

A Tasting of the Wines of the Jura

by Ormond Smith

To the majority of wine enthusiasts within the UK, the name Jura, in all likelihood, conjures up an image of a 12 year old malt whisky, so little is generally known about this very small wine producing area east of Burgundy in the Jura Mountains, near to the Swiss border. Indeed, the term Jurassic emanates from the limestone and marlstone soils of the area, representative of geological developments dating back to some 145 to 200 million years ago. So what about these little known wines from the Jura, difficult enough to find in their native France, far less in the UK. In short, individual and different, perhaps even an acquired taste for some tasters.....ah, the complexity of wine, one of life's pleasures!



The Waterside Hotel in Inverness played host to Goustevin Scotland's Jura wine tasting, the wines themselves being procured by our Connetable when in the Jura on holiday almost two years ago and in a change to normal tastings, Nicol had decided to taste some of the wines in pairs, accompanied by tapas style Jura delicacies prior to the main course being served.



On arrival, members and guests were treated to an aperitif of the Macvin liqueur wine, born of the mixing of unfermented wine and stalked marc (the distilled residue in the wine barrels after bottling), a deep amber colour with candied aromas of cooked fruits and spices, fresh and appealing, particularly when accompanied with an "amuse-bouche" in the form of cubes of Comte cheese and peeled walnuts – that got the tongues wagging! Into the tasting room and to get the evening proper under way, we were presented with a Cremant Rose du Jura, light, fresh and clean on the palate and served with Compe cheese and Montbeliard smoked sausage, perhaps unusual but nevertheless a pleasant combination. We then commenced the "paired" tastings and compared a Cotes du Jura Chardonnay and a Cotes du Jura Selection, both 2010 and they were accompanied with a typical dish of the region of Morteau smoked sausage, warm potato salad and served with a Reblochon dip. The Chardonnay showed light buttery tones, balanced on the palate with a light aftertaste, a wine which drew mixed views from the assembly. The Selection, made with 90% Savagnin (alias the Traminer grape) and 10% Chardonnay proved to be more appealing, a clean fruity nose, well bodied on the palate with a lingering aftertaste and coupled with the food, was very well received by all.

A speciality of the Jura is Vin Jaune, the wine of kings and the most eminent representative of the region. The best examples come from Chateau Chalon where the wine from the Savagnin grape is held in barrels for six years and three months (Google "Chateau Chalon Online") during which time the unique aromas develop and the permeability of the barrels allow part of the wine to evaporate. As no interference is permitted, the barrel is therefore not completely full and a veil of natural yeast

forms on the surface of the wine. Carefully watched over by the winemaker, this yellow wine under the “voile” gradually acquires its qualities and aromas. The best examples of Vin Jaune are reputed to last for 100 years and given the limited production quantities, are expensive – a bottle of 2003 vintage will cost £30 and a mere £350 will “seal the deal” on a 1955 vintage!! So our next pairing of wines matched a three year old Cotes du Jura Savagnin Vin Jaune from 2009 alongside a Chateau Chalon Vin Jaune from 2005 and the wines were accompanied by the main course of the evening, a Poulet aux Morilles (Chicken with Morel mushrooms and rice braised in Vin Jaune Selection). The Cotes du Jura wine assaulted the nose with hints of dry sherry, with flavours of nuts and spices on the palate and a dry light aftertaste but onto the Chateau Chalon.....distinct dry sherry aromas, nuts, dried fruits and spices rich on the palate and that intense dry sherry aftertaste. Both wines “hit the spot” and proved to be an ideal accompaniment to the Poulet aux Morilles, moreover, they seemed to find favour amongst the assembled party.



After the richness of the Vins Jaunes, the next wine appeared to be a strange choice as the 2011 Cotes du Jura Trousseau was red. Nicol had chosen this wine to accompany the cheese dish and it proved to be worthy of its placing. Very light in colour (reminiscent of a Pinot Noir from Burgundy or a Beaujolais Gamay), the nose began fragranced, almost disappeared and then returned with renewed aromas, giving way to hints of strawberry and raspberry jam on the palate with subtle hints of nutmeg and this wine proved to be most satisfactory in marrying with the rich and creamy Morbier, the soft, creamy (delicious!) Vacherin Mont d’Or (which is only produced between September and late March when the cows are taken down from the high Alpine pastures to the stables, producing limited quantities of their rich milk) and Reblochon, made from raw cow’s milk and has a nutty taste. All these cheeses are specialities of the Jura.

The climax of the evening, a 2008 Vin de Paille certainly proved to be a winner and in the writer’s opinion was the wine of the evening after the Chateau Chalon. The grapes for this wine are naturally dried (originally on beds of straw, hence the term Straw Wine) then pressed and matured in oak barrels, ageing patiently. The end result is a complex copper coloured wine, the nose exploding with crystallised fruits, rich orange marmalade (remember Keillor’s Dundee Rough Cut Marmalade?) and the palate matched the aromas, rich but not cloying, clean and satisfying.....this wine certainly found favour with the tasters!! To accompany the wine was a Fourme d’Ambert Blue Cheese (reputed to be France’s oldest cheese) and it mated perfectly.....until we tried the dark chocolate (75% Cacao) – Wow! Did that hit the spot! In the writer’s eyes, THE perfect match!!!! A perfect way to end a rather special tasting of wines which the majority of us will in probability not have the opportunity to taste again, such is their scarcity in the UK.

Thanks are obviously due to our Connetable Nicol for having the foresight to acquire these wines when in the Jura on holiday and also to Waterside Hotel Sous Chef Alex MacPherson for the selection of regional dishes which he created from Jura recipes. All in all, an evening very much in keeping with the maxim of the Goustevin, a mix of good food, good wine and good company!!