

A Tasting of Wines from North America

17th January 2026

by Ormond Smith

When the programme for 2026 was being discussed, subject matter for the January tasting included North America.....but where? Given that wine producing areas stretch from the eastern states, through the mid-west and to the Pacific west coast, it was far too much to attempt in one tasting. Research was done and an in-depth look at the vineyards of the Pacific coast was selected, which narrowed down choices but only marginally, given the intensity of wine production stretching from southern California and north to Washington State beside the Canadian border. It may be of interest to learn that early settlers tried to make wine from indigenous wild grapes – in the 1580's Captain John Smith on one of Sir Walter Raleigh's expeditionary forays opined "they be fatte and the juyce thicke. Neither doth the taste so well please when they are made into wine". Thankfully viniculture has improved immeasurably since those early days!

Connetable Nicol hosted this "at home" tasting and he and Beverley welcomed some thirty members and guests, not quite from a' the airts but including Aberdeen and the Central Belt, to their house for what would be a most interesting look at single grape varietals stretching



the length of the Pacific west coast, the proceedings getting under way with a welcoming glass of "**Quartet**" **Anderson Valley Brut** from the **Roederer Estate, Mendocino County, California**. This non-vintage 'sparkler' is made from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes grown on their 340 acre estate about 18kms inland from the coast but still benefitting from the marine influences. A 'stand-out' wine, it was rounded and full, with good acidity and finish with notes of yeast, toast, nutmeg and spicy cedar. It certainly got the evening off to the perfect start. Into the tasting proper and the opening

white was a **2023 Lone Birch Riesling** from **Yakima Valley, Washington State**, near to the Canadian border, indeed Yakima Valley (named after the indigenous Native American tribe) was the first federally recognised wine growing region in the Pacific North-West. The vineyards in Yakima benefit from having cooler areas towards the Cascade Mountains which are clearly beneficial for growing white wine grapes, i.e., Riesling and Chardonnay. This Riesling, made by the fourth generation Miller family is 'zingy' with ripe apple and peach aromas, leading into a refreshing palate of peach and apricot with a hint of lemon sherbet and with good acidity – good value at the price!

Just to throw a bit of variation and complexity into the proceedings, it was decided late on to include an "interloper" into the tasting with the attendees being invited to try and guess the grape variety. A number of suggestions were proffered before 'sommelier' Caroline

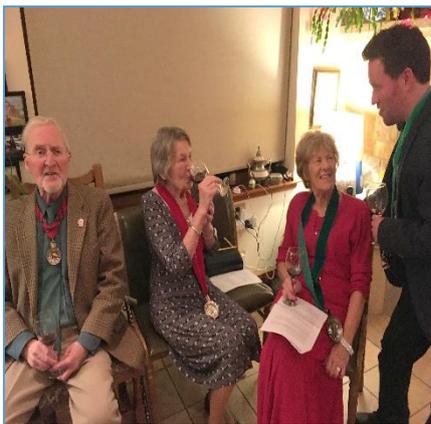
confirmed that it was indeed a Chardonnay.....but from Long Island in New York State on America's eastern seaboard. A **2023 Osmote Long Island Chardonnay**, but slightly confusingly, not produced there but in the **Osmote Winery in Finger Lakes** just south of Lake Ontario. This is potentially a "one-off" production as Osmote experienced horrendous frosts to their Finger Lakes vineyards and they collaborated with the Macari Vineyard on Long Island to purchase their Chardonnay production – following pressing the juice was shipped to Finger Lakes for fermentation in French oak barrels. A pronounced aroma of peach and apricot flavours carried over onto the palate, with a hint of lemon curd and honey on the aftertaste.



Returning to the Pacific west coast and Washington State, wine number three of the west wines beckoned, a **2022 Ste. Michelle Chardonnay** from **Woodinville, Columbia Valley**.

Ste. Michelle Vintners are the state's oldest and most proclaimed winery with an extensive history going back to the repeal of prohibition in 1912. This winery is dedicated to white wine production with their Chardonnay grapes being grown in a valley in the Cascade Mountain Range, just east of Seattle where sunny days and cool nights result in perfectly ripe grapes with refreshing acidity. Described in tasting notes as "not a subtle wine", the nose inhaled a powerful 'whack' of butter and vanilla which continued onto the palate, full and intense with notes of nectarine, toast and patisserie. A most acceptable Chardonnay and it made for a very interesting comparison with its east coast offering.

Wine four was the first of the red wines, a **2021 "Erath" Pinot Noir** from **Willamette Valley in Oregon**, a state which offers perfect conditions for the delicate Pinot Noir grape, growing on the volcanic soils of the region. Oregon, particularly the Willamette Valley, has a more



maritime climate with cooler, wetter summers and milder winters than neighbouring Washington State and the grey skies of this lush pastoral area can do what California found to be next to impossible – to conjure up the illusion of drinking fine red Burgundy, even if the Oregon Pinots are generally softer, fruitier and earlier maturing than their European counterparts. The Erath vineyards in the Dundee Hills are just about 10 miles south-west of city of Portland and this Pinot Noir displays aromas of red berry fruits with hints of violets and orange zest while the palate, with smooth tannins emanates flavours of vanilla

and spice and a long, satisfying finish – a really good example of Pinot Noir and at a reasonable price!

Moving onto wine five and this was a **2021 "Ranch 32" Cabernet Sauvignon** from **Monterey County**. The grapes for this Cab. Sauv. come from selected vineyards around Arroya Seco and San Lucas in the extreme south of Monterey County where both sites feature porous soils, hot days and cold nights: the three ingredients necessary to produce deep, rich, ripe and

concentrated Cabernet Sauvignon. And this powerful and elegant expression did not disappoint – aromas of blackberry, plum and currant are complimented with hints of mocha and violet. The palate is lush and layered with balanced acidity and supple, integrated tannins, culminating in a long smoky oak finish, this wine most definitely benefitting from 12 months ageing in French and American oak barrels. Most certainly a “hit” on the evening!

Time for the supper content of the evening – Chef Steve Hulme of Highland Prestige Catering



had arrived earlier with trays of delicacies for the American style finger buffet and with busy hands making light work, the Connetable along with Christina Cameron and Jean Slater were soon dishing up an array of



“hot dawgs, mini burgers with ‘slaw on the side”, accompanied by a selection of relishes and mustards and to go with the repast was a **2022 Ravenswood Old Vine Zinfandel** from **Lodi County**, from the E&J Gallo vineyards (America’s largest wine producer) immediately south of Sacramento. Primarily Zinfandel from old pre-prohibition vines, with just a dash of Durif (Petite Sirah to add complexity and structure) and aged in oak barrels for eighteen months, the wine assaults the olfactory senses with aromas of pronounced both red and dark berry fruits and sweet coconut. On the palate there is a concentration of wood spiced blackberry and figs with more coconut, cloves and Christmas spices. The tannins are soft but do not lack freshness. A memorable wine indeed. Following some cheeses, the dessert was served, a Seville Orange Gateau generously covered in chocolate and served with a generous dollop of Crème Fraîche and with it our final wine, a **2019 Cline Family Cellars Mourvedre**. This luscious red dessert wine is from Cline’s **Costra Costa County** and **Sonoma County** vineyards near Oakland/San Francisco, where the grapes are left on the vines until shrivelled, this producing incredible natural sweetness. Richly sweet and with excellent balancing acidity, the senses were assailed with notes of prunes, chocolate, berry fruit and coffee – a memorable wine with which to close our tasting.

Sincere thanks and appreciation to Connetable Nicol and Beverley for hosting the evening, to Chef Steve Hulme for the “finger lickin” buffet, to Caroline for the inordinate amount of time spent researching (and procuring) the wine selection and not forgetting Christina and Jean for not only their kitchen service but helping to clear the room after the “invasion” of the array of assorted wine glasses and empty plates! A great start to 2026 in the best traditions of good food, good wine and good company.....what’s not to like!!

Wines and Suppliers

N/V “Quartet” Anderson Valley Brut	The Wine Society	£30.00
2023 Lone Birch Riesling	The Wine Society	£12.50

2023 Osmote Long Island Chardonnay	Woodwinters	£28.00
2022 Ste Michelle Chardonnay	Majestic Wines	£18.00
2021 "Erath" Pinot Noir	Majestic Wines	£20.00
2021 "Ranch 32" Cabernet Sauvignon	Appellation Wines, Edinburgh	£25.00
2022 Ravenswood Old Vine Zinfandel	Majestic Wines // Tesco	£15.00
2019 Cline Family Cellars Mourvedre (375ml)	Great Grog, Edinburgh	£21.00

*** If you would like to order any of the wines, please discuss with Caroline Duncan, who may be able to help, particularly with The Wine Society or Appellation Wines orders. Caroline can be contacted by email at caroduncan75@hotmail.com.*

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