

| | Welcome: Week 8: Close encounters of the Wine Kind 14 th May 2024 | Grape Varieties | Cost £/Where from |
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| R | <p>Cinsault Syrah I.G.P. Pays d’Oc “Vendanges Nocturnes” Laurent Miquel 2023</p> <p>If the label looks familiar, we tried Laurent Miquel’s Viognier at our last Wine Discovery and this is his Rose offering! Jenny Dunning had extolled its virtues so I thought it only right to bring it along for us all to try – and we hadn’t had a Rose for a few weeks as I recall. Some of our previous Rose selections have been very popular and I must confess we did try one of these with some friends and everyone really enjoyed it and it looked spectacular in the glass as it has that lovely pale onion skin colour we all look for these days in a Rose wine!</p> <p>Laurent Miquel is a young winemaker but his land has been in the family since 1791 when it was acquired after the Revolution but monks had grown vines there for many years. Laurent was given a plot as a very young man from his Father and the first Viognier vines in this region were planted here in 1992 – Laurent left to study engineering but returned to winemaking with his wife to be. However, his engineering background led to him becoming a “thinker” – he solves winemaking problems before people realise they are problems that need solving and believes everything can be improved upon in the vineyard and is one of the best examples of the new way of making wine in France.</p> <p>This wine is also a “night harvest” wine as the cooler temperatures ensure the grape is in top condition and immediate pressing ensures a crisp, balanced and aromatic wine. He is not unique in this and you will find various wines that have a name that references harvesting the grapes in the cool of the evening. We should get crisp freshness, subtle raspberry, strawberry, lemon citrus bite and red cherry, perfect as an aperitif or great with Asian food too – spot on for a hot goat’s cheese salad or a bbq chicken. Lots of great reviews on line and ideal for those summer evenings – equal to many pricier examples.</p> <p>The Cinsault gives the freshness, pink crystal hue and texture and Syrah the colour and red fruit flavours and silky finish.</p> <p>Rose wine is essentially a white wine made from red grapes – all grape juice is clear and it is only the skins that give the wine its colour so effectively if you run off the juice very quickly after pressing the grapes you will get clear juice – the trick with Rose wine is to let the juice only have limited skin contact before running off so it is just enough to colour the wine – with the trend to paler Rose that skin contact can be often measured in hours – or even minutes!</p> | Cinsault, Syrah | Waitrose normally £9.16 but on offer at £6.86 and less a further 5% case discount so £6.52 net (6 bottles) |
| W | <p>Albarino, Rias Baixas 2022 – Galicia, North Western Spain – The region of “Ree-Ass by Shuss” (that’s how it’s pronounced !) forms a small section of Atlantic coast of the North Western tip of Spain in the province of Galicia – The coast comprises of “rias”, fjord like inlets and the Albarino grape that grows here resists mildew which is useful protection against the frequent sea mists that roll in – The province has, as the name suggests, Celtic (Gallic) traditions and owing to its geographic isolation was ignored by most of the rest of Spain, so in many ways is almost the Spanish equivalent of Brittany.</p> <p>Much of the land is divided into miniscule parcels that have been inherited down the years and are fiercely clung on to, so there are few large-scale vineyards. Indeed, the vines here are traditionally grown on pergola like structures called “parras” well above shoulder height which allows these small farmers to use the precious land beneath for their food crops – they also ventilate the vines which again is useful when the mists roll in.</p> | Albarino | Waitrose normally £11.00 but less 25% on across the board wine offer so £8.25 net (6 bottles) |

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| | <p>This remains a very “on trend” wine choice for a white wine to go with shellfish – not surprising given its coastal provenance! – and very different to typical Spanish white wines.</p> <p>We have tried a Rias Baixas Albarino before from the Co Op some years ago and I imagine many of you will have tried or at least heard of this wine but for any of you who haven’t tried it I do hope you like it and for those that have here is a chance to reacquaint yourselves! – it is terrific with some garlic prawns as part of a tapas! The style of wine should appeal to Pinot Grigio fans.</p> <p>This particular one comes from the Waitrose “blueprint” range which showcases some of the classic wines of the world from partnerships with respected producers. The Wine guru at Waitrose told me that currently there are some major supply issues for getting Albarino generally and indeed at that point he did not have any of the various examples they sell – so I was very lucky to get his last six of these!</p> <p>It is a very fashionable wine in Spain, even though it is expensive there – perhaps that is why they aren’t exporting so much! It is always worth looking out for the words Rias Baixas on Spanish Albarino as this is regarded as the very top, premium region for Albarino. We should get a refreshing wine with apple flavours, fruit and a hint of lemon with some apricot scent and lemon sherbet nose and good acidity with powerful energy and some seductive salinity. In Portugal, you will get Alvarinho and we have had an example in the past which was very good.</p> <p>The Guardian says this wine over delivers in terms of lip-smacking drinkability and zesty-ness. Taboexa was a Celtic place of worship in Galicia and as far as I can determine this wine is made by Bodegas La Val a top winery on the banks of the Mino river where it has three estates including that of Taboexa</p> | | |
| W | <p>Pouilly-Vinzelles A.O.C. by Joseph Drouhin 2021– Maconnais, Burgundy, France.</p> <p>We have tried a Pouilly Vinzelles by Drouhin before at one of our wine lunches but it would be well outside of our usual budget for a Discovery afternoon, although a combination of special offer and our surplus enabled me to push the boat out.</p> <p>This wine is a bit of an “insider’s choice”. The Appellation of Pouilly Vinzelles borders its more well-known neighbour, Pouilly Fuisse and consequently wines from here tend to be better value for money. (Neither of these are to be confused with the wines known as “Pouilly Fume” which are entirely unrelated and come from the Loire Valley which are a whole different wine – still very good but made from Sauvignon Blanc and a completely different region).</p> <p>This wine is by the producer and Negociant, Joseph Drouhin who is both one of the top two Negociants and producers in Pouilly Vinzelles and also a top producer of the Cote d’Or (Puligny Montrachet etc) so we should have a very high quality wine on our hands. Burgundy is very different to Bordeaux as vineyards in Burgundy tend to be fragmented between various owners, few who can produce enough grapes in their own right to make a wine commercially and so “negociants” buy grapes from numerous growers that meet their criteria and produce and sell the wine under their name – so most Burgundy tends to come from negociants such as “Louis Latour”, “Louis Jadot” rather than being “Chateau this” or “Domaine that”.</p> | Chardonnay | Waitrose normally £27.50 but on offer at £22.91 and less a further 5% case discount so £21.77 |

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| | <p>The Maconnais region which the appellation of Pouilly Vinzelles falls into is definitely the “value” end (in relative terms) of top Burgundy white, whose prices are getting astronomical – at £21, our bottle will be at least half the price of many Cote d’Or wines from Burgundy.</p> <p>A number of the very top Burgundy producers of the Cote d’Or of Burgundy have now invested in quality vineyards in the Maconnais to the South of the Cote d’Or as the land is far more affordable there and the result is top quality wines from very good producers but at prices that are affordable (well, we may well still consider them expensive, this is a £20 bottle of wine after all !- but of course it is all relative and a Puligny Montrachet from the same producer will set you back at least £50 in the supermarket – and three times that in the local restaurants!).</p> <p>We have the Chardonnay grape here which is the grape of Burgundy white wine and the terroir is limestone overlaid with clay or alluvial topsoil. We are promised a superb Burgundy with the elegance and richness of a really good Burgundy white and with good fruit flavour. It ticked my wish list for a top quality (yet affordable within the budget), white Burgundy to keep our white fans happy and I wanted to give you the opportunity to try something a little special! If you like this style but find it a bit pricey then keep a look out for white Macon Villages/Macon Lugny which are the a few rungs down the quality ladder but still very good Burgundy whites.</p> | | |
| Red | <p>Regnie A.O.P. “Cuvee Tim” Domaine Pardon 2022 – Beaujolais, Burgundy France</p> <p>Regnie is a wine that falls into that broader category of wines which are known as “Beaujolais”. Beaujolais is effectively the southernmost region of Burgundy but for all intents, these wines are not Burgundies in the true sense – firstly, they aren’t made from Pinot Noir which is the case for Burgundy reds – there is a reason for that – the soils in Beaujolais are granite and the Pinot Noir vine will not thrive there – so Gamay is planted which does! - and the climate is very different! – they also tend to be much cheaper - although not bargain basement than their true Burgundy cousins!!</p> <p>Like the Cotes du Rhone, the Macon region and several other regions in France, Beaujolais has a system of classification of (theoretical) quality where “basic” wines will be simply called “<i>Beaujolais</i>”, next step up being “<i>Beaujolais Villages</i>” – and at the top of the pecking order, will carry the name of their Village, if considered worthy enough, on their label – there are 10 such Villages or, so called, “Beaujolais Crus” which are able to be sold under the name of their village or commune, one of the best known in the UK, is Fleurie - but you may also have also seen “Moulin a Vent”, “Morgon” or “Brouilly”, especially in French supermarkets which are “Cru” villages in the Beaujolais. Regnie is the most recently elevated “Cru” village and can produce some lighter wines on sandy soils which is of course a bit of a Beaujolais trademark which makes it a great charcuterie wine or Summer red.</p> <p>This example came from Waitrose’s fine wines section in the wooden shelves and will be deep garnet with red fruit and violets on the nose with a powerful yet supple and fruity palate. It can be kept for up to 5 years. It got Gold at the Concours of wines of Beaujolais.</p> | Gamay | Waitrose £13.75 less 5% case discount so £13.06 net |
| Red | <p>Haut Medoc A.C. “Chateau Barreyres” – Cru Bourgeois - Medoc, Bordeaux, France 2020</p> <p>Another quality wine that would normally fall outside of budget! This is a great opportunity to discuss how wines are categorised in Bordeaux! You will see this wine is described as “Cru Bourgeois” – but what on earth does this mean?</p> | | Co Op £19.00 but on offer at £15.00 and less a further |

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| <p>To begin, we need to think of Bordeaux as two distinct regions – the area on the Left Bank of the Gironde River/Estuary which forms a peninsular almost separate to mainland France where the wines are dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon grapes and referred to generally as “the Medoc” - and the area on the Right Bank of the Gironde river where Merlot forms the basis of most of the wines although often there will be other grape varieties blended with them. The two areas have very different methods of quality classification as you will see below!</p> <p>Dealing firstly with the Left Bank (the Medoc) we have (amongst others), the great wines of the Appellation Controlees of Pauillac and St Julien – such as Chateau Latour, Chateau Mouton Rothschild etc. In 1855, Louis Napoleon III arranged for the very best Chateaux of Bordeaux at that time (which were all considered to be in “the Medoc” or Left Bank) to be effectively classified into League tables, with the result that the very best Chateaux were known as “First Growth” followed by those categorised as Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Growths respectively – it is important to remember only the very best Chateaux (at that time) were classified – there would have been (and still are) many, many more Chateaux of the Medoc (and Bordeaux in general) which would not make it into these top 5 leagues or “Classed Growths” – so inclusion in these leagues remains very prestigious to this day and those Chateaux remain very much top quality producers and able to charge a substantial premium for their wines.</p> <p>That categorisation has remained largely unchanged since 1855 - in truth it is unlikely a wine estate such as Chateau Mouton Rothschild is going to dramatically fall from grace! You may well see a wine described as being say “Third Growth” – all will all be very expensive (in the £’000’s a bottle for the First and Second Growths). A realistic option to get a feel for a top Medoc wine is to go for a so called second or cadet wine from one of these classed growths – these would be wines made by one of the top Chateaux from say its young vines which would not quite make the grade for the top wine and will go under a label name that contains a veiled reference to the Chateau such as “La Chapelle des Bages” rather than “Chateau Haut Bages” which would be reserved for its top wine, for example – but these are still likely to be a seriously expensive option if it is from one of the First / Second Growths – in the £100s of pounds a bottle.</p> <p>In 1932 an additional Classification was introduced in the Medoc to complement the 1855 “Classed Growth” Classifications of Louis Napoleon to recognise that, in the ensuing years since 1855, other quality wines from the Left Bank were worthy of recognition and a distinction on the label to enable the consumer to be able to more easily distinguish other top quality wines in a crowded field! - This additional Classification is the “Cru Bourgeois” – there are now three tiers within that classification – firstly Cru Bourgeois, then “Cru Bourgeois Superieur” and ultimately “Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel”. There are about 250 wines at Cru Bourgeois level and the list is revised annually, so this is a good indicator of quality, as a wine cannot simply rest on its laurels and remain a Cru Bourgeois wine based on its quality at a tasting back in 1932!! Our example is a Cru Bourgeois wine and has even garnered a Decanter silver medal. It is Chateau bottled which in general terms is regarded as an indicator of a quality wine. You will note the classic slender bottle shape which is a feature of all Bordeaux wines in the main, Burgundy being the other style. All Bordeaux red wine can be referred to as Claret.</p> <p>Pierre Castel acquired this Chateau in 1971 and he established its 101 hectare vineyard and he likes nothing more than strolling through the Chateau’s vines as the sun rises through the morning mist (according to their website – I haven’t actually spotted him doing it!). The terroir of its vineyards, resemble those of the Margaux vineyards, which are nearby. The soils are full of gleaming pebbles which reflect the sun’s rays on to the grapes helping them to ripen. The Chateau has certified Terra Vitis environmental status. It has a reputation for the elegance and finesse of its wines which are aged in locally made barrels.</p> <p>This wine, is the Chateau’s “First label” and has intense darkness, nose with fruit, peony, vanilla and autumn spice with redcurrant. On the palette it is powerful, silky, lively. The finish is long with tobacco and has ageing potential. It has got numerous gold medals in the past. It is suggested for aged steaks, lamb. The Castel family have 20 chateaux estates in Bordeaux, the Loire, Languedoc and Provence. This is great</p> | <p>10% staff discount so £13.50 net</p> |
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| | <p>introduction to serious Bordeaux wine - but at a fraction of the price of a classed growth and a bit of a bargain at the net price with many Haut Medoc wines selling for twice this!</p> <p>Dealing very briefly with classification of Bordeaux wines from the Right Bank of the Gironde, here we find St Emilion, Pomerol (legendary Chateau Petrus) and here there is no 1855 First/second/third/fourth/fifth growth classification or Cru Bourgeois for that matter! However, in St Emilion there is Premier Grand Cru Classe A, then B and then Grand Cru Classe followed by “Grand Cru” (200 wines from St Emilion can put this on their label, so, although a general indicator of quality, it is by no means a totally exclusive club at the Grand Cru level!).</p> <p>The classification in St Emilion is updated every 10 years or so. Those in the Premier Grand Cru league will again sell for huge sums like their counterparts in the First and Second Growth categories across the river.</p> <p>To put things in Bordeaux into perspective, there are 8,500 Chateaux in Bordeaux and it includes 54 different Appellations as well as generic Bordeaux – and the Bordeaux wine region produces 650 million bottles a year - so it is helpful to have some indicator on the bottle of the ones we should be looking out for! So, keep an eye open in the Supermarket for Bordeaux wines (<i>which as well as generic Bordeaux will include specific top Appellations such as Margaux, Haut Medoc, Pauillac, St Emillion etc</i>) described as “Cru Bourgeois” or “Grand Cru” as these should be a cut above the rest – or if you find yourself the lucky holder of a Euromillions winning ticket, you could always pick up a case or two of a Bordeaux First Growth!</p> | | |
| Red | <p>Chateauneuf du Pape AOC “Close Encounters” – Famille Perrin - Southern Rhone Valley, France 2020</p> <p>Normally Chateauneuf du Pape is well outside our Discovery Budget!</p> <p>This is the classic top-quality Appellation of the Southern Rhone and this example is from none other than the Perrin Family who own Chateau Beaucastel which is probably Chateauneuf du Pape’s top Estate and one of France’s most prestigious and expensive wines.</p> <p>So, firstly, what’s with the Spaceship on the front?! Well, quite famously, in 1954, some very officious local politicians banned flying saucers from landing in the vineyards of C du P! – flying saucers had apparently been spotted over C du P – it is of course, most likely the local politicians seized an opportunity to get some free publicity for the region’s wines knowing this would make headlines! - and to that extent it probably worked as it caused a media sensation at the time and the legend is now lore among wine fans!</p> <p>The French call a Flying Saucer, a “Flying Cigar or “Le Cigare Volant” and a Californian Wine Maker, Randall Grahm, decided to use that name for his Californian wines which used the principal Rhone varieties of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre in an homage to C du P wines (in fact, those with a very good memory may recall we tried one of his wines, a Rose offering from his “Bonny Doon” vineyard some years ago when Waitrose sold off cheap their remaining bottles!) The Perrin family admired the pioneering spirit of Randall Grahm in promoting Rhone wines in the US and for kickstarting the “American Rhone” movement and they have now produced their own respectful but playful homage to his homage, using the three varieties that Grahm used in his original “Cigar Volant” wine !! So impressed were they with all things Californian, Perrin have now also established their own Tablas Creek winery in Paso Robles.</p> <p>The Grape variety of Grenache dominates the Southern Rhone wines – in the Northern Rhone, it is Syrah. We have previously discussed how France’s Appellation Controlee system dictates what grape varieties a producer in a particular ‘Appellation’ can grow and put into their wine and normally the list is quite restrictive – often only one variety is permitted - but perhaps somewhat uniquely for France, Chateauneuf du Pape allows producers to use a cocktail of up to 18 permitted different grape varieties and still call their wine a Chateauneuf du Pape ! –</p> | Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre in this cuvee but you will see that up to 18 varieties are permitted to go into the blend. | Co Op £21.00 but less 10% staff discount so £18.90 net (6 bottles) |

although Grenache is the backbone of this AOC, you will often see Mourvedre, Syrah, Cinsault, Rousanne and numerous less well known varieties eg Picpoul Noir, Muscardin in the blend.

Grenache demands real ripeness and in these times of global warming this means that the alcohol levels can get very high – Chateauneuf has always had a high minimum legal strength but now they are rarely less than 14.5% and can hit 16% ! With that in mind often Mourvedre is used in the mix as it is a late ripening grape and can tone down the alcohol strength in a hot year. One or two top producers use 13 varieties in their blend. Although often a constituent in the blend of Chateauneuf du Pape, Syrah can struggle this far south and hence why it only tends to dominate the wines of the northern Rhone Valley appellations.

Bottles of Chateauneuf du Pape are of course noteworthy for their distinctive embossed crests on their shoulders –these do vary slightly on close inspection (although they all tend to be based on Papal insignia/regalia) – this is because which crest is used depends on which of several trade associations their producer belongs to, which each have different crests.

The name of “Chateauneuf du Pape” literally translates as “the Pope’s new castle” and the village is dominated by a ruined Papal summer palace which lends its name to the wine. In 1309 Pope Clement V the former Archbishop of Bordeaux relocated the papacy to nearby Avignon for around 70 years. There is an Australian wine called “Nine Popes” which also emulates the grape varieties used in C du P – this name results from misconstruing “neuf” as meaning “nine” rather than “new”.

90% of Chateauneuf du Pape is red but the white is good especially with runny French cheese. It is the birthplace of the Appellation Controlee (AOC) system.

Chateauneuf is renowned for its notes of Provencal herbs and spices (Garrigue herbs) and indeed a requirement many years ago was that no vineyards were to be planted on land not arid enough to support Lavender and Thyme!

This particular cuvee is exclusive to the Co Op and is a bargain for a C du P from a top Estate. The Grenache will give kirsch cherry and those Garrigue herb notes – the Syrah gives the core of the wine with structure and weight and the Mourvedre gives an elegant finish. Matthew Jukes and the Times have plugged this wine.