

MICHAEL BROADBENT



Yes, I do venture beyond Bordeaux

Coincidentally, I had just started to draft a note for a splendid Californian wine when I read the readers' letters from Spencer Swartz and Eduardo Garcia in *Decanter's* September issue, criticising my apparent hostility to New World wines. The wine was a 2003 Ridge Geyserville – interestingly bottled December 2004 (I always study wine back labels, as I do sauce bottles and cereal packets, also noting the grapes used: 76% Zinfandel, 18% Carignan, 6% Petite Sirah).

In the hands of Paul Draper, the Californian winemaker I respect and admire above all, I anticipated something special: fairly deep with a plummy rim and impressive, loitering tears; highish-toned, crisp, fruity nose; fairly sweet; positive entry, its richness balancing the level of alcohol I usually strive to avoid, 14.5%, very good acidity and well-masked dry tannic finish. As they say over there: 'well crafted'. A lovely wine.

Two days prior, I tasted an Australian Riesling – I well recall the attractive Rieslings from the Clare and Barossa Valleys I tasted on my first visit to the southern hemisphere in 1977. This, however, was a 2008 Eden Valley Riesling from Pewsey Vale, a vineyard established back in 1847, producing 'some of Australia's first cool-climate wines'. My note: very pale, with a melon-like sheen; not an archetypal Riesling kerosene nose, more grassy and minty; very dry, positive, moderate 12.5% alcohol, fair length and its flavour brought out by Daphne's spinach, feta and roasted red pepper quiche. A serious wine which would benefit from more bottle age.

A hop over to Italy to taste a relatively

new Supertuscan, Caiarossa, from the estate of that name, founded in 1998 and purchased in 2004 by Eric Albada Jelgersma, the Dutch owner of two Margaux châteaux, Giscours and the much improved du Tertre. I was intrigued to know how the winemaker could juggle with such a variety of varieties: four Bordeaux, one Spanish, two Rhône and just the one classic Tuscan: Sangiovese, which made up a mere 9% of the wine. All harvested and vinified separately. The result in 2005 was a recognisably modern style of wine, verging on opaque, still with a youthful

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rim; good fruit but, unsurprisingly, indefinable, but straightforward nose and flavour. I found it too sweet, and its alcoholic content, which appeared on the label as 12.5%, was probably nearer 15%. Certainly not a food wine, more suitable as a headache-inducing City wine-bar drink. And not cheap; Berry Bros & Rudd lists the 2004 at £36.20.

Now for a complete change, a stellar South African red, Villafonte, created by the legendary (though not old) winemaker Zelma Long and her husband Phil Freese, the designer of the first Opus One vineyard in Napa. A younger old-friend, Mark Ratchiffe of Warwick Estate, is involved, as is my son, the US importer.

I first met Zelma when she was the winemaker at Simi (previous to that she worked with Robert Mondavi) on one of my very frequent visits to California in the 1970s and 1980s (Messrs Swartz and Garcia please note). In 1989, while staying at another winery in the Alexander Valley, I was invited by Zelma to a blind tasting of top Californian wines of the 1982 vintage. Her Simi Reserve Estate-bottled cask reserve was outstanding.

I was reminded of the above when I tasted her 2005 Villafonte Series M: a deep, impressive, velvety appearance; an immediate surge of fruit, tempered with new oak; decanted into an open glass jug (which I often do with young vintages, mainly but not all New World). It had a very sweet entry due to its super-ripe Paarl grapes and a now customary high level of alcohol, 14.5%, and a dry finish. Not my style of wine, but I liked it.

Back to the old country – France – for yet another wine new to me, Domaine de Mourchon's Grande Réserve 2006 from Côte du Rhône-Villages, Seguret. Owned since 1998 by a British family, the Mackinlays, who kindly sent me a bottle to taste. Familiar grapes, 65% Grenache and 35% Syrah, old vines, low yield, 40% in oak blended with 60% in concrete vats. A most attractive brochure which, as is my wont, I read avidly. Set in a secluded valley, the 'steep slopes' looked rather on the flat side to me but there was a rather sensuous hint of a downward slope on the near horizon. Still, I mustn't carp. I liked the wine despite its robust alcoholic content (15%) which gave it a hot finish. Colour appropriately deep, with youthful purple core and rich legs. Nose and flavour full of fruit, meaty, and spicy. I didn't open it 'several hours' before serving – surely right – but, the next best thing, decanted it (not for sediment's sake – I didn't notice any) into my open jug. It is worth leaving to age and mature. UK stockists include Avery's, Roberson's and the Big Red Wine Company. Well priced for its quality at £13 to £17 a bottle. If only we lived in France. **D**

Michael Broadbent of Christie's has been writing on wine for more than 50 years

WHAT (ELSE) MICHAEL'S BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH...

CLASSIC, POWERFUL RIESLING

Schloss Reinhartshausen's 2007 Erbach Marcobrunn, Edition Marianne Riesling, Erstes Gewächs, may be hard to pronounce but is made up for by the beautiful label. Excellent vintage and a Rheingau with extra dimensions. A

shimmering pale yellow, hint of gold, a pure Riesling aroma (understated kerosene) of great depth; the immediacy of the palate, its sublimated power and length spelling quality. Classic and will benefit from at least five years' ageing.