

West Leicestershire u3a

Wine Appreciation Group meeting February 2024

What do aluminium, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, copper, iron, manganese, nickel, lead and zinc have in common? Answer – they are all found, in varying concentrations, in our tippable of choice – wine!

Referencing Mr Google we find some appropriately long words to explain this phenomenon, many of which I cannot spell. The metals are not actually added to the mix, rather are present in trace amounts, usually originating from either the ingredients or the wine making equipment. They affect the characteristics of wine including flavour, freshness, aroma, colour and taste. In other words most of the metals found in the wine serve both functional and regulatory purposes, contributing to the wine making process as well as the overall character of the product.

So far so good, most of us can ignore facts and accept that wine quality is subjective and personal preferences will vary – unless you are sensitive to one or more of these elements. One of our members has, after a lifetime of study, narrowed down some unpleasant after effects of having a drink. Not to colour – red or white, not to ABV nor even to quantity but rather to the presence of trace metallic elements. As she says, she is allergic to metal – not sure which one though. The study continues...

To return to the u3a mantra – 'Learn, Laugh and Live' – we embarked on a geographic odyssey. Our subject this month was Antipodean Wine. We had wines apparently from the Spanish, Italian and South African enclaves of Australia? We even had a Merlot from that well known wine making concern – Morrisons. This we were assured is in Eastern Australia. Most of our samples though, actually came from Australia and New Zealand.



Our first tasting was a very nice Prosecco, admittedly from Italy but to celebrate Hazel's birthday which she topped off with a smorgasbord of cheeses, crisps, crackers and grapes. The rest of us will have to up our game – thank you Hazel and Happy Birthday.

Speaking of cheese, ever the master of the obscure, Roger brought some Shropshire Blue which actually originates from Inverness, although this particular sample was made a little nearer to home, in Long Clawson, more renowned for the production of Stilton cheese.

We moved on to a set of three Brancott Estate Sauvignon Blanc wines – a posh ‘reserve’, a more run of the mill pouring wine and a ‘Flight’ version which is apparently good for you, having just 58 calories per glass and only 9% ABV. An interesting comparison but all very palatable. Staying on the ‘good for you’ tack we tried a Banrock Stalia Merlot which was presented in a interesting shaped plastic bottle and was 100% Carbon Neutral. We all felt much better after this.

A Kooliburra Sauvignon Blanc from Margaret River scored highly on its name alone, a later Shiraz from the same region in Western Australia was also highly regarded. Looking at the scores for the various wines sampled, the standard was very high – or did our decision to delay judging them to the end of the evening affect the scores? This may seem a bit perverse but illustrated the power of our collective memory.

Nearly all of us could remember our parent’s Coop dividend number, the posh ones among us who had a telephone could remember that number – even our first car registration. We proceeded down memory lane to laugh (or to be realistic not) about the seeming privations of the ‘40s and ‘50s and how conventions and expectations have changed. The uses and protocols of potties and even toilet paper were discussed. Izal came in for specific mention – good as tracing paper or for musical combs – not so good for its specified use.

As so often talk turned to holidays, travel and restaurants. It is interesting how a good or a bad experience of a restaurant can influence and even blight that establishment for years. One restaurant in rural France did sound good – perhaps a venue for the lunch group?

John Dexter



The picture shows John trying to “adjust” a cork so it would refit into a wine bottle to allow the contents to be taken home without spillage, sadly unsuccessfully. Fortunately an alternative solution was found – using a different cork!

Our next meeting – Wednesday 27 March 7.30pm at Alan’s Way
Theme: Iberian Wines.