 90% Merlot/10% Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged in equal thirds: oak, tank and amphora. Lush, ripe nose, succulent and supple in the mouth, silky tannins on the finish.

Mileto Rioja Gran Reserva 2016, Bodegas Alvia (Rioja/Spain)**28.99**

After completing our Cava Quest last year we headed to La Rioja. We stopped in Ventosa in the Rioja Alta at Bodegas Alvia. The Pilgrims' Trail passes in front of the Bodega - marker 593km, to be precise. Alfredo Bernaldez's family has been making wine for 100 years and bottling themselves since 2006. Alfredo showed us several of his beautiful vineyards, many with seriously old vines (60-118 years old). With so many old vines, harvesting is always by hand. Old vines = intense juice.

It was the Crianza that brought us here. We stayed for the Reserva and Gran Reserva. Tonight we are showing the Gran Reserva from our latest shipment: 90% Tempranillo, 5% Graciano and 5% Garnacha. 24 months in American, French and Hungarian oak. Rich, saturated dark fruits, smooth and powerful.

LUNAR CALENDAR OBSERVERS – today is a **Fruit Day**.

Our next tasting will be on **Wednesday 22nd January** at **The Winery Maida Vale** when we *may* be joined by **Jonas Müllen** with distinctive dry Riesling from his family's winery **Martin Müllen** on the **Mosel**.

Join us for our Monthly Tastings

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