

Alliance's instructive quarter- century

3 Nov 2009 by Jancis Robinson

The Scotland-based wine importer Alliance Wines recently celebrated 25 years in business with a particularly fascinating tasting and dinner at Tate Modern (view therefrom illustrated). They invited their principals to show one of their own best wines, alongside a wine that had inspired them. As marketing and buying director Giles Cooke MW put it in the introduction to an extremely handsome book that commemorates this unusual exercise, 'Not everyone got the format'. One or two simply showed two of their own wines. Others (rather cleverly, it seemed to me) chose famous but similar wines that actually put their own in a particularly flattering light. Uccelliera's choice of Sassicaia was particularly effective in this respect, and Bruwer Raats was kind enough to allow us to compare his own Stellenbosch 2001 Cabernet Franc with a Cheval Blanc from the same vintage.

It was particularly crowded and I didn't manage to taste every single pair but I list below in the order tasted the pairs I was able to tackle, with the principal's own wine shown first. It was a shame (see [Let's hear it for white wine](#)) that such a high proportion of the wines were red, but perhaps that's inevitable.

The most impressively long-lived wine was a delicate white, Richter's 1970 Riesling Spätlese from the Mosel, and from a distinctly ordinary vintage. But I was also impressed by how fresh Suckfizzle's 2005 Western Australian blend of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc still is. The Australians were generally inclined to look backwards, with both Peter Althaus of [Domaine A in Tasmania](#) and the Lynns in Coonawarra pulling out their top 1998s for our delectation.

The overall effect of all these choices and comparisons was so much more interesting than a standard tasting and I learnt even more than usual, tasting for the first time a botrytised dessert wine from the Douro and marvelling at a Quebeccois cider. I hadn't realised quite how successful Amayna's Chilean barrel-fermented 2005 Sauvignon Blanc from Leyda is, for example. I have long admired my fellow Master of Wine Norrel Robertson's more commercial work in lesser known corners of Spain such as Calatayud and Bullas, but this tasting rubbed my delighted nose in a couple of his top bottlings.

Domäne Wachau, Achleiten Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 2008 Wachau 17 Drink 2010-14
Very bright and fresh. Mouthfilling, crystalline.

Domäne Wachau, Achleiten Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 1968 Wachau 15.5 Drink 1975-90
Copper colour, not much nose and honestly a bit long in the tooth. A little soft and flabby.

Zephyr Sauvignon Blanc 2009 Marlborough 15.5 Drink 2009-10
Quite firm and clean without quite enough fruit in the middle. Their third vintage.

Hugel Gewurztraminer 2007 Alsace 16 Drink 2008-11
Quite rich and off dry - an easy crowd pleaser.

Amayna, Barrel Fermented Sauvignon Blanc 2007 Leyda 17 Drink 2009-12
Quite rich and opulent. Lots there! Very ambitious, long and interesting. The oak is very subdued. Long and pretty impressive.

Didier Dagueneau, Silex 2007 Pouilly- Fumé 18 Drink 2009-14
More complex and drier than the Chilean. Very long and nuanced. Massively mineral. Sucking stone indeed! Clean and open.

Stella Bella, Suckfizzle Sauvignon Blanc/ Semillon 2005 Margaret River 16.5 Drink 2009-18
Most impressive longevity! Very green and grassy on the nose and with good texture and weight on the palate. Still impressively lively.

Dom de Chevalier Blanc 2000 Pessac- Léognan 16.5+ + Drink 2006-20
Very pure initially and then just a tad wet woolly on the nose - but bone dry, firm, racy and exactly what one expects of mid-life Dom de Chevalier.

Max Ferd. Richter, Veldenzler Elizenberg Riesling Auslese 1999 Mosel 16.5 Drink 2009-30
Smells almost the same age as the 1970 (which I tasted first)! Definitely sweeter and heavier - very jolly and appetising.

Max Ferd. Richter, Mülheimer Helenenkloster Riesling Spätlese, Nikolaus- Wein Richter 1970 Mosel 17 Drink 1980-2020
Light greenish gold. Very fresh and lively still even if fully open on the nose. This was a bumper vintage of only average quality - the last vintage of the old wine law, and one described by Dirk Richter as 'the last push to get me convinced to take on the family tradition and finally get involved in the wine business'. Picked on 6 Dec, St Nikolaus Day. Drying but still lovely and amazingly fresh - a real eye-opener.

Buil & Giné, Giné Giné 2007 Priorat 16 Drink 2010-13
Very young and cool-tasting - almost callow, sweet and easy - quite gentle and no very obvious oak ageing.

Doña Beatriz Verdejo, Fermentado en Barrica 2006 Rueda 16.5 Drink 2008-10
Very fresh and lean with a fine, lightly nutty nose and lots of personality. Firm and bone dry. A very pure expression of Verdejo.

Cillar de Silos, Tinto 2007 Ribera del Duero 15.5 Drink 2011-16
Not totally clean, clear nose. The second bottle was much fresher but failed to get me excited, I'm afraid. Rather sweet and sour.

Contino, Gran Reserva 2005 Rioja 17 Drink 2011-19
Complex, savoury and completely dry. Still as youthful as the 2007 Ribera served alongside, but in a more classical style.

Luis Cañas, Reserva Especial Amaren 2001 Rioja 17 Drink 2010-20
French oak and dense and correct from 16-year-old vines. Very mouthfilling. Impressively good and serious. Much less obviously oaky than some Luis Cañas bottlings I remember from [this tasting](#).

Ch Haut- Brion 1995 Pessac- Leognan 17.5 Drink 2013-30
Very sophisticated and gentle and easy. Calm, non showy, and beautifully balanced.

Remelluri, Colección Jaime Rodríguez 2004 Rioja 16.5 Drink 2011-18
Very dark and just released. Sweet and a little bit cocoa-flavoured. Determinedly modern! But there is real focus and personality here too which will presumably eventually emerge.

López Heredia, Viña Tondonia Reserva 2000 Rioja 16.5+ Drink 2012-20
Very pale ruby. Light and funky - very old-fashioned. Probably too young?

El Escoces Volante, Manga del Brujo 2007 Calatayud 16.5 Drink 2010-13
Norrel Robertson MW's joint venture with San Gregorio, taking advantage of old Garnacha vines, with involvement of purple pager Reg Ward, who poured the wine. Sweet and rich and flattering. Perhaps just a tad drying on the end but the fruit is great. Bravo! I can't believe it is very expensive - about £15 a bottle in New Zealand according to wine-searcher.com.

Norrel Robertson MW/ Luis J Perez 3000 Años 2006 Bullas 17.5 Drink 2008-13
Very dark. Concentrated, sweet and gentle - lovely stuff! So voluptuous - all texture, though the flavour from these old Monastrell vines with Syrah is not bad either...

Uccelliera, Rapace 2006 IGT Toscana 17 Drink 2009-15
Scented and seductive. Polished and lively. Very fine and well balanced.

Tenuta San Guido, Sassicaia 2006 Bolgheri 16.5+ Drink 2012-25
Rather animal, and cruder than the Uccelliera in fact. Is this why they chose it?! Solid on the end and still very youthful.

Raats Family Cabernet Franc 2001 Stellenbosch 17.5 Drink 2006-12

A wine I was most impressed by about five years ago. Dolomite granite. Now in its prime with 2007 the current vintage. Lovely and still fresh with no jagged oak. Very skilful winemaking for eight years ago. Bruwer Raats' favourite vintages of this highly successful varietal (of which Marc Kent of Boekenhouts Kloof is also a fan) are 2001, 2004 and 2007. Really refreshing.

Ch Cheval Blanc 2001 St-Émilion 18 Drink 2009-30

Velvety texture. Really deep- flavoured yet racy and layered. Electric tension and refreshment factor. Long and lively.

Land's End Syrah 2006 Elim 16.5 Drink 2009-13

Sweet and modern and thick but with playful freshness.

Alain Graillot 2006 Crozes- Hermitage 16 Drink 2010-14

Deep crimson. Another example where the French archetype is not necessarily better! Dry and light, and certainly appetising.

Famille Quiot, Dom du Vieux Lazaret, Cuvée Exceptionnelle 2001 Châteauneuf- du- Pape 16 Drink 2007-15

Dark crimson. A bit dusty but fine, with some beef extract aromas. Perfectly acceptable but not thrilling.

Neige Ice Cider NV Quebec

Admirably novel choice, but I'm afraid I didn't taste it. Tut tut.

Odfjell Carignan 2005 Maule 15 Drink 2010-14

Norwegian owner. Very sweet and a bit crass and raw to my taste, but then this may be my Carignan- phobia kicking in. Apparently this is made only in special years, with 2004 the first vintage. Very dry tannins, with a chewy end. Californian Paul Hobbs consults here.

Ch Troplong Mondot 1995 St-Émilion 17 Drink 2007-20

Very dark, seductive, polished, smooth and appetising. Velvety texture. Odfjell admits theirs is a bit different!

Familia Zuccardi, Zeta 2006 Mendoza 16.5 Drink 2010-15

Very dark indeed. So full and opulent! Thick and sweet and round and in- your- face. Full of fun! French oaked Malbec with American oaked Tempranillo - a most attractive and flattering blend.

Vega Sicilia, Valbuena 2004 Ribera del Duero 17 Drink 2010-20

Quite animal on the nose with a dry finish - very different from most Riberas. Lively and fresh and dense - very much of the soil.

Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1998 Tasmania 17.5 Drink 2006-20

Sweet and subtle and easy to love, beautiful evolution - a very fine wine by any measure and, with the Majella Coonawarra, the oldest of the Alliance wines on show.

Ch Mouton Baronne Philippe 1985 Pauillac 17 Drink 1993-2008

Minerally nose, light and almost lean but certainly fine textured. I suspect this would have tasted better a few years ago.

Majella, Mallea 1998 Coonawarra 16.5 Drink 2005-15

Sweet and scented blend of Cabernet and Shiraz - much more opulent than the 2006 John Riddoch!

Wynns, John Riddoch Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 Coonawarra 16+ Drink 2015-25

Very dark and pretty chewy and hard work. For the moment this is too angular for me but it will presumably soften.

Shelmerdine, Merindoc Shiraz 2006 Heathcote 16.5 Drink 2011-17

Sweet and a bit in- your- face when I tasted it after a Jasmin Côte Rôtie. Well defined and sculpted. The Shelmerdine family point out that their first Shiraz was picked in the year of Robert Jasmin's premature demise.

Jasmin 2006 Côte Rôtie 16.5 Drink 2012-20

Light and fresh and scented.

Two Hands, Samantha's Garden 2004 Clare Valley 16 Drink 2010-13

Sweet and tarry and full of ease and pleasure but arguably halfway to port - with a dry finish.

Remoissenet, Clos des Chênes Premier Cru 1978 Volnay 16.5 Drink 1990-2012

Fresh and hedonistic with what looks like an impressively long active life.

Paul Hobbs, Beckstoffer To Kalon Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 Oakville 17.5 Drink 2010-18

Extremely luscious and flattering. Hand- made, as though the hands were beautifully manicured. Toasty, leathery nose. Round and sweet and full - very glossy and paradigmatic of Napa Cab. All Cab. Really quite refined and very well balanced. 15.3% alcohol.

Arvay, Tokaji Aszu 6 puttonyos 2000 Tokaji

Chosen by Paul Hobbs because it was a great sweet white, Yquem 1962, that lit his wine flame when he was 16. I didn't alas have time to taste this.

Real Companhia Velha, Grandjo Late Harvest 2006 Douro 16 Drink 2008-10

Unusual - a nice, fresh, botrytised, golden dessert wine from a vineyard at 600 metres in port country - though it seems a little simple.

Ch d'Yquem 2004 Sauternes 18 Drink 2011-25

Big, massive in build and very ambitious in scale. So much more complex! Very good wine with a dry finish. Pretty glorious.