

T H E  
W I N E R Y

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## August Tasting *Fulham* 08.08.23

### *sparkling*

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

27.99

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?. 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*

#### **Valcerasa Etna Bianco 2018, Alice Bonaccorsi (Sicily/Italy) ORGANIC**

29.99

Living on a live volcano may seem crazy but the growers on Mount Etna see it differently. The presence of "The Etna" is not some angry god of fire and destruction, dark, brooding and malignant but more the embodiment of Mother Nature, warm and fertile, gently spewing lava which will recharge and renew the soil with rich mineral nutrients. Alice Bonaccorsi's family has owned land planted with vineyards on Etna's slopes since 1793. Alice trained as an agronomist and, with the help of her husband Rosario Pappalardo, made her first bottlings in 1997 at Benanti, the well-known Etna estate. Happy with the results, they bought their striking terraced vineyard near Randazzo in the Val Cerasa (*valley of cherries*) in 2000.

This is their fascinating white wine. The grape is Caricante, native to Sicily and mainly used on the Etna. The vines are old and gnarly, the soil is sandy and (unsurprisingly) volcanic. Alice picks quite late, in the middle two weeks of October. Wild yeasts and no new oak help the elegance and purity of the fruit and the unique terroir shine through. We find her white wine oily, with hints of grapefruit and orange zest, good acidity and a savoury, almost salty finish.

#### **Riesling vom steilen Berg trocken 2022, Scholtes (Mosel/Germany)**

17.99

Vibrant and fizzing with slaty minerality, Michael Scholtes' dry Rieslings were the standout discovery for us at a tasting in Berlin in 2019. Based in Detzem, between Trier and Trittenheim, this is a relatively undiscovered section of the river – not least because Detzem is in a cul-de-sac with no through road. Michael trained as an engineer before switching to wine and starting in his family's winery in 2014. Brimming with youthful energy and ambition, Michael has been working tirelessly and snapping up parcels in the Pölicher Held plus some seriously steep rows in Thörnicher Ritsch - his 'pin-up' vineyard. His father was less enthusiastic, given the vertiginous gradient.

Yields were down 30% in 2022 owing to lack of water in the hot, dry summer. The family now has 11 hectares, with 4 on the steep slate slopes, which is where "vom steilen Berg" (*from the steep hill*) comes from. It's a Riesling with vibrancy and succulence.

#### **Ürziger in der Kranklei Riesling Spätlese\* trocken 2022, Karl Erbes (Mosel/Germany)**

28.99

Ürziger Würzgarten (*spice garden*) is a striking vineyard in the middle Mosel. It has a Hollywood-style sign high up in the vines and has probably the largest concentration of red slate in the Mosel. It owes its red colour to the iron oxide suspended in the slate which gives its Riesling an exotic, flamboyant overtone. We happened to be in the Mosel valley one weekend in June when the annual Mythos Mosel tasting festival was on. High point of the day was the only dry wine on Karl Erbes' table: Ürziger in der Kranklei Riesling Spätlese\* trocken 2022. Exotic, herbal, viscous. So, we picked some up from Stefan Erbes (who runs the winery) when we were back there a couple of weeks later. Stefan intimated that he has a bunch of older Rieslings for us to taste when we next visit.

The vineyard has vines up to 80 years old and sits precariously above the sundial close to Erdener Prälät. The name is intriguing. "Krank" usually means "sick" or "ill" in German and "Lei" (same as *Lay* or *Ley*) is derived from the Celtic, meaning "slate" or "slate rock". Apparently "krank" has nothing to do with "sick" in this case but is a purely phonetic development from "grande" (often pronounced *grang* in German) to "krank". Shame. We quite liked the idea of "sick slate" in the contemporary application of "sick". That's some *sick* Riesling. Anyone?



*red*

**Vino Nobile di Montepulciano 2018, Il Macchione (Tuscany/Italy) ORGANIC 31.99**

Montepulciano, the place in southeast Tuscany where they make reds mainly from Sangiovese, is not to be confused with Montepulciano d'Abruzzo where the grape is called Montepulciano and grown in Abruzzo on the Adriatic side of the Appenine mountains.

The wines of Montepulciano have long been valued. First known mention was in 789 in a document when a cleric offered a farm and a vineyard to the Church of San Silvestro. In 1685, Francesco Redi, a poet, wrote an ode praising Montepulciano as the king of all wines. The Nobile (Noble) was tacked on by Adamo Fanetti in 1925. The wine was such a success that it led to many growers adopting the term in the 1930s.

We were having a wonderful dinner at Osteria La Porta in Montichiello between Montepulciano and Montalcino. The first wine was not our cup of tea – all juice and oak. “Do you have something, err, a bit more restrained, more traditional?” Daria Cappelli, the very helpful owner, and her wine-waiter looked at each other and came up with a bottle of Vino Nobile from Il Macchione. We phoned Il Macchione at the crack of dawn. “May we visit you? We are really sorry we only have one hour to cram a meeting in before heading to Montalcino.” “OK.” Minutes later, we arrived at Il Macchione to be met by Simone Abram, a bearded man with bags of energy and bags of quotes.

Quote #1 - “We’re not from Tuscany, our family is from Trentino. We were driving around for 5 or 6 years looking for the right spot.”

Quote #2 - “I didn’t choose Sangiovese – I chose this land”.

Quote #3 - “It’s just me, my brother and a gypsy. A real gypsy. One of the family. Totally committed.”

Quote #4 - “100% Sangiovese – not cut with Cabernet or Merlot or other stuff.”

Quote #5 - “Everyone talks about acidity and dark fruits and tannins and stuff – I taste with my body.”

Not certified but totally organic, we would describe Il Macchione as beyond organic. This is where we first saw Favino plants (Broad Bean/Field Beans) between the rows - an effective natural fertiliser, used to fix nitrogen in the soil.

We listened, loved the attitude, tasted with our bodies and were very impressed.

**Rioja Crianza 2019, Longrande (Rioja/Spain) 15.99**

A quarter of a century has passed since we came across Isabel Fernandez’s Longrande in the brilliant Casa Toni restaurant in San Vicente de la Sonsierra in Rioja Alta. We had tasted so much mainstream Rioja and her Crianza was a breath of fresh air – a revelation. We had to beg to see her, largely to overcome her fear of export. Fortunately, we were able to convince her to sell to us and her wines have been a fixture on our shelves ever since.

Isabel is as full of personality as her wines. She has been making the wine in her family Bodega in Abalos since 1987. She goes to great lengths to keep the whole process as natural as possible; treading the whole bunches by foot, using gravity to avoid pumping, never filtering. She determines the bottling date biodynamically, according to the cycles of the moon. Her wines are fascinating - often boldly perfumed, with a beautiful purity of fruit and surprising body and structure.

We visited Isabel and her nephew David on our recent trip to Spain. After a big night out in Logroño we met the following morning at the Bodega in Abalos where the Rioja Alta meets the Rioja Alavesa. Despite the sunshine it was very windy and fresh. Isabel says it’s always windy in Abalos and that helps the vines, dispersing moisture and protecting against disease. She showed us several of her vineyards, almost entirely 45-130 year-old vines. Later we tasted her Reserva 1994. It was marvellous: mature, alive and well; still fresh with some tannins and very long. Old vines and classical winemaking shine through the more recent vintages and all the way back.

**Funnari Nero d’Avola 2019, Mimmo Paone (Sicily/Italy) 16.99**

For the past dozen 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 Condrò near Torregrotta.

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

Our following tasting, which will be at **The Winery Maida Vale**, will be on **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September**.



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