

Old World Grapes...New World Wines

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by Ormond Smith

As countries of the New World, in wine terms, embrace the long established grape varieties of the Old World, i.e., Europe, many fine examples have been tasted over the years by Goustevin Scotland but for the first event of 2025, it was decided to select some of perhaps the slightly less well known grape



Connetable Nicol outlines the evening's format

varieties from European vineyards where they successfully make outstanding wines, but choose wines from the New World which are growing these varieties in different soils, terroir and weather conditions. How would they measure up?

The evening got under way chez Le Connetable's house on Island Bank Road and as is the norm for "at home" tastings, numbers are necessarily capped to equate to the space available – the tasting was booked to capacity and on arrival, we were offered a glass of **2019 Grüner Veltliner**, from the Zocker Vineyards in Edna Valley, California.

Origins - Grüner Veltliner is the

most planted varietal in Austria where it is known for making dry, peppery (white pepper), vegetal wines with fresh, high acidity The Zocker wine, from a single vineyard in Edna Valley, where cool ocean breezes give the fruit plenty of time to ripen and develop complex flavours, assailed the senses with notes of lively lemon, lime and ripe melon with hints of candied ginger and a characteristic kick of white pepper. Refreshing, with a steely minerality, that got the evening off to a fine start. And to add to the experience, platters of extremely tasty canapés supplied by consœurs Christina Cameron, Jean Slater and Caroline Duncan were distributed, and accompanied by delicious Burgundian gougères (baked savory choux pastry made of choux dough mixed with cheese) from Sallie Fraser, the empty platters spoke for themselves!



The Grüner Veltliner opening white wine

The first of the tasting wines was a white **2023 Coriole Estate Fiano** from McLaren Vale in Australia, and this wine "hit the spot" immediately. A dry wine with a soft, floral nose exhibiting hints of pear, nectarine, jasmine and lemongrass, the palate was equally attractive with traces of peach, lemon, fresh ginger and white pepper. McLaren Vale's warm Mediterranean type climate encourages wines of aromatic intensity and textural generosity and Coriole Estate have been pioneering Italian grape varieties since 1985 and their Fiano vineyard is now the finest in Australia. *Origins - Fiano's "home" is in fact the Campania region in Southern Italy and is an ancient variety dating back centuries, to pre-Roman times, indeed there is a school of thought that suggests the ancient Greeks introduced the grape to Italy as far back as the 7th century BC!*

Still with white wine, the third offering of the evening was a **2022 El Enernigo Semillon** from an 80 year old single vineyard sitting at a height of 930 metres in altitude in Agrelo in the Uca Valley in the Mendoza region of Argentina, the vines benefitting from the rich clay soils. This wine found instant favour with those who enjoy a rich, full-bodied white in an oaked style. Aged for 15 months in French oak barrels, the nose has notes of vanilla, smoke and toast melding with tropical fruits and the palate, with its rich creamy taste adds a honeyed complexity. This is a wine that could well age with interest. *Origins – Semillon’s spiritual home is, of course, Bordeaux, where it is a key ingredient of Sauternes sweet wine. It is often blended with Sauvignon Blanc to make dry Bordeaux white wine, most famous in the Graves appellation. It is pivotal in the long lived sweet wines of Sauternes, Monbazillac and Barsac and as a single varietal it can age very well to give intense, rich, viscous lemon and honey flavoured wines.*

Amid stimulated conversation and tasting comparisons, we moved on to the first of the red wines, a **2022 Thorny Devil Old Vine Grenache** from Thistledown Estate in McLaren Vale, Australia, so named after a small lizard native to the region.



The red wines await deliberation

Thistledown selects its Grenache grapes from a number of vineyards in the area, all of which have old vines, dry grown and bush trained, but of a consistently high quality. Incidentally, as far as Australia is concerned, Grenache vines were originally planted in 1838 and nowadays the wine is often referred to as Australia’s “unsung hero”. These Thistledown wines are stored in seasoned old French oak hogsheads for 10 months before bottling. A bright red in the glass, the nose is quite intense with notes of ripe strawberries, red plums and subtle spices with the palate emphasising the fruit flavours in a velvety texture with a vibrant finish. Continuing the appeal factor of the white wines, this Grenache met with acclaim from the confrères. *Origins – Grenache Rouge (not to be confused*

with Grenache Blanc) is grown widely in its “home” in the south of France where it is a key varietal in blends in Languedoc-Roussillon and the Rhone valley, notably Chateauneuf-du-Pape. It is also grown extensively in Spain’s Rioja wine region where it is known as Garnacha, and is used for both blends and as a single varietal in Priorat and Navarra.

Moving on, as they say, we then arrived at the final red of the tasting, a **2021 Craggy Range Syrah**, from the premier Gimblett Gravels wine region of North Island, New Zealand. The unique terroir is characterised by its ancient riverbed soils of the Ngaruroro River, free-draining and low in fertility, resulting in the vines concentrating on ripening fruit instead of producing vegetation – the gravel soils also absorb heat during the day and radiate it back at night, keeping the vines warm. An additional benefit of the Gravels positioning is that it is sheltered from coastal breezes. The family owned Craggy Range Winery was established in 1998, with the Syrah vines emanating from an original Heritage clone brought to New Zealand about 150 years ago. On to the wine itself - deep red with a purple hue, the nose has tremendous aromatics of sweet cherries, lavender and spiciness (black pepper) and the palate is a perfect balance of savoury and fruitiness. Absolute satisfaction! *Origins – Syrah is a Noble red grape, capable of serious ageing and best known in the Northern Rhone Valley in France where it is the dominant grape in the famous wines of Hermitage and Côtes Rôtie. It is also grown in the southern Rhone, Provence and Languedoc-Roussillon. It shot to fame in the New World when introduced to Australia where it is known as Shiraz.*

The clarion call for supper came with a nod to Scotland’s national bard, as sumptuous plates of “haggis, neeps ‘n tatties” were served up by Steve Hume and his wife, Anne-Marie and this repast was accompanied, very successfully, by a **2021 John X Merriman Rustenberg** from Stellenbosch in South Africa. This Bordeaux blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot is unashamedly Old World in stylistic aspiration, although a bit easier to approach in youth – Bordeaux examples, certainly of quality are quite austere when young. Rich and robust with black fruit and earthy notes, the palate softens with veins of sweet oak – a fulfilling, satisfying wine and a splendid finale to the evening. This wine also went well with the delicious cheese platter. *Origins – The classic Bordeaux blend came from the regions geological complexity, weather conditions and the need to balance the varying qualities of different grape varieties. Vines were first planted by the Romans in the mid-1st century and since then vigneron have experimented with blending differing varieties before selecting what we now recognise as the classic Bordeaux blend. As a generalisation, Bordeaux blends are now made all over the New World and tend to be fruitier and more approachable than Bordeaux red wines and require less ageing.*



The "supper" wine - went well with the haggis, neeps 'n tatties

Thanks are due to Nicol and Beverley for their hospitality, Caroline Duncan for sourcing the various wines and the afore-mentioned consœrs for the appetising canapés. As one member opined “ a fine evening to kick off 2025” total agreement from all present!

Wines and suppliers

2019 Zocker Grüner Veltliner	Majestic Wines, Inverness	£16.00
2023 Coriole Estate Fiano	Great Grog, Edinburgh	£17.29
2022 El Enermigo Semillon	Tesco, Inverness	£18.00
2022 Thorny Devil Old Vine Grenache	Smith & Gertrude, Edinburgh / Drinkmonger Wines, Pitlochry	£20.00
2021 Craggy Range Syrah	Majestic Wines, Inverness	£19.99
2021 John X Merrimen Rustenberg	Great Grog, Edinburgh	£17.99