

A Champagne Soirée

17th September 2022

by Ormond Smith

The three witches in Shakespeare's "Macbeth" chanted "bubble, bubble, toil and trouble" as they tended their cauldron which is a reasonably apt description for the Tasting on September 17th, hosted by Ecuyer Graham Vine and his wife Helen in their house in Nairn, looking out over the Moray Firth. The "bubble" aspect befits the topic of the Tasting, i.e., Champagne, the "toil" accurately covers all the preparation ... and trouble, what trouble? It was a Goustevin evening, so none whatsoever!

The attendees to the soirée, from near and not so near boarded the coach for the trip through to Nairn and were soon welcomed by our hosts. Following the Connetable's opening remarks to the assembled members and guests, a one minute silence was observed in memory of our late monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, prior to us enjoying our "welcome" wine, in fact not an authentic Champagne but a very good quality **Graham Beck Brut "Cap Classique"** (Majestic Wines, circa £12) from the Robertson vineyards in South Africa, and accompanied by a wee



Ormond does the rounds . . .

brain teaser..... guess the wine, its grapes and its origin! Easy !?! It was a "Méthode Champenoise" and as they are forbidden from using the term Champagne in South Africa, Beck's call it a Cap Classique, "Cap" after Cape Province and "Classique" to refer to the production method – and the grapes are absolutely traditional, 51% Chardonnay / 49% Pinot Noir. As a sparkling wine, it is about as near to an authentic Champagne as you will get and it was well received (as were the extensive "nibbles") with aromas of limes and fresh

fruit and a palate with a rich and creamy complexity – a fresh wine with an air of finesse and a very suitable start to the evening. And finesse is quite appropriate as this wine was selected as the celebratory drink at Nelson Mandela's inauguration and also to celebrate US President Barack Obama's presidential victory!

The opening champagne of the evening was an **Etienne Dumont Brut NV** (Sainsbury), very much a supermarket wine but one which has collected numerous awards over the years. Described as complex and traditional, the aromas of blackberries led into a mouth filling experience of black fruits and green peppers with a refreshing finish exuding a soft elegance. This wine is 80% Pinot Noir with 20% Chardonnay and is on the shelves at around a very reasonable £15.



Graham and others enjoying a lively discussion . . .

Moving up the price ladder was the second offering, a **Piper Heidsieck Brut NV** (or “multi vintage”) (Sainsbury) at circa £26 again available on your supermarket shelves. This wine comprises the three traditional grape varieties and in this example, Pinot Noir (50%) ; Pinot Meunier (30%) and a 20% contribution of Chardonnay – lively, subtle and light hints of almonds and fresh hazelnut on the nose led into the palate highlighted by the smoothness of fresh pears and apple with hints of citrus fruits. Whoever coined the phrase “class in a glass” must surely have had a wee tipple of this wine to hand at the time!

Just to further our knowledge and appreciation of champagne, our next wine was a rosé example, a **Les Pionniers Brut Rosé NV** (Co-op circa £20), indeed made for the supermarket chain by Piper Heidsieck with a blend of 60% Pinot Noir / 40% Chardonnay. Streams of fine bubbles enticed us to enjoy the ‘breadly’ nose with red berry and blood orange notes, followed by a palate offering a yeasty tang with notes of red cherries and raspberries with a cleansing acidity and a dry memorable finish. The evening’s programme then swung toward the kitchen from where chef Graham dispensed the supper content of the night, his famous Fish Pie, which would be followed by a cheese selection. To accompany the Fish Pie was a **2015 Union Champagne Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs**



Caroline welcomes guests to their first event.

(Tesco Finest at circa £26). A Blanc de Blanc champagne can only be made using white grapes and of course, the only white grape for champagne is Chardonnay. This wine opened with a rich, ‘leesy’ nose, with hints of warm pastry and tinges of honey. The palate showed good minerality with distinct citric notes. An elegant wine which went well with the Pie, was very well received and with a most satisfying finish. The Tasting was just getting better and better! The closing champagne, which was served to accompany the cheese selection, was a **Philizot et Fils Brut NV Blanc de Noirs** with a blend of 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Pinot

Meunier (Aldi circa £18). For a Blanc de Noirs, (using only the black Pinot grapes) this literally means clear wine from black grapes whereby the skins are quickly removed after gentle pressing to eliminate any possibility of colour permeation from the skins. On the nose, juicy red apples and berry fruitiness to be followed on the palate with crisp apple acidity with creamy nutty tones, leading to a dry but most pleasant lingering finish.



To round off the evening, we “moved” about 200 miles north-west from Champagne to Normandy and an offering of a 20 year old Calvados, courtesy of the Connetable. Calvados really has to be aged for that period of time to fully appreciate its nuances - a much younger Calvados is generally “rougher” and very fiery whereas the aged ones are smoother

and more refined. This one was a good mahogany colour with round, earthy aromas of dried fruit while the palate was long and intense with a good balance of fruit and grilled hazelnuts. A fitting climax to a most enjoyable evening and it would be remiss not to thank Graham and Helen for their welcome, their organisation and execution of a quality tasting, in the best traditions of Goustevin Scotland.

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Footnote:- A number of members remarked on the intricately decorative place mats which Graham had laid out on the main table – intricate designs encompassing “weel kent” written texts and phrases. For those who enquired, the website is www.susanmcgilldesigns.com and contact email address is “enquiries@susanmcgilldesigns.com”.

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