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Spurrier's World

Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor gives us a round-up of recent tastings, his views on current issues in the wine world and top bottles to drink or keep

End-of-term tastings

July for wine writers, as for school children, is the end of term. After the summer holidays, work begins again. I feel the vinous year begins on 1 September, certainly not on 1 January, though antipodeans may not agree. As I write, my own wine-tasting term has ended, leaving a few events to wrap up, before starting afresh in autumn.

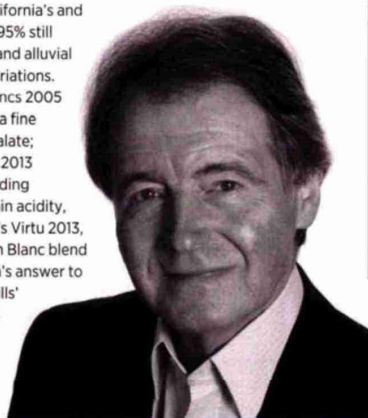
Napa Valley Vintners

Napa Valley Vintners was founded in 1944 and now has more than 500 members. Several were in London in June to show a range of young and older vintages.

To introduce Napa, some bulletpoints were cited: Mediterranean climate, low summer rainfall, resistance to vine disease, vintage consistency, 13,300 hectares of vines representing 4% of California's and 0.4% of the world's vineyards, 95% still family-owned, both mountain and alluvial soils with more than 100 soil variations.

Schramsberg's Blanc de Blancs 2005 (£25.94, Vineyard Cellars) had a fine mousse and creamy, elegant palate; Waterstone's Sauvignon Blanc 2013 (£15.84, Vineyard Cellars), avoiding malolactic fermentation to retain acidity, was floral and fresh, St-Supery's Virtu 2013, a 55% Semillon, 45% Sauvignon Blanc blend (£24.95, Jeroboams) was Napa's answer to Pessac-Léognan, and Grgich Hills' Paris Tasting Chardonnay 2012 (£122, Vineyard Cellars) exhibited good florality and citrusy flavours.

'I feel the vinous year begins on 1 September... antipodeans may not agree'



In the reds, Twomey Cellars' Merlot 2011 (£69.99, Selfridges) had fine, Pomerol-like fruit from a cool vintage while in complete contrast was Shafer's Merlot 2012 (£42, Selfridges), spicy and rich at 15%abv. Five Cabernets showed very well: Silverado Vineyards 2012 (£70, Jeroboams) was European in style with a good future; Hoopes Vineyard 2012 was spicy, smooth and very Napa; Gallica 2008 (£122.76, Vineyard Cellars) was beautifully extracted and elegant; Herb Lamb Vineyards 2012 (£127.22, Vineyard Cellars) had more spice and depth but due to 80% new oak needs to open up; and Long Meadow Ranch 2012 (£69, Vesuvio Wines) was really impressive and also needs to soften.

The Mediterranean Alentejo

For a vineyard region east of Lisbon, inland from Portugal's Atlantic Coast and stretching to the Spanish border, the wines of Alentejo are not on the Mediterranean, but taste as if they were.

With 22,000ha under vine, 20% white and 80% red, indigenous grapes are to the fore: Antão Vaz, Arinto, Roupeiro and Fernao Pires for whites; Aragonez, Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet, Castelão, Alfrocheiro and Touriga Nacional for reds. The terrain is relatively flat, in complete contrast – as are the wines – to the Douro, and the 3,000 annual hours of sunshine with cool nights ensure natural ripening and optimum conditions for eco-friendly and sustainable viticulture.

Sarah Ahmed, the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Portugal, hosted a masterclass to show how good these wines are: Pera Manca's Branco 2012 (Atlantic UK) is oaky but with refreshing acidity; Monte da Ravasqueira's MR Premium Rosé 2014 (ABS Agencies) is a perfect summer rosé from Touriga

Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p111)



Raventos i Blanc, Silencis, Penedes, Spain 2013 16.75 (89)

£15.50-£16 **Fields Morris & Verdin, Harvey Nichols**
From 50-year-old vines, the owners call this 'an acidic Xarel-lo white with high salty notes', while I found lifted florality and fresh minerality. **Drink 2015-2016 Alc 12.2%**



Delaire Graff Estate, Chardonnay, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2013 17.25 (90+)

£13.99 **Armit Wines, Swig**
Grapes from high hillside vineyards vinified in 50% new barriques with no malolactic nor batonnage; this is a floral, fresh, citrusy Chardonnay. Very elegant. **Drink 2015-2018 Alc 14%**



Domaine de Montbourgeau, L'Etoile, Vin Jaune, Jura, France 2007 18 (93)

£43.99/620ml **Armit Wines**
Savagnin grapes matured after fermentation for six years in 230-litre casks with no topping up. Brilliant 'non-oxidised oxidation'. Nutty, dry, superb length. **Drink 2015-2027 Alc 13%**

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Nacional; Susana Esteban's Aventura 2013 (Raymond Reynolds) is a vibrantly pure vineyard blend – the most exciting wine of the tasting; Herdade de São Miguel's Reserva 2012, is a rich, spicy Cabernet Sauvignon; Quinta do Mouro's Touriga Nacional 2010 (Raymond Reynolds), is lifted and floral, still young but very well made; Joao Portugal Ramos' **Marques de Borba** Reserva 2012 (Oakley Wine Agencies) is a blend of local grapes and Cabernet Sauvignon, polished and classy; Herdade do Mouchao 2010 (ABS Agencies) – Alentejo's most famous estate – is 70% Alicante Bouschet, 30% Trincadeira, with lovely fruit weight; Azamor's Petit Verdot 2011 (Liberty Wines) has spice and grip. Prices were not available, but expect to pay £15 to £18 for each.

Sicily via Planeta

Diego Planeta is the person most responsible for keeping Sicilian wines Sicilian, though the most talked about wine he produced from the family vineyards, after two decades as president of the huge Settesoli Cooperative, was a Chardonnay in 1995. 'People were amazed it came from Sicily and we could never have won recognition with local grapes. But now it is more about terroir and our Sicilian grapes express this best.'

Of Spanish origin, Planeta's Sicilian roots go back to 1585. Today, the 17th generation is represented by Diego's daughter Francesca and nephew Alessio. Planeta owns 370ha with wineries in six regions across the island. From its Feudo di Mezzo winery near Etna came Eurzione Bianco 2014 (£18), a fresh, mineral blend of 90% Carricante and 10% Riesling; and Etna Bianco 2014 (£21), a richer, smoother 100% Carricante. From the east was Cometa, Menfi 2014 (£23), a lovely floral 100% Fiano, while from Vittoria in the southwest come two marvellous reds: Frappato 2014 (£13.50), young and stylish; and Cerasuolo di Vittoria 2013 (£18.50), with 60% Nero d'Avola – seriously good Mediterranean wine. Finally, the Santa Cecilia, Noto 2010 (£23), 100% Nero d'Avola, shows off this grape at its smooth and spicy best. Retail stockists from Enotria.

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster

From the cellar Ridgeview's 20th anniversary

The late Mike Roberts MBE planted his first vines in Ditchling, Sussex in 1995 with a target production of 25,000 bottles. Today Ridgeview produces 10 times that, and a recent purchase of adjacent land and a £2 million investment programme in a new winery will take volume to 500,000 bottles by 2020. To celebrate its 20th anniversary, vintages of Bloomsbury (60% Chardonnay, 25% Pinot Noir, 15% Pinot Meunier) from 2013 to 1996 were shown, all disgorged in May with an identical 8.8g



dosage. The **2013**, fine and elegantly floral will mature well (£24.99, Waitrose); **2011** is nutty from a light vintage; **2009** is excellent, yeasty and creamy with Pinot flavours dominant; **2008** is lighter with green apple acidity; **2007** with white and yellow summer fruits is perfect now; **2006**, buttery and briochey, is even better; **2004** seems younger due to high acidity; **2002**, also lemony, is better balanced; **1998** is rich and toasty but still fresh; while the original **1996** shows nutty creaminess and citrus notes.

For the cellar Laroche Chablis

With 90ha of Chablis vineyards, of which 25ha are premier cru and 5ha are grand cru, Laroche is one of the best-positioned producers in the region. It was the first here to use screwcaps, though they have now been largely abandoned in favour of natural cork to match the reductive style of winemaking. Head winemaker Grégory Viennois was in London to launch 'the first single-vineyard, non-premier cru Chablis' – his Vieille Voyer 2014 from 7ha of 70-year-old vines on Kimmeridgian limestone below the Les Vaillons premier cru on the Serein River's left bank.

Reminiscent of 1996 for its remarkable fruit and acid structure, it shows broad white summer fruits, fleshy and stony, with impressive depth for drinking between 2016-2020 (17/20 points). Then a range of premiers crus from **2013**, a difficult but ultimately successful vintage: the precise **Vaudevey**, charming **Beauvoys**, mineral **Côte de Lechet**, structured **Vaillons**, energetic **Montmains**, floral **Mont de Milieu** and robust **Fourchaumes**, all wonderful drinking to 2023. Contact Liberty Wines for prices.



Domaine Rochette, Cuvée des Braves, Regnie, Beaujolais, France 2014 17 (90)

£10.95 **Lea & Sandeman**
 A stand-out from a huge range of 2014 Beaujolais crus: 60-year-old vines, hand-harvested, rigorous selection to show bags of fruit; a really good wine. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 13%



Château Les Annereaux, Lalande de Pomerol, Bordeaux, France 2012 17 (90)

£13.34-£23 **Handford, Millésima**
 Biodynamic since 2010, this has earthy yet elegant fruit, a floral nose and smooth yet robust palate; a classic and classy Libournais. **Drink** 2015-2024 **Alc** 13.5%



Joseph Swan, Trenton Estate Pinot Noir, Sonoma, California USA 2011 18 (93)

£51 **Armit, Fields Morris & Verdin**
 Joseph Swan was the King of Pinot Noir in California and his chosen successor Rob Berglund has created a beautifully textured wine from this historic estate. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 14%