

# T H E W I N E R Y

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## May Tasting *Maida Vale* 18.05.22

### SPARKLING

#### **Champagne Tradition Brut NV, André Fays (Champagne/France)**

**29.99**

In the depths of lockdown in March 2021, hotels that were open in France were few and far between. Particularly any that had a good kitchen and wine-list. We did however find three between Calais and Beaune. One of the most useful was (and still is) the Val Moret, conveniently close to the autoroute just east of Troyes. It may look like a motel in the US midwest, complete with a fluorescent sign visible from the autoroute but the rooms are good and they have a wine-list which draws heavily on champagne growers from the southern part of the Champagne region – the Côte des Bars.

We were drawn to a Solera Champagne by André Fays. Solera? Champagne? Solera system, like for Sherry? Yes, you draw enough out of the tank to bottle and fill up with the latest vintage. The tank has every vintage from 2013-2021.

It was inevitable that we would then go to Celles-sur Ource to meet Marie Fays, current owner and granddaughter of André. What we weren't expecting was the high quality and sheer deliciousness of her other champagnes. Tradition, Réserve, Prestige, Rosé and Étincelles (a local peculiarity, being 100% Pinot Blanc). Boom. In the van and on our shelves. More than once. Marie's Cuvée Tradition is a blend of 85% Pinot Noir, 10% Pinot Blanc and 5% Pinot Meunier.



### WHITE

#### **Riesling trocken 2019, Fred Prinz (Rheingau/Germany) ORGANIC**

**15.99**

The Rhine takes a sharp turn west at Mainz before turning north again at Rüdesheim. The south-facing slope on the north bank between the two is the Rheingau, thick with castles, convents and vineyards. This is the classical home of Riesling. Evocative names like Steinberg, Marcobrunn, Johannisberg, Hochheim - the home of Queen Victoria's "Hock", back when German wines were the most expensive in the world. In contrast to wine made in historic castles and convents, Fred Prinz made his wine in the garage of the flats where he and his family live in the small village of Hallgarten. Having started as a hobby in 1991, demand became so great that he had to give up his day job and rent another cellar nearby, thereby freeing-up space in his garage for a Mid-Life Harley motorbike.

We have been importing Fred's dry Rieslings since our first buying trip to Germany in 2002, watched him outgrow his garage and have seen his vineyard holdings grow from 1.5 to over 10 hectares. We were impressed by his 2019s. Bright, blackcurrant leaf, expressive and with hints of lime in the mouth.

#### **Riesling trocken 2015, Lubentiushof (Mosel/Germany)**

**15.99**

We were on the Mosel last week and asked Andreas Barth of Lubentiushof, "don't suppose you have any of that dry Riesling 2015 tucked-away?" "As a matter of fact, I do." Woohoo!

We now find ourselves on the Lower Mosel, close to Koblenz, where the stunningly beautiful, winding river joins the Rhine and the slate vineyards are dizzyingly steep - terraced to squeeze out every last bit of late autumn sunshine. Andreas Barth studied Law and Music but decided, with the support of his interior designer wife Susanne, to turn to wine-making. Almost entirely self-taught Andreas bought the run-down cellar of Lubentiushof in 1994 and five hectares of steep parcels with old vines. With tiny yields and very late harvesting you can really taste the age of the vines. Bold, yeasty, oily and spicy - the volume is cranked up to eleven.

This particular bottling was previously labelled "Spontan" (German for spontaneous) and refers to the spontaneous, natural fermentation that happens when you just use the wild yeasts present on the grapes, sometimes leading to some striking aromas. 2015 was a ripe vintage with relatively low acidity.

#### **Viognier 2020, Aurélien Chatagnier (Rhône/France)**

**22.99**

We often get asked for Viognier. Finding one that isn't heavy or flabby is tricky. Viognier's spiritual home is Condrieu, south of Lyon, in the northern Rhône valley. We regularly stop in Ampuis, the small town below the Côte-Rôtie, not far from Condrieu. There are a couple of useful wine shops and wine bars where we can poke around to see what's new. This is where we came across Aurélien Chatagnier's wines.

Aurélien says he was "bad at school". When he was 16, his mother said he should probably knock it on the head and get a job.

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**WHITE continued**

He went to work for Jamet and then for François Villard. He loved it – and especially enjoyed working in the vines. In 2002, after a gentle, encouraging nudge from Villard, he set up on his own, starting with just a single hectare. He now has 7.5 hectares and is making wonderful, expressive northern Rhone wines. He still doesn't make much and it took over two years to claw some bottles from his grip - not helped by the fact that in March 2017 thieves broke into his remote winery and made off with most of his 2015s, including cases earmarked for us. Apparently this is a frequent occurrence in the region. The good news is that since then our annual hits of Aurélien's pure, modern Viogniers and Syrahs have made it out of "Dodge" to The Winery intact.

**RED****Purist Spätburgunder 2020, Adeneuer (Ahr/Germany)****19.99**

Spätburgunder is German for Pinot Noir.

The tiny Ahr valley near Bonn is one of the most northernmost winemaking regions of Europe. Romans planted vines here. Locals say the sheltered valley has an almost Mediterranean micro-climate. We wouldn't go quite that far, but there is little doubt that some of Germany's finest Pinot Noir (Spätburgunder) comes from here.

The Adeneuer family has been making wine for 500 years in the spa town of Ahrweiler and in 1984 brothers Marc and Frank took over from their aunt. 1984 was the worst vintage since records began and they almost gave up but, fortunately they persevered. Year in, year out they manage to deliver delicious smoky, autumnal Pinot Noir, whatever the climate throws at them. And the climate has thrown a lot at them. Last July's biblical flooding affected everybody in the valley: lives were lost and vintages were swept away. It was good to see the Adeneuers back on their feet again, when we picked-up these wines last Saturday.

Purist is the new name for their Ahrweiler Spätburgunder, a blend from multiple parcels grown on sandy clay, aged in big old casks called *Fuder*. Bright, sour-cherry fruit, smoky and silky-smooth.

**Amadeus Fronton 2015, Saint Guilhem (Southwest France)****15.99**

Much has been written about the French Paradox – the life-enhancing properties of certain red wines protecting the French from high fat diets. We received a stream of data from the very excited former Teacher and Estate Agent Philippe Laduguie of Saint Guilhem, north-west of Toulouse. His wines tested with the highest number of phenolics, proanthocyanins and procyanins, which have been directly linked to a long list of health benefits; reducing histamine production, improving circulation by strengthening capillary walls, helping collagen repair (keeping your skin elastic and wrinkle-free), protecting blood vessels in the brain (which may or may not increase mental acuity), decreasing stroke potential, fighting senility. We all want to believe it's true as we pile into our plate of delicious, high-fat cheese! "Amadeus", one of his magic potions, is a blend of Négrette, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Think of it less as a wine, more as a life-extending health drink.

**Chiles Canyon Zinfandel 2017, Green & Red (Napa/California) ORGANIC****29.99**

We continue to celebrate the arrival of our shipment from California, a shipment that was adrift in the Pacific for eight months last year. Well, that is a slight exaggeration but it did take over eight months to get here following a fire in the engine room. Our favourite Zins from Green & Red were also onboard.

Green & Red Vineyard, named for its red iron soils veined with green serpentine, is located in the steep hills on the east side of Napa Valley. Jay Heminway trained as a sculptor, studied in Italy as a sculptor, taught sculpture, had a gallery in San Francisco, became disenchanted, got divorced and bought a place in the Napa hills to get away from it all.

The guy who came to install his septic tank told him "you've got some great geology here – you should plant some vines". It wasn't long before Jay was off to Bordeaux to do a season at Château Lascombes followed by a spell with NYC wine merchants Sherry Lehmann and Alexis Lichine. He planted the vines in 1972 and started selling his wines in 1977. We started importing them in 1998.

These are our favourite organic Zinfandels. They are cooler, less heavy, coming as they do from high altitude vineyards, way above the fog line, up at 1,700ft, where the soils are red and rocky. We were not alone to appreciate his wines – Alice Waters' legendary West Coast restaurant 'Chez Panisse' House Zinfandel was always Green & Red.

We were deeply saddened when Jay died in June 2019. In recent years he had the foresight to phase in a new winemaker to work alongside him and also to bring his daughter Tobin onboard after careers in film and interior design.

**LUNAR CALENDAR OBSERVERS** – today is a **Fruit Day**.

Our following tasting, which will be at **The Winery Fulham**, will be on **Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> June**.