

Havant U3A Wine Appreciation Group

2nd Lockdown Newsletter 24th April 2020

Welcome

Hello Wine Appreciation members, this is the second of our regular emails during the Coronavirus lockdown period. We hope that you are still coping with lockdown and that the first newsletter went a little way towards lightening the mood and encouraging the consumption of wine!

Attached is a short video to help you exercise and then consume with a good conscience! (click the attached file called The Extraction Challenge to view)

Members News

If you have wine-related news or information to share, please let us have that and we will try to include that in the next newsletter. Also, if you are able to offer help to or if you need help from any members, please let us know and we'll share that as necessary.

Ken Arkell's feedback to the first Newsletter included the request for members experiences of Wine Clubs such as the Sunday Times Wine Club so over to you members!

My own experience of the Wine Society since 2006 has been consistently good, paperwork interface and delivery logistics are first class. In particular the Society Range (69 strong) and more expensive Exhibition range (44 strong) cover white, red, rose and fortified and offer excellent consistency of taste from year to year and cover a wine price range from £5.95 to £39. Much better than flipping between endlessly inconsistent supermarket labels.

Study topic

We are a learning organisation so each newsletter will cover one wine learning subject each time. Your suggestions for future subjects and the way that the subject is covered will be gratefully received.

This time the topic is the wine of Romania.

Romania is fighting its way up the wine growing ladder of success, starting from the lows of the Communist era exit in the early 90s. The inheritance of the Communist control of wine with decrepit and aged equipment and a concentration on quantity not quality has been a considerable challenge.

Surprisingly it has the fifth largest area of planted vines in Europe after Spain, France, Italy and Portugal in descending order. But in an indication of the state of the industry it has the largest number of vineyards and the smallest average vineyard area. It also has about 60% of vines more than 30 years old, the third highest proportion in Europe behind only Cyprus and Belgium. The planted area splits roughly 30% quality (either PDO or PGI for the experts) and 70% table wine. Compare this with a more mature wine industry such as Spain where only 4% of area yields table wine. Some 60% to 70% of wine is self-production, wine made at home, which explains the small average vineyard area and that only 15% of wine production is exported. Romania therefore has some way to go in vineyard consolidation, quality improvements and export build-up before it

can rival the major producers, even if it has the planted area. Modern equipment shortages still exist, notably of refrigeration for fermentation temperature control and for safe bottled wine storage.

The main indigenous grape varieties are the red Feteasca Neagra, the whites Feteasca Alba and Feteasca Regala, though in all there are five reds, eight whites and one rose.

Feteasca Neagra translated as Black Maiden or Black Fairy is the best of these with a long history as seeds more than 2000 years old have been discovered in Romanian remains. Production involves oak barrel maturation followed by bottle ageing leading to fine tannins, good acidity, medium to full body and alcohol content often exceeding 13.5%. Typical aromas are of dried plums, blackberries, and black blueberries along with flavours of black pepper, vanilla and coffee.

Feteasca Alba translated as White Maiden or White Fairy is thousands of years old and planted mainly in Transylvania, Moldavia and north of the Grater Wallachia. Usually produced as a fresh dry white, either citric or floral tasting of green fruits.

Feteasca Regala translated as Royal Maiden or Royal Fairy, is only 100 years old, the youngest of these three grapes, from an early 20th century natural crossing between Feteasca Alba and Grasa de Cotnari grape varieties in Transylvania. At that time the Romanian royal family assisted wine industry development so the grape was named in their honour. A dry, floral white with low alcohol content (9 to 11.5%) with fruit flavours made to be drunk young.

A Bucharest based wine merchant website has a good explanation of Romanian indigenous grapes and growing regions [here](#). Bottles are priced from about 13 to 26 euros. There is at least one specialist UK based Romanian wine importer appropriately named “Transylvania Wine Ltd” [here](#). Bottle prices range from about £12 to £30 for the main grape varieties. These prices are not cheap, but are indicative of the small scale of the quality Romanian exporters.

Two short videos on Romanian wine including the inherited problems of the communist era and the struggles of producers committed to quality are [here](#) and [here](#). A third video both longer, and more up to date is [here](#). It is unfortunately in Romanian, but sub-titled in very good English, with some interesting content covering major grape varieties.

Members Cellar

In this section we'll share information about your current favourite bottle or something you're saving for a special occasion, please let us have that and we'll include in future newsletters.

Here's my 'something, actually somethings, for a special hot occasion'!

Last year on Crete Alison and I had an excellent visit to the Lyrarakis winery in Western Crete. Excellent and informed commentary, some very good wines to taste, all accompanied by a superb cold plate. We emerged some hours later with three bottles, a red, a white and a sweet white. The white is a 2018 Dafni using the Dafni grape grown only in Crete and saved from extinction by the Lyrarakis family by replanting in the early 90s. The red is a 2013 Mandilari composed only of the mandilari grape notorious as the “thug” of Cretan red grapes and used only for blending until Lyrarakis pioneered sole use. Experience shows this has a real kick, but in a controlled way. The sweet white 2015 Liastos is a blend composed of a role call of white Cretan grapes, Plyto, Assyritiko, Thrsapsathiri, Dafni, Vilana and Vidiano. So far so good, but the problem is enjoyment requires weather good enough to match these wines with Greek salad, lamb

Kleftiko and natural yoghurt with honey. So my hopes are up as the sun continues to shine and temperatures creep ever higher. Roll on the summer!!

The best wine or wine experience

Do you have a real wine highlight either the wine itself or the overall experience? Please email in to share with other members?

Here is one of mine. Many years ago Alison and I were touring around Tuscany in Italy, near Siena. We stayed in San Gimignano, a small village distinguished by its tower houses. These were a product of a medieval “mine is better than yours” literal race to the top to build a house with the highest tower! So, bright sunshine, salad for lunch and a brilliant white wine we had never heard of before. Floral, fresh, bright and a real holiday high note. The wine was [Vernaccia di San Gimignano](#), produced from the ancient variety of [Vernaccia](#) grape which is grown on the sandstone hillsides of the area, first recorded in 1276 and mentioned in Dante’s Divine Comedy. Recently I purchased a couple of bottles of 2017 and the recent weather has certainly been warm enough for sun, Vernaccia and salad (see members cellar above)!

Feedback

Thanks to all those members who gave us such positive feedback on the first newsletter last week, however we are anxious for contributions to help fill future newsletters. Please take a moment of your time to find something appropriate in any of the sections above and then email same to Geoff. We all want the newsletter to be a combined group effort.

Happy Drinking. Keep safe!

Cheers, **Steve**
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