



THE
ATHENÆUM
PALL MALL LONDON

A TUTORED
WINE TASTING AND DINNER:
NORTH AMERICAN WINES

Thursday 29th June 2023



Speaker: Professor Kathleen Burk

Chairman: Professor James Crabbe

MENU AND DINNER WINES

Roederer Estate Quartet Brut NV, Anderson Valley,
California, 12%



Jumbo Shrimp Cocktail, Iceberg Lettuce, Avocado,
Marie Rose, Caviar

Henry of Pelham Family Estate Riesling 2019, Niagara
Peninsula, Ontario, Canada, 10.5%



Barbequed Beef Short Rib, Succotash, Creamed Potatoes

Patelin de Tablas 2018, Tablas Creek, Paso Robles,
California, 13%



Mississippi Mud Pie

Quady Elysium Black Muscat Dessert Wine 2018,
Madera, San Joaquin Valley, California, 15%



Coffee and Chocolates



NORTH AMERICAN WINES

The production of wine in North America advanced from South to North. The first vines were planted in Mexico by the colonialists in 1524, but quality winemaking only really began in the 20th century. Baja California, the peninsula extending south from the mainland, and with the Gulf of California between it and the rest of Mexico, produces Mexico's top wines. It is hot, but most of the winegrowing areas are only 15 miles from the Pacific Ocean, which provides the crucial cooling evening breezes. The most threatening aspect is a lack of water; everyone has to irrigate, since enough rainfall cannot be depended upon.

The history of wine in the US is really two stories: failure in the east and success in the west. The crux was American versus European vines. Native American grapes thrive in the east but European varieties died. This was primarily because of the diseases, such as various forms of mildew, and pests, such as phylloxera, which in the late 19th century wiped out a third of European grape production, including much of Bordeaux. Only in the 20th century did winemaking begin to be a serious occupation in the east, and this was only in certain areas. New York state has a widespread wine industry with some excellent wines, as does Virginia.

In the west these native American varieties, with their inherent diseases such as phylloxera, did not grow, allowing the European grapes to flourish. They were brought to California by Spanish monks, primarily from Mexico, who over the years established 21 missions on the Pacific coast, at each of which they planted grapes from which they made sacramental wine. Winemaking really took off in the years following the California

gold rush in 1849, however, and currently California is by far the largest wine producer in the US.

Continuing north, grapes were first planted in Oregon in the 1840s. What really put Oregon on the map was the French Wine Olympiads in 1979, which pitted pinot noirs from around the world against each other. The winner was an Oregon pinot noir made by Eyrie Vineyards. A rather famous Burgundian winemaker, Robert Drouhin, did not believe the outcome and arranged for a rematch, pitting the Eyrie pinot noir against a group of French wines considered to be finer than those in the Olympiad. The winner was Drouhin's 1959 Chambolle-Musigny, but the Eyrie came a very close second. At that point, Drouhin decided to buy some land in Oregon, and the fame of Oregon wine spread. Pinot noir and pinot gris wines are the best known, but some of their chardonnays are also outstanding.

Washington is the second-largest wine-producing state in the US. Most of the wines come from the hotter, drier eastern half, where water is at a premium, but which has long sunlight hours during the growing season. German and Italian immigrants during the 1860s and 1870s produced the first wines. The mid-20th century saw the growth of the modern wine industry, with quality dry wines now mostly replacing fortified sweet wines. It is largely red wine country, with merlot and cabernet sauvignon dominating.

TASTING WINES

Monte Xanic Viña Kristel Sauvignon Blanc 2020, Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico, 13%



Mexican winery Monte Xanic

The Mexican wine industry is concentrated in Baja California, with most of the production in the Valle de Guadalupe. Monte Xanic was founded in 1987 by five friends, led by oenologist Hans Backhoff, to produce premium wines. They decided that world-class quality could be achieved by monitoring various factors to which no one else was paying attention, such as controlling the fermentation temperature of their white wines. Before they grew their own vines, they paid what was necessary for top quality grapes. They had non-winery problems: for example, agreements with the EU and Chile allowed the market to be flooded with inexpensive but good-quality wines. Furthermore, they could not compete with the big Mexican wineries, so much of the early publicity was word-of-mouth, making them cult wines. The drive for quality made Monte

Xanic wines the first premium wines in Mexico and a leader in a Mexican wine revolution. Its success also spurred a major wine industry in the Valle de Guadalupe.

The area is challenging, from the very high temperatures to droughts to bouts of high humidity during the late summer harvest; to save the grapes, they pick them at night. The soil is decomposed granite, which allows for good drainage and minerals, but the vines can get stressed. This can, of course, concentrate the flavours.

The wine has a nose of citrus and tropical fruit, whilst the palate is dry, fresh, and light, with lively acidity.

Tatomer Wines Meersboden - GUESS THE GRAPE - 2019,
Santa Barbara, California, 13.5%



Santa Barbara Wine Country

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The wine has a lovely palate of stone fruit with some minerality. It is bright, fresh and racy now, and gives some indication that it will age into a silken honeyed mouthful.

Bergström Old Stones Chardonnay 2020, Willamette Valley, Oregon, 13%



Bergström Winery

Bergström Winery is situated in the Willamette Valley in Oregon, a region ideal for Burgundian varieties (both Joseph Drouhin and Louis Jadot have wineries there). There is a long growing season: cool wet winters are followed by warm summers with cool evenings. The Bergström parents – he is a retired doctor – decided to plant a vineyard to give their children a legacy. Their fourth son, Josh, returned from a year in France in 1999, which he had spent in Burgundy doing a postgraduate programme in viticulture and oenology; since then he has been the winemaker. That year he made wine from purchased grapes, but from 2001 all of the Bergström wines have been made from their own grapes. Since 2000 the farming has been biodynamic, which necessitates paying meticulous attention to the vines.

The wine has a floral and fruity nose. On the palate it is dry with rather crisp acidity; although there is a touch of fruitiness, it is dominated by a savoury minerality.

Barboursville Vineyards Cabernet Franc Reserve 2015, Barboursville, Virginia (90% Cabernet Franc, 10% Petit Verdot), 13%



Barboursville Winery

Barboursville took its name from James Barbour, Governor of Virginia (1812-1814) and a close friend of President Thomas Jefferson, who designed his house. This remains at the centre of Barboursville Vineyards. In 1976 Gianni Zonin, an Italian winemaker from the Veneto, where his family has produced wines since 1821, bought the estate. Jefferson had tried unsuccessfully for decades to grow European wine grapes on his estate at Monticello; Zonin's estate was the first in Virginia to do so successfully. The Virginian climate is unforgiving: the winters are long and can be very cold, with varying amounts of snow; this is followed by suffocatingly hot and humid summers, which include frequent, sometimes torrential, downpours; and,

to top it all, there are not infrequent tropical storms and even hurricanes. This has all required constant and massive efforts in their vineyards. They grow a range of varieties, notably including a number of Italian varietals such as Vermentino, Nebbiolo and Barbera. However, the grapes which are considered Virginia's signature grapes are Viognier and Cabernet Franc, with Petit Verdot and Petit Manseng coming up fast.

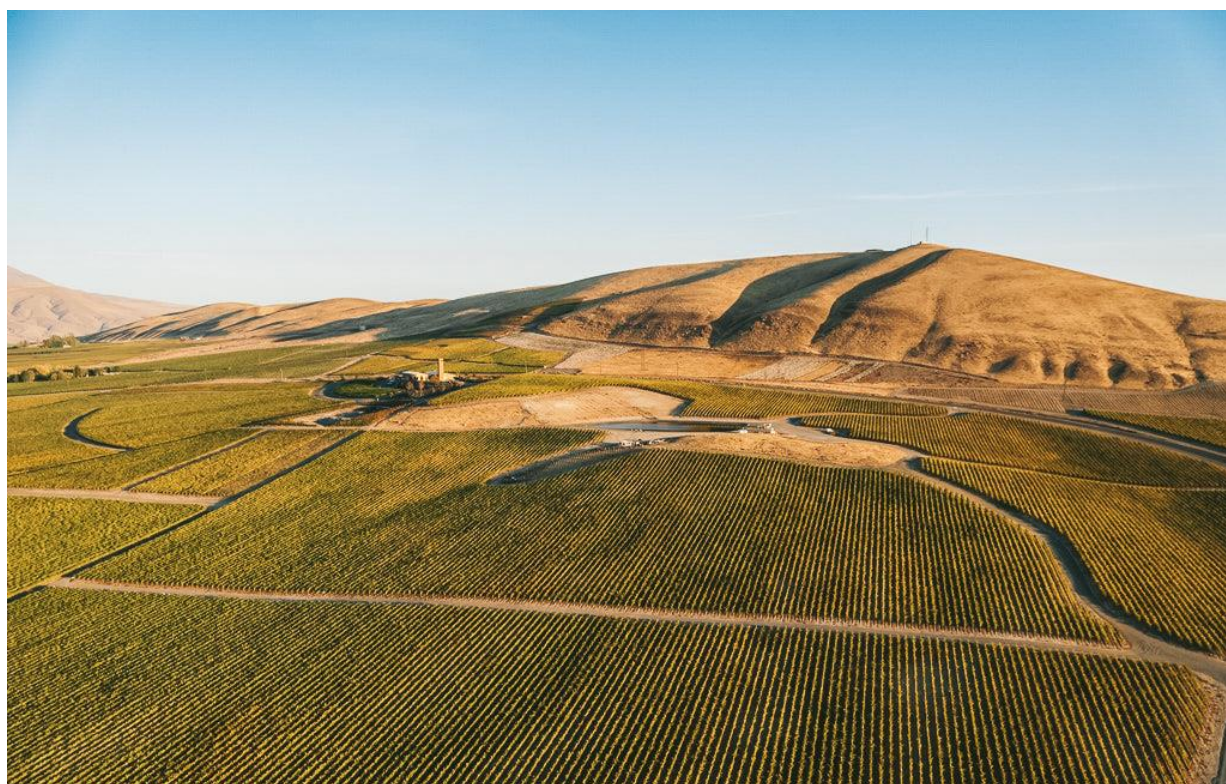
The Cabernet Franc Reserve was aged in new and used French oak barriques for 12-14 months. It has a wonderfully balanced structure, integrated fruit and minerals, and a seemingly endless finish.

Monte Xanic Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2020, Valle de Guadalupe, Mexico (60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 40% Merlot), 13.7%

Monte Xanic prefers Bordeaux varieties for their red wines. After years of producing traditional and conservative wines, they are now experimenting with fruitier wines and using much less oak. They control yields so that their wines have the concentration that they prefer. The wines are aged in top quality French oak; they were the first wine producer in Mexico to do this.

The wine is dry, with Medium acidity and tannins. There is some earthy fruit on the palate. Merlot's contribution is noticeable.

Betz Family Winery 'The Untold Story' Red Wine 2018,
Columbia Valley, Washington (40% Cabernet Sauvignon,
40% Syrah, 10% Merlot, 10% Grenache), 13.8%



Betz Family Winery

Bob Betz MW had worked at Chateau Ste. Michelle, the largest winery in Washington state, for 28 years, when he and his wife founded their own winery, producing their first vintage in 1997. At that time, he was probably the only owner and winemaker who was also a Master of Wine. In 2005 they built a state-of-the-art winery and in 2011 the winery was sold to Steve Griessel, with Betz staying on as winemaker for a further 5 years. The hallmark of winemaking there is attention to detail, with the winemaker taking unusual care over every aspect of the winemaking. Decisions on blending, for example, take several months. The red wines are aged in 100% French oak. Although the mantra is that wine is made in the vineyard, nevertheless it gets help from work in the lab.

Eastern Washington, where the winery is located, is hot and semi-arid during the summer and cold to very cold during the winter; annual rainfall averages 6 inches a year. Irrigation is vital. Yet with sunshine hours two hours a day longer than in California, the grapes have a long time to ripen, with the additional flavour that that can provide.

It is a dry, big wine with prominent acidity and tannins, dark stone fruit and oaky notes on the palate.

Ridge Vineyards Geyserville 2020, Alexander Valley, Sonoma County, California (69% Zinfandel, 20% Carignane, 8% Petite Sirah [Durif in Europe], 2% Alicante Bouschet, 1% Mataro [Mourvèdre]), 14%



Ridge Vineyards

Ridge Vineyards was established in 1962 by four Stanford Research Institute engineers. In 1969, Paul Draper, a Stanford philosophy graduate who had recently set up a winery in Chile, joined Ridge as a partner and winemaker. He was a practical winemaker who knew a great deal about fine wines and believed in low-intervention traditional methods, which accorded with the hands-off approach of the founders. He has achieved a quite unbelievable status as a thoughtful and inspirational winemaker. The Ridge flagship wine is Monte Bello, a Bordeaux blend of consummate quality. Ridge also produces a large number of zinfandel wines, all of which are single vineyard-based. Geyserville, which is primarily a zinfandel wine, is rather a field blend, since the different grapes all come from the same site, which is made up of three adjacent

fields with virtually identical soils. Some of the vines, those in 'The Old Patch', are more than 130 years old. The wine is aged for 13 months in American oak, 20% new and the remainder from one to five years old. Geyserville was first made in 1966, and is generally considered to be the top zinfandel in the world.

Geyserville has ripe red fruits, especially cranberry, on the nose, with a touch of dried herbs. On the palate there are blackberries and other dark fruits, vibrant acidity, solid structure, and a long finish. One word to describe it might be 'rich'.

RECEPTION WINE

Roederer Estate Quartet Brut NV, Anderson Valley,
California (Chardonnay and Pinot Noir), 12.5%



Roderer Estate

Roederer bought a 580-acre estate in Anderson Valley in 1984, built the winery in 1986, and produced its first vintage in 1988. The 'Quartet' arises from the fact that the fruit comes from four distinct vineyards on the estate. It combines new wine with a proportion of aged oak-based reserve wine. It has aromas of brioche and pear, and is fresh and lively with a mousse of tiny and sustained bubbles.

DINNER WINES

Henry of Pelham Family Estate Riesling 2019, Niagara Peninsula, Ontario, Canada, 10.5%

The estate has been in the family since 1794; in 1842 the then owner planted some of the first grapevines in Canada. In 1984, and for several summers and lots of weekends thereafter, the three sons of the owners, then 17, 14 and 10, hand-planted Riesling and Chardonnay grapevines. The sons are now the owners, with a closer relationship with the vines than most owners can boast. The 300-acre estate is set in an area where the vines are planted on slopes which have excellent sun exposure during the day and cool breezes during the night, a very good combination for producing grapes with good flavour. The estate has also been deemed 'Sustainable' by the appropriate authorities in Canada.

The wine is a pale yellow with a lowish acidity and good fruit of a citrus character. Curiously, at this young age a note of petrol has appeared, more on the palate than on the nose. It is slightly sweet from the fruit.

Patelin de Tablas 2018, Tablas Creek Vineyard, Paso Robles, California (40% Syrah, 33% Grenache, 21% Mourvèdre, 3% Counoise, 3% Terret Noir), 13%



Tablas Creek vineyard

Tablas Creek is the product of a partnership between Familie Perrin of Beaucastel and the American Haas family of Vineyard Brands, which for many years distributed Beaucastel wines. In 1989 they decided to establish a wine estate in Paso Robles because of its many similarities to the southern Rhône. Perrin imported cuttings of all of their grape varieties and established a nursery to grow and replicate them. All of the vineyards at Tablas Creek were planted with these cuttings, and they now have vines of all of the allowed Châteauneuf varieties. They prize sustainability, and have mobile herds of alpacas, sheep and guard donkeys to control the weeds in and fertilise the vineyards. The rains in the winter are sufficient to allow dry-farming during the rest of the year. Their flagship wine is Esprit de Tablas; Patelin is their second wine. ‘Patelin’ is French slang for neighbourhood, and the grapes are sourced from 8-12 vineyards around Tablas Creek, all of which are planted with their vines.

The wine is a medium-dark ruby and has a nose of dark stone fruit and herbs. It has a lovely structure, and a palate of savoury fruit.

Quady Elysium Black Muscat Dessert Wine 2018, Madera, San Joaquin Valley, California, 15%

In 1975 the Quadys moved to the San Joaquin Valley, which is in the north of the very hot Central Valley, to live a rural lifestyle and to enable Andrew Quady to study enology at U.C. Davis. Four years later he discovered an unused patch of the rare Orange Muscat varietal and produced a dessert wine called Essensia, which became very popular. In 1983 a nearby grower brought Quady some Black Muscat grapes that were meant to be used to make sacramental wine for a local church. Unfortunately for the grower, the church had closed down, and he was left with truckloads of ripe but unwanted grapes. He had heard that Quady had had some success with Orange Muscat, and so he knocked on his door. Quady took the grapes. The wine made from the grapes was, as was Essensia, immediately successful.

The wine is rather a violet-crimson colour, with an unexpected rose aroma, which is more intense when the grapes are from warmer years. The flavours tend towards boysenberry and cherry, with a saving acidity. This is a sweet and lush wine.

Kathleen Burk - June 2023



East

WASHINGTON —

OREGON —
(Willamette Valley)

CALIFORNIA —
(Paso Robles)

BAJA CALIFORNIA —
(Valle de Guadalupe)

NIAGARA
PENINSULA

VIRGINIA

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