

T H E
W I N E R Y

March Tasting 05.03.20

SPARKLING

SVIC Pinot Nero Metodo Classico Brut NV, Cantina di Casteggio (Lombardy/Italy) 15.99

The little-known region of Oltrepó Pavese is a bump on the plain 60km south of Milan. Casteggio is a small town at the base of a small range of hills. We have been importing from the Cantina di Casteggio for well over a decade. It's fair to say Cantina di Casteggio is bigger than any other winery we work with – much bigger. It started in 1907 as a Co-op with 100 members and after WW1 was successful enough to buy SVIC (Società Vinicola Italiana Casteggio), the local sparkling wine producer. By the time we found the Cantina in 2007 it was a Co-op with 350 members and a massive facility - part run-down *fascista*-style, part Space Age.

This impressive sparkling wine is a true *Methodo Champenoise* - 100% Pinot Noir, fermented and aged for 18 months in bottle. A hint of red fruits (raspberries?) in the nose, full in the mouth yet crisp and balanced. Lombardy may be in lockdown now but, no need for concern: we shipped this in late October, long before the dreadful virus left Wuhan.

WHITE

Abaris Rioja Blanco 2018, Longrande (Rioja/Spain) ORGANIC 18.99

Isabel Fernandez's Longrande Rioja has been a staple on our shelves for two decades. Tonight we are introducing her elegant new white Rioja.

100% Viura, selected healthy grapes, not over-ripe. Trodden by foot. Isabel has bought several pneumatic presses over the decades but always returns to treading by foot. "It's gentler – the results are finer." Despite being fermented in oak and aged on lees, oak influence is minimal. The result is floral. White flowers, honeysuckle, a touch of citrus.



“Vom Rotliegenden” Riesling trocken 2018, Huff (Rheinhessen/Germany) 18.99

Nierstein is a town overlooking the Rhine on the strip between Mainz and Worms, and which historically has always been considered to be at the summit of the hierarchy of Rheinhessen's vineyards.

We came across Christine Huff's bright, mineral, dry Rieslings shortly after she finished at Geisenheim, the top German wine university. She has had a busy decade since then; increasingly taking control of the winery; meeting and marrying Kiwi Jeremy Bird (who came to help with the 2009 harvest and never left); having two babies; working tirelessly in the vines and cellar to create wonderful, finely-judged dry Rieslings from the red slate and sandstone cliffs (*der Roter Hang*: red from iron oxide, which can often infuse Riesling with some marked spicy and tropical notes).

Charta Riesling 2010, Flick (Rheingau/Germany) 21.99

From the other side of the river, the Rheingau, just where the Rhine turns west. Reiner Flick is a super-energetic, dynamic man who always has a new project. Building a vaulted cellar, putting in a light display to show how colour and light can alter your perception of wine. Building a new office and shop. Putting on massive concerts on the lawn behind the family house. Making barrels from his own trees. He is also the man who makes Victoriaberg - Queen Victoria's favourite wine.

Tonight we are showing something we found deep in his cellar - his Charta wine, a stunner from 2010 - a vintage of legendary density, concentration and acidity.

What is a Charta wine? Charta, which started in 1984, was a forerunner of the Erstes Gewächs/Grosses Gewächs designation (First Growth/Great Growth/Grand Cru). A number of top growers in the Rheingau wanted a name for higher quality dry wines. It might be considered obsolete as a designation, now that Grosses Gewächs has taken hold but some growers still make a Charta wine which usually sits just below the GG.

RED**Château La Fleur Poitou 2012 (Lussac-Saint-Émilion/Bordeaux/France) 16.99**

Owned by the highly-regarded Pomerol estate Certan de May, Château La Fleur Poitou is from Lussac-Saint-Émilion - one of the satellite appellations of Saint-Emilion, which shares similar geologies with its more famous neighbor.

The 2015 and 2016 were recent fast-movers in our Bordeaux section. When we asked for more it was gone. "We do have some 2012 and 2014 though." Whaaaat?! A swift tasting followed. That's a definite yes, please.

A blend of 60% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Franc and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon - the higher proportion of Cabernet Franc balances the soft, supple Merlot with an extra sense of structure and purpose.

Funnari Nero d'Avola 2016, Mimmo Paone (Sicily/Italy) 16.99

For the past ten years the periodic return of Mimmo Paone's Funnari from Sicily is always eagerly awaited. Funnari doesn't survive long on our shelves.

Mimmo is a Sicilian with the firmest, bone-crunching handshake we have ever experienced. Once our hands had recovered, we were blown away by his two dark, brambly Nero d'Avolas. Although he is based on the north coast, in the top right hand corner of the island, Mimmo's Nero d'Avola is harvested in Agrigento on the south coast and driven overnight to their winery in Condò near Torregrotta.

Côtes-du-Rhône Villages 2017 (Petite Ourse), Pascal Chalon (Rhône/France) BIODYNAMIC 17.99

It is 13 years since we stumbled across Pascal Chalon making biodynamic Côtes-du-Rhône-Villages in his granny's garage not far from Châteauneuf-du-Pape. We clambered around, amongst the tools and apples, squeezed ourselves around her beaten-up Renault and, as soon as we had tasted his original two red wines, 'La Petite Ourse' and 'La Grande Ourse', were quick to back the van up and load everything he had.

Petite Ourse has become a Winery Classic. When we visited him late last year in the middle of a tempest, Pascal told us about the name and label changes afoot. There is no cause for alarm - the wines are the same, but all his wines will now carry the Grande Ourse label. The former Petite Ourse still exists but with a different name. The 2017 (which has just arrived) still has a white label. The 2018 will carry a black label and, to make it harder to distinguish from the Grande Ourse (which already has a black label), it will also carry the Grande Ourse name. Confused? Yes. The clue will be on the back label. The former Petite Ourse will feature (in small print) Visan on the back label. La Grande Ourse will be labelled Suze la Romane. We look forward to helping everyone find the right bottle! Potential confusion aside, the wines are always pure, biodynamic Rhône heaven. Fragrant, gutsy - 60% Syrah with 40% Grenache.

**OLIVE OIL****Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Terre a Mano (Tuscany/Italy) BIODYNAMIC 500ml - 25.99**

Rossella Bencini's classy Extra Virgin Olive Oil from olive trees on her estate west of Florence.

LUNAR CALENDAR OBSERVERS - today is a **Flower Day**.

Our **next tasting** will be on **1st April** when, pandemic allowing, we will be joined by **Philip Nelles**, who makes top rank Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir) in the Ahr valley near Bonn. **Simone Abram** from **Il Macchione**, who makes our favourite Vino Nobile di Montepulciano is also planning to come. We'll call it closer to the time!

New arrivals - From Tuscany - Rossella Bencini's fabulous **Terre a Mano Carmignano** (and some of her unique white). **Bordeaux** from Chateau Martinet, Tour Cordouan, Laujac, La Fleur Poitou, Tour Canon and halves of Croix de St Georges - they are out of the 1999, so we're onto the 2000. Happy to report that **Becker-Landgraf** Spätburgunders and a smattering of their whites arrived yesterday.

Coming soon - White Burgundy-a-plenty; **Stéphanie Mosnier's Chablis** (including the last of her Beauroy 2015), **Charles & Thierry Drouin's Mâcon, St-Véran & Pouilly-Fuissé**. Rheingau Rieslings from **Fred Prinz** (the Fresh Prinz of the Rheingau?), much missed and not a moment too soon. **Dreolino Chianti Rufina** from just outside Florence.

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