

Havant U3A Wine Appreciation Group

13th Lockdown Newsletter November 2020

Welcome

Hello Wine Appreciation members, welcome to the next of our regular emails during the Coronavirus lockdown period and beyond.

We hope that they are providing some interest and education whilst our normal monthly meetings are suspended. Those face to face meetings are established as collaborative, with different members choosing the wines and the education topic each session. We would very much like these newsletters to also operate in this way, so we ask for any of the following:

Members to volunteer to produce the next letter

Members to volunteer to provide the content of the next learning topic

Members to provide input about their:

Wine experiences – like the best wine I ever had or the wine I've saved for a special occasion

Wine likes and dislikes – what is your favourite wine or a style of wine and why

Please reply to this letter to offer your services and or to provide your input.

Many thanks

Members News

The next virtual tasting will be the Christmas 'party' tasting so I would encourage all who can to attend. The subject of the tasting will be "celebration wine". This can mean whatever you want it to mean! It could be sparkling wine, a fortified wine, a sweet wine or simply a wine that you might reserve for a celebration. It's your choice!

The tasting will be Tuesday 15th December at 2pm

It will be conducted over Zoom and Geoff will send the link nearer the time.

Please will you reply to Geoff whether you plan to attend or not and when you've made your wine choice please let him know.

Party hats will be allowed!



This interesting story was shared by Ken and it partly prompted one of the subjects in this newsletter.

The Sad Bottle

Recently a friend, coming to me for lunch, kindly brought a bottle of red wine. It was found tucked away in a cupboard and was a French Cabernet Sauvignon claiming to be a blend of that variety, medium bodied with rich colour and fruit. However as I had a bottle already open (I think it was the Chilean originally bought for our next tasting) we used that. Only then did we notice that the label bore the date 1997! Next day I attempted to open it. The corkscrew went in fairly easily and I very gingerly tried to extract the cork. The top half came out very easily but the bottom half remained in the bottle. Further examination revealed that its centre was rotten and smelt so. With the help of a skewer and a conveniently shaped sliver of wood I managed to get it and all its parts out. I sniffed, even I could tell that there was no smell, sorry, I meant nose. I poured a little into a glass. It had a rather attractive reddy /rust colour so I took a sip. Difficult to describe the taste, it was sort of peppery cum chemical but even a sip left a warm glow. With a heavy heart I decided it was not for me and poured it down the drain!

Study Topics

We have two study topics for you this time, the first is some information about ageing of wine, the second about the wine of Lebanon.

1. Why do some wines improve with age and some just become undrinkable (like Ken's)?

Which wines will age?

All wines will age, but most wines will not age well!

The vast majority of wine is made so that it should be drunk soon after purchase and only a tiny minority of wines are made with the intention of improving with age. If you cast your eye across a supermarket shelf the vast majority, perhaps all, of the wines should be drunk within 2 years. There are, however, no hard rules about this due to people having different tastes and preferences.

Wines that are designed to age well will usually cost more or much more than an average bottle and this is a reflection of the effort, and thus the cost, that a winemaker has put into the process. Age-worthy wines are special and so they are made using the best grapes when 'best' frequently means lower yields per hectare. The other factor influencing ageing potential is the type of grape and the method of vinification.

Wines designed for ageing

Why do some wines get better with age? In general, that's due to the wine's structure: acid, tannins, and sugar, as well as the quality of fruit in the wine.

It's a result of many factors, such as the grape variety (some age well, others not so much), the terroir (some regions make more structured, and therefore more age-worthy, wines) and, of course, the winemaker. Some winemakers aim for an easy-to-drink, lush style of wine that may not improve in the bottle, while others may want a brutally tannic young wine that can last and evolve in wonderful ways for ages.

This list shows the grapes that Jancis Robinson considers capable of producing wines that can age well. You will notice that for many the range of years of potential aging are very wide showing again that successful aging also needs the wine to be designed for it. There is also no "best" age for a particular wine since the wine will evolve over time possibly getting "better" or possibly getting less pleasant depending on the winemakers objective and skill.

White

- Botrytized wines (5–25 yrs)
- Chardonnay (2–6 yrs)
- Riesling (2–30 yrs)
- Hungarian Furmint (3–25 yrs)
- Loire Valley Chenin blanc (4–30 yrs)
- Hunter Valley Semillon (6–15 yrs)

Red

- Cabernet Sauvignon (4–20 yrs)
- Merlot (2–10 yrs)
- Nebbiolo (4–20 yrs)
- Pinot noir (2–8 yrs)

- Sangiovese (2–8 yrs)
- Syrah (4–16 yrs)
- Zinfandel (2–6 yrs)
- Classified Bordeaux (8–25 yrs)
- Grand Cru Burgundy (8–25 yrs)
- Aglianico from Taurasi (4–15 yrs)
- Baga from Bairrada (4–8 yrs)
- Hungarian Kadarka (3–7 yrs)
- Bulgarian Melnik (3–7 yrs)
- Croatian Plavac Mali (4–8 yrs)
- Georgian Saperavi (3–10 yrs)
- Madiran Tannat (4–12 yrs)
- Spanish Tempranillo (2–8 yrs)
- Greek Xynomavro (4–10 yrs)
- Vintage Ports (20–50 yrs)

What happens when wines age.

(this is from an article in [Wine Enthusiast](#))

Taste

When wines are young, we taste their primary flavours, like grassiness in Sauvignon Blanc, plum in Merlot, apricot in Viognier or citrus in Riesling. We may also notice some secondary notes associated with winemaking techniques, like the vanilla flavour of oak or buttery nuances from malolactic fermentation.

When wines age, we start speaking about tertiary notes, or flavours that come from development. This could mean young, bold notions of fresh fruit that become gradually more subdued and reminiscent of dried fruit. Other flavours, previously hidden by bold primary notes, come to the fore, like honey, herbal notes, hay, mushroom, stone and earth.

What causes these changes? Nothing in wine is ever static. Acids and alcohols react to form new compounds. Other compounds can dissolve, only to combine again in another fashion. These processes happen constantly and at different rates. Every time you open a bottle, you catch the wine at another stage in its development, with new and different nuances. While the proportion of alcohol, acids and sugars stay the same, the flavors continue to change.

Texture

Texturally, the wines also change. Dry, aged white wines can become almost viscous and oily, while reds tend to feel smoother. This is due to phenolic compounds like tannins falling out as sediment over time.

In a young wine, these compounds repel each other, staying small enough to remain suspended in the wine. As the wine ages, they lose their charge and start to combine, forming chains and becoming larger and heavier. This reduces the surface area of the tannins, causing them taste smoother, rounder and gentler.

Once these combined compounds become too large, they fall out of suspension as sediment. Some red wines throw heavy sediment, others almost none.

Colour

One of the most visible processes in an evolving wine is slow oxidation. Colour is the most obvious indicator of this.

As white wines age, they often evolve from pale lemon or golden to amber and even brown. Vivid salmon-hued rosés can take on onion skin tones as they age. As reds develop, oxidation often moves them from the purple end of the spectrum toward tawny or brown hues.

While young reds can be opaque when held against a white background, mature reds often show a lighter colour around the edges. This is known as “rim.”

The rate of oxidation depends on the amount of air left in the neck of the bottle after it was sealed, and how permeable the closure is. Traditionally, natural cork has allowed minimal oxygen exchange, which is why most wines deemed age-worthy are still bottled under cork. However, since cork is a natural product, there is no such thing as uniformity. This can cause considerable bottle variation in the same case of wine.

Even the liners of screwcaps can allow for a certain amount of oxygen exchange, and it's perfectly possible to age and cellar these wines.

When to drink wine

There's no hard and fast answer but put simply: drink it when you want to. The seller or the winemaker may give you guidance about when to drink their product but usually it's quite broad – like “2-3 years” or “drink young” – but the decision finally rests with you.

If you like a wine of a certain type at a certain age, then drink it then. If you like the fruitiness of a young wine, then drink it young; if you would like to see a softening of tannins or a reduction in up-front fruitiness then keep it a bit.

Finally, a personal experience. In the last 1980s I bought some wine ‘en Primeur’ from Adnams wine merchant. In that batch was a case of Ch Lafaurie Peyraguey 1986 Sauternes Premier Cru. I kept the case unopened for few years before sampling the first bottle. Over the years we have occasionally had a bottle at Christmas and been amazed and surprised how the wine has changed and evolved over time; from a bright, light sweet delicate wine to a mellow, viscous, marmalade flavour. There is one bottle left.

Was there a time which was the 'perfect time' to drink it? No. On each occasion it had evolved to become something slightly different but certainly no less nice than the previous time.

2. Lebanese Wine

Introduction

Lebanon is a county in crisis after years of economic mismanagement by a ruling elite during which the currency has crashed and basic public services have been failing. Covid19 impact and an explosion in the port of Beirut causing massive damage and many deaths have both made the situation worse. (see this [BBC summary](#) for more info)

It is a very sad situation for a country which has been a popular tourist destination and who's capital, Beirut, was known as the Paris of the Middle East.

History

Lebanon has a long history of wine making and it may have been here that the wild *Vitis Vinifera* grape vine was brought into cultivation, although that may have happened elsewhere in the Middle East. There is, however, firm evidence of wine making in Byblos, still one of the cities in Lebanon today and of its export to the Egyptian Old Kingdom (2686 BCE – 2134 BCE). The Phoenicians and later civilisations produced wine in both Tyre and Sidon (both still cities in modern Lebanon) in the land then known as Caanan. So not only milk and honey but also wine flowed in the land of Caanan!

When the land fell to the invading Muslim Caliphate, wine production was tolerated for Christian religious use but nevertheless production declined.

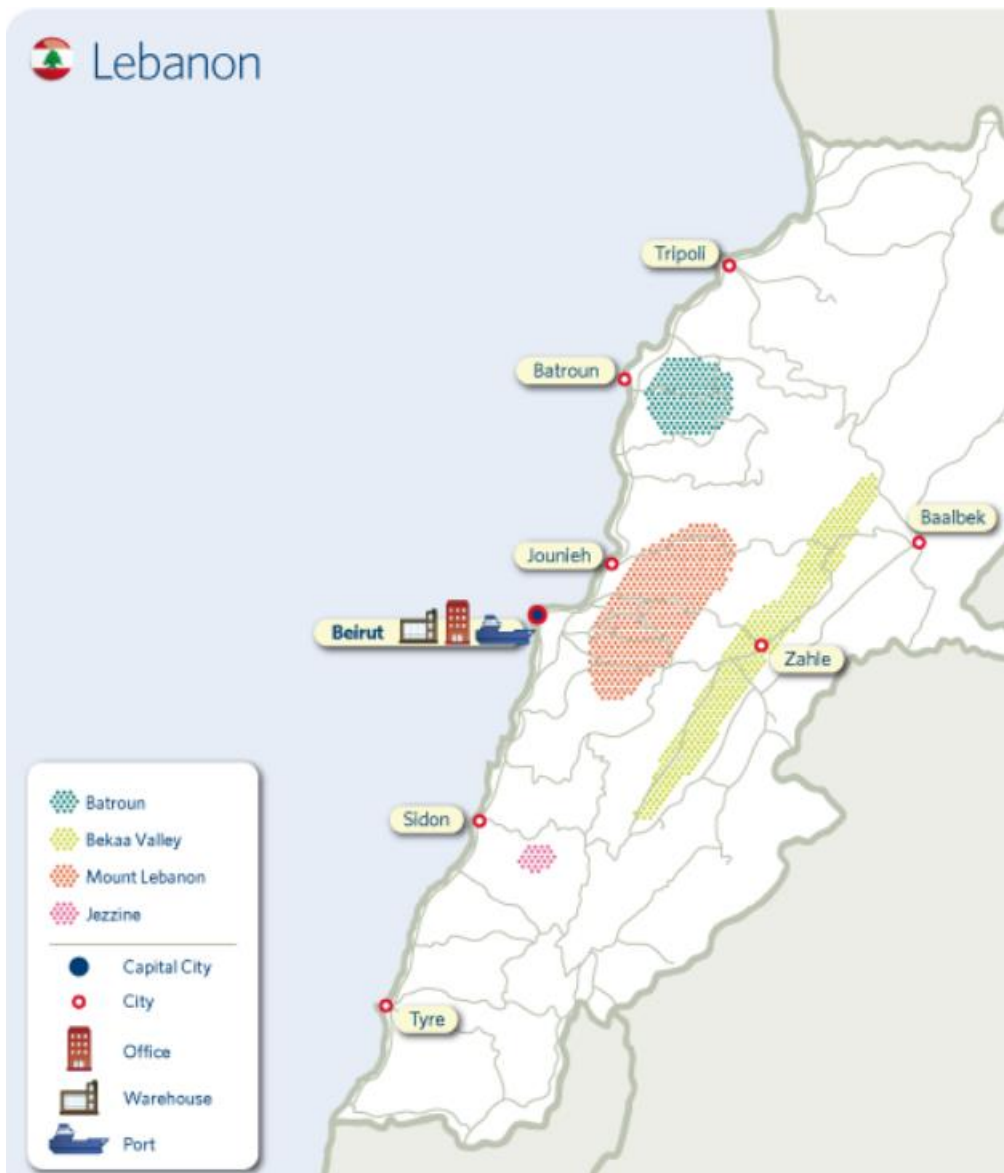
The modern winemaking era began in the 1850's when winemakers set up chateaux in the country when in 1857 that Jesuit missionaries formally introduced viticulture and new vines from French-governed Algeria were planted, developing the foundation for the modern Lebanon wine industry. Other wineries followed over time with Chateau Musar, perhaps the best-known producer, being founded in 1930.

Grapes, wines and vineyards

Lebanon is the 44th biggest wine producing nation today with a production volume of 14,700 tonnes. A substantial majority is red wine and produced from French varieties as a result of the French influence over both the county and wine making.

The major red varieties are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cinsault, Carignan, Grenache. The whites are produced from Viognier, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Chardonnay, Clairette and Muscat as well as native varieties Obeideh and Merhwah.

The majority of wineries are in the Beqaa Valley on the east side of the county but there are still some in the ancient production area on the coastal plain.



Chateau Musar

You might be forgiven for thinking that this winemaker is the only one in Lebanon because that's the only one on UK high street sellers' shelves. You'd be wrong, of course, there are many more ([see this link](#)) but only Ch Musar has managed to break into our markets to any significant extent. This is due

to having good wines but also to having a winemaker who was gifted in both making wine and promoting his wine.

Gaston Hochar set up his winery in 1930 and it seems that his wine was one amongst many in the country at the time. It was only after his son Serge Hochar decided in the 1950s that his future lay not in Civil Engineering but in the family business of wine making that the business really achieved great things. To achieve this, he went to Bordeaux to learn how to make wine, studying oenology with Emile Peynaud. On his return to Lebanon, he took over winemaking from his father determined to make the best wine he could along the lines of the great Bordeaux houses but one that still carried the hot climate characteristics of his country. His first vintage was in 1959 but it was the civil war of 1972 that changed everything for Hochar.

With local markets broken but the war he decided to go out to the world and find new customers for the wine. At the 1979 Bristol Wine Fair his Ch Musar 1967 won the top award and this brought his wine to the attention of many buyers from across the world. He continued to travel the world attending wine shows, meeting buyers and the wine press earning the first Decanter magazine 'Man of the Year' award in 1984 (how anachronistic that title now sounds when there are so many excellent female wine makers around the world!).

Serge Hochar's success was due to an excellent and widely praised product combined with a passion to take that wine into the world. His death at the age of 75 in 2015 prompted wine buyers and critics across the world to mourn the passing of a great man. This is the Decanter [obituary](#) from the time.

The Wines

One description of the top of the range wine, Chateau Musar, is "Think Bordeaux meets Arabian Nights, Chateau Musar's indulgent, sensuous flavours make it an unforgettable experience". This top wine come at same price as a good Cru Bourgeois but the two ranges of second wines – Hochar Pere et Fils and Musar Jeune – retail in the £15 to £20 range. The second wines have the style of their big brother but designed for earlier drinking.

And finally



Happy drinking

Nick Howard