

A Tasting of the Ten Crus of Beaujolais

Saturday 16th November 2013

By Ormond Smith

A unique opportunity to enjoy all ten Beaujolais Cru wines was offered to members of Goustevin Scotland on November 16th when Ecuyer Gordon Leitch and his wife Riona hosted a most interesting and enjoyable Tasting. Since all the wines are made from the Gamay grape, an added level of concentration was required to determine the differing nuances between the wines, which in itself created animated discussions amongst the members. In the years following the initial craze for Beaujolais Nouveau, standards dropped as producers jumped on the Nouveau bandwagon and as the market for this basically unfermented wine petered out, the reputation of Beaujolais wines in general had been lowered by the Nouveau "image". The wines we were about to taste proved that a successful restoration in standards has been achieved.



Connetable Nicol Manson welcomed members and guests with an aperitif of a past favourite of some of the members, Clairette de Die Tradition, a Methode Champenoise wine from Die near Drome in the Rhone Valley, accompanied by some "saute' saucissons". Now extremely difficult to source in the UK, Nicol had come across stocks of this Moscatel grape sparkler in Carrefour in Calais on one of his trips.....and stocked up! Certainly brought back some happy memories.

The Tasting got under way with a Beaujolais Blanc from the northern end of Beaujolais, a **2010 "Chateau de L'Eclaire"** made with 100% Chardonnay (although other producers sometimes add some Aligote), pale gold in colour with a nose of white flowers and exotic fruits. The palate was well balanced and exhibited a touch of minerality. We then moved onto the first of the ten Beaujolais Crus, a **2012 "Regnie' Domaine les Petites Pierres"**. This is the newest of the Crus, being elevated in 1988. The initial assault on the senses of the Gamay grape showed a fairly full bodied cru with redcurrant and raspberry flavours. Local legend has it that this was the site of the first vineyards planted in Beaujolais by the Romans. We moved on to a **2010 "Brouilly"**, a gold medal winner from Vignerons de Bel Air. Brouilly is the largest of the Crus, sited around Mont Brouilly. Deep and concentrated with characteristic aromas of blueberries, cherries, raspberries and currants, the wine was indeed fruity and mouth filling. Third on the tasting table was a **2009 "Chiroubles"** from Joseph Drouhin, from the highest altitude vineyards in Beaujolais - the only wine not matured in the region but in Beaune in Burgundy. With its delicate perfume this wine was to be savoured and being the longest matured of the ten crus, a return at the end of the tasting would make an interesting comparison.



Our next cru would be the **2010 "Fleurie – Domain Pardon Vieilles Vignes"**, a wine described by Hugh Johnson as "the Queen of Beaujolais". The bouquet



was awash with strawberries and red cherries and velvety smooth on the palate. Interestingly, in a good vintage, a *vin de garde* (wine for aging) Fleurie can last up to sixteen years. Moving on we arrived at a **2011 "Cote de Brouilly"** from Henry Fessy, the grapes for this wine coming from vineyards located on the higher slopes of the extinct volcano Mont Brouilly. By comparison to the Brouilly tasted earlier, this wine showed more concentration and less earthiness, its bouquet dominated by aromas of red and blue berries – certainly a wine of class. Next in line for sampling was **2009 "Saint-Amour"**, rated as one of the best

vintages on record and would be, in the writers view, his favourite wine of the evening. A gold medal winner in Macon, the nose displayed aromas of peaches whilst the palate had that typical spicy flavour. Certainly a wine which caught the imagination.

The final four wines, all 2010 vintage, are known to be the fullest bodied examples of the Cru Beaujolais which do need the most time aging in the bottle and are generally meant to be consumed between four and ten years after harvest. A gold medal winning "**Chenas – Chateau de Chenas**" opened the final chapter of our exploration, its fragrant nose of wild roses appealing to many. On an historical note, this cru once contained many of the vineyards which are now sold under the Moulin-a-Vent designation and now Chenas is the smallest of the ten Beaujolais crus. The "**Julienas**" from Henry Fessy tantalised the senses with its aromas of peonies and its rich and spicy attack on the palate. In contrast to the claims of Regnie producers, Julienas growers believe that their area was the first to be cultivated with vineyards by the Romans during the conquest of Gaul, in fact the village is indeed named after the Roman Emperor Julius Ceasar.....historical notes at no extra charge!! The penultimate cru was a "**Morgon**" from Vignerons de Bel Air – an earthy wine yet with a silky texture, with aromas of apricots and peaches and a palate full of vibrant cherries and intense summer fruits. And so to our final wine, the "**Moulin-a-Vent**", arguably the most full bodied and powerful of the ten crus tasted, indeed very similar in style to the Chenas tasted slightly earlier which appealed to many of the members. This region of Beaujolais is noted for the high level of manganese that is in the soils which can be toxic to vines in high concentrations. Fortunately the level of toxicity is not high enough to kill the vines but it does alter their metabolism which results in severely reduced yields, making Moulin-a-Vent wines the most full bodied and powerful of the Beaujolais crus.



A most interesting (and complex) tasting, allowing the members the opportunity of comparing all ten crus at one time. The evening concluded with an extremely tasty Coq au Vin de Beaujolais which "hit the spot" (many thanks to Riona, Heather and Beverley for the culinary delight) and followed by a rather nice cheese selection, before the members (and guests) took their leave and trundled home (by taxi!!)

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