

Decanting
special

The world's best wine magazine

November 2013 £4.40

Decanter

To decant or not?

That age-old dilemma is resolved in our unique test

St-Emilion 2010

A great year revisited:
we reveal the top performers

Barolo 2009s tasted

134 fantastic buys from
'an outstanding vintage'

Value Christmas fizz

25 sparkling wines under
£25 - some less than £10!

Also
this
month



Figeac: the new team
Latour's Californian buy
Brunello 2008: top picks
Hospices de Beaune



Spurrier's World

Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor gives us a round-up of recent tastings, his views on current issues in the wine world and top bottles to drink or keep

Falling for Niagara

In July I attended the International Cool Climate Chardonnay Conference (i4C) in Niagara, Ontario, which is modelled on the highly regarded International Pinot Noir Conference in McMinnville, Oregon, and which, in its third year, was sold out for the full three days. My first visit to Niagara had been in the mid-1980s for the first 'Cuvée' wine tasting organised by Peter Gambie of the Ontario Wine Board, now an international wine consultant. Then the grapes were mostly hybrids and it was hard to be encouraged by the wines. Now, with hybrids a thing of the past, it is hard not to be encouraged by what Ontario produces.

The wine country of Ontario is situated between the 41st and 44th parallels, on the same latitude as Oregon and central Burgundy, and is a little warmer than both during the growing season with cooler nights during the harvest. The vineyards are located near three of the Great Lakes where cold winters are made up for by hot summers. The soils in the Great Lakes basin vary from sand to clay to rock with a high concentration of limestone. Considerable planting is on the flat former sea bed, while the hills and benches that formed the ancient shoreline are much prized. Drainage on both is excellent.

Recognising the restrictive but very valuable controls that the European appellation systems impose on producers, the original dozen or so Ontario wineries grouped together in the early 1990s to create The Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA), which guarantees that 100% of the grapes come from Ontario, specifically from four wine-growing areas - Lake Erie North

'Now, with hybrids a thing of the past, it is hard not to be encouraged'



Shore, Pelee Island, Niagara Peninsula (where 10 sub-appellations were created in 2005) and the cooler Prince Edward County. Currently there are 6,100ha (hectares) of vineyards farmed by 140 licensed wineries, of which 124 produce VQA wines of origin.

Viticulture is on a 'green' basis, many vineyards being organic and a few biodynamic. Core white varieties are Chardonnay and Riesling, followed by Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer, while core reds are Cabernet Franc (alone and blended) and Pinot Noir, with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and very good Gamay.

So much for the background; what about Ontario Chardonnays? I was the keynote speaker and moderator aided by a panel made up of Marimar Torres, Jacques Lardière (ex-Louis Jadot), Albrecht Seeger (eighth-generation German grape-grower with a 60ha vineyard in Niagara), Thomas Bacheider (winemaker in Oregon, Niagara and Burgundy) and François Morissette (ex-Chambolle-Musigny, Meursault and Sonoma, now Niagara). I first asked Pierre-Marie Guillaume of Pepinières Guillaume, vine supplier par excellence, for his views on Chardonnay: 'It is remarkably adaptable, for it makes good wine on all latitudes,' he replied. 'It buds early and has a short vegetation cycle, so it risks late frost (Chablis) and is best in climates that are not too hot, and with variations in temperature between day and night which slow down ripening to show aromatic finesse and preserve acidity; the best soils are chalk and limestone.' The panel's individual views converged with Guillaume's. Wines from each were then served blind.

I placed Bacheider's Saunder's Vineyard 2011 equal to Jadot's Les Folatières Puligny-Montrachet 2010; with Morissette's Twenty Mile Bench 2011 just behind.

Niagara's cool-climate Chardonnays are very good.

Time during my too-short stay was divided between winery visits and massive open-house Chardonnay

Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p104)



Villa Crespia-Muratori, Brolese Brut Rosé Franciacorta, Italy NV

£21.95 Bancroft Wines
Franciacorta producers came to London recently to show their sparkling wines, and this rosé stood out for its pale colour, lovely wild strawberry nose, light summer fruits and a lifted dry finish with a low dosage.
Drink 2013-2015 Alc 13%



Pezat, Blanc, Bordeaux, France 2012

£4.92 (in bond) Cambridge Wine, From Vineyards Direct
The irrepressible Jonathan Malthus (Ch Teyssier, Le Dôme) has produced this 85% Sauvignon, 10% Semillon, 5% Muscadelle: clear and fresh with a lovely floral nose, pear and citrus flavours and a classy charm.
Drink 2013-2014 Alc 12.5%



Cantina Argiolas, S'elegas, Nuragus di Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy 2011

£9.50 Eurowines, Olivino
Nuragus' vines cover 3,300ha and are at their most expressive in the southern Cagliari. Summery nose, fleshy, yellow fruit flavours, attractive bitterness on the finish. Perfect with Sardinian food.
Drink 2013-2014 Alc 14%

tastings. Of the wineries, two early producers – Henry of Pelham and Cave Spring – showed that experience counts as the second generation takes over, while I'd select Ed Madronich's Flat Rock Cellars and Harald Thiel's Hidden Bench Vineyards for superb Pinot Noir and Riesling as well as Chardonnay; 13th Street Winery for Mercurey-style Pinots and a lovely Gamay; Norman Hardie's Pinots from the cooler Prince Edward County; Closson Chase's KJ Watson Vineyard Pinot Noir; the biodynamic Tawse Vineyard for Syrah, Meritage blends and a stunning Van Bers Cabernet Franc; Ravine for Meritage and Cabernet Franc; and Pearl-Morissette for Cabernet Franc and Riesling of great purity and energy. These wines are, or will soon be available in the UK.

Surprises in Spain

Right after Vinexpo (see last month's column), I left for Spain to select a cuvée from José-Manuel Ortega's Ribera del Duero estate for the DOSS Foundation (see my June 2013 column). With Dany Rolland and José Spisso we narrowed down 14 wines to three, finally deciding on a blend of 85% Tinta del País (Tempranillo) from 100-year-old vines, refreshed with 15% from a much younger Merlot. This completes the trio of wines, all 2011: the others are from José-Manuel's O Fournier wineries in Chile's Maulé and Argentina's Uco Valley.

The day before, I spent time with Carlos Falco, Marqués de Griñón, on his 750ha Señorío de Valdepeña estate west of Toledo, which dates from the 13th century. Here he concentrates on the 50ha of vines he began to plant in 1974 and for which he was granted one of Spain's first *pagos*, or single-vineyard DOs, in 2003. The first plantings in 1974 were Cabernet Sauvignon, followed in 1991 by Spain's first Syrah vineyard, Petit Verdot and, in 2001, the first Graciano planted in Castilla La Mancha. With his head winemaker, the Davis graduate Julio Mourelle, and his daughter Xandra, who manages the estate, I tasted a fascinating range of both blended and varietal wines under the Dominio de Valdepeña label from 2004 to 2010. Quality was very high, but one wine stood out: AAA 2010 – 60% Petit Verdot, 40% Graciano – a blend of sophistication and power with a 20-year future. Prestigious UK representation is talked about. **D**

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster

From the cellar Holidaying in Tuscany

My annual family holiday in Tuscany is usually split between Fattoria Nittardi in Chianti and Castello di Argiano near Montalcino. At Nittardi, I tasted a vertical of **Nectar Dei**, its icon Maremma Toscana blend of 40% Cabernet Sauvignon with Petit Verdot, Merlot, Syrah and a touch of Alicante Bouschet. The **2003**, the wine's first vintage, showed the heat of that year and the young vines; **2004** had both firmness and spice; **2005** was perfect now in the Tuscan Bordeaux style; **2006** was young with lifted fragrance, vigour and balance; **2007** was a blockbuster with superb tannins for the future; **2008** was a



marvellous expression of deep fruit and was my favourite of the tasting (to 2020); **2009** was in the 2007 mould, but more elegant (to 2018), and finally the **2010**, whose exuberant black fruits will see it through to 2025. Back home, I opened three 2001 Tuscans from the cellar: **Rocca di Montegrossi, Vigneto San Marcellino, Chianti Classico Riserva**, a single-vineyard Sangiovese of extreme elegance; **Castello di Argiano, Brunello di Montalcino**, warm, smooth with spice and charm; and **Brunello di Montalcino, Fuligny**, more vigorous and firmer, Pauillac to Argiano's Pomerol; all three with life ahead of them.

For the cellar 2011 Beaujolais crus

After superb vintages in 2009, 2010 and 2011, Beaujolais is back in the spotlight, and deserves to be in the cellar. Nobody knows it better than Roger Harris (www.beaujolaisandbeyond.co.uk) who showed me a wide range, from which three stood out: **Domaine de la Grosse Pierre, Chiroubles** (£12.95), Alain Passot's black-fruited, still rich and dense wine; **Domaine des Ducs, St-Valentin, St-Amour** (£13.30), with rich, briary-earthy fruit for autumn drinking; and **Nathalie Fauvin, Prestige, Chénas** (£13.40), explosively ripe fruit, lovely texture and serious depth.

Later, InterBeaujolais presented vintages back to Château des Jacques'

superb Clos du Grand Carquelin, Moulin-à-Vent 1999, plus a range of 2011s from young winemakers, my choice being: **Domaine Julien Sunier, Fleurie** (£18.95, Roberson); **Domaine Cédric Chignard, Les Moriers, Fleurie** (£15.95, Berry Bros & Rudd); **Charly Thavenet, Grain et Granit, Régnié** (£18.95, Roberson); **Château du Moulin-à-Vent, Couvent des Thorins, Moulin-à-Vent** (£14.95, Berry Bros & Rudd), and the superb **Vers le Mont, Fleurie and Julienas en Bottières** from Moulin du Carra, seeking an importer.



Rocca di Montegrossi, San Marcellino, Chianti Classico, Tuscany, Italy 2008

£36 **Handford Wines**
High-elevation, single-vineyard Sangiovese, with 6% Pugnitello. Dense colour, wonderful black fruit, spice, perfect ripeness and depth, beautifully expressive with the hallmarks of greatness.
Drink 2014–2022 Alc 14%



Michele Satta, Syrah, Tuscany, Italy 2009

£36 **Sommelier's Choice**
Michele Satta's Bolgheri estate dates from 1984; inspired by Chave's Hermitage, he planted Syrah in 1991. This has superb fruit, spice and depth, wonderful richness and purity from vines cooled by Mediterranean breezes.
Drink 2013–2020 Alc 13.5%



Vignalta, Alpinae Passito, Colli Euganei Fior d'Arancio, Veneto, Italy 2008

£22/375ml **Sommelier's Choice**
Voted the Best Italian Moscato in the 2012 Muscat du Monde Competition. This has a heady and hedonistic Moscato aroma and a rich yet refreshing palate.
Drink 2013–2014 Alc 12.5%