

“Wines of the Southern Rhône Valley”

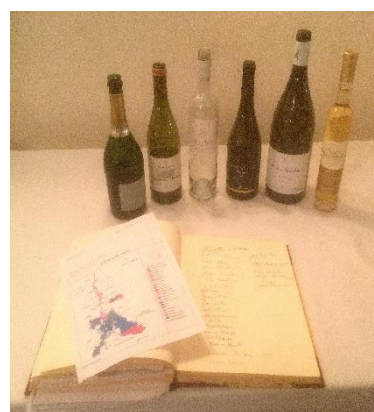
A Food and Wine Comparison

November 16th 2022

by Ormond Smith

Given the range of tastings Goustevin Scotland have enjoyed over the years, it came as a surprise to find that we had last visited the South of France in 1986.....a return visit was therefore long overdue! When the possibility of the South of France as a whole was suggested, it soon became clear that it was far too large an area to fit into one tasting, particularly as the format was to be a food/wine pairing, so the Southern Rhône valley was selected, leaving the exciting prospect of a visit to the Midi for the future.

The venue was again the Loch Ness Country House Hotel, who had looked after the Goustevin admirably on our Georgian wine tasting and an encouraging turnout of members and guests turned out on what was a dry but chilly evening. On arrival, although not a Southern Rhône wine, a welcoming glass of **Blanquette de Limoux** accompanied by tantalising canapés got the evening off to an appropriate start, the geographical trip westward deemed acceptable given that there are no sparkling wines from the subject area.



The wines of the evening



*Quennelles de Brochet et
Bisque d'Ecrivisses*

Once all were seated, the Connetable welcomed the members and guests and outlined the format of the evening which would be a three course dinner with accompanying wines, paired for both the starter and main dishes, with copious information available on the tasting sheets. With regard to the dishes, the chef had exercised his imagination with regional Southern Rhône cuisine. The starter was a very French opener, **Quennelles de Brochet et Bisque d'Ecrivisses** (Pike Mousses with a Crayfish Bisque), visually well presented and certainly most appealing to the taste buds. To accompany this dish were two wines, a **2019 Côtes du Rhône Blanc “Domaine Grand Reserve”** and a **2021 Chateau Routas Provence Rosé**. The former was 100% Clairette grape, a bit of a rarity and a wine which has the capability of ageing for several years, with delicate fruit and floral aromas on the nose and a palate assailed with grapefruit and lemon flavours, well rounded with a lively finish. The Rosé came from Goustevin member Sir David Murray’s Chateau Routas estate, a Decanter Magazine International Winner for best rosé and it didn’t disappoint. Aromas of freshly cut strawberries, ripe peaches and floral notes led into a soft fruit driven palate with hints of minerality and a refreshing finish. Both wines were well received with (at the writer’s table) the Côtes du Rhône Blanc just edging in popularity, complementing the dish admirably. Animated discussions ensued around the tables as the main course wines were poured.

The chef had taken a traditional French cassoulet recipe for the main course but had opted to deviate from the normal pork main ingredient by using beef, an imaginative move.....but would **Cassoulet de Boeuf** be well received? The wines to be paired with this dish were two outstanding examples of the southern Rhône, the first from the Chatus grape grown almost exclusively in the Ardeche, a **2020 Chatus Monnaie d'Or** and probably a grape variety members had never before experienced. Alongside was a **2017 Gigondas Romane Machotte**, a typical Rhône blend of Grenache and Syrah but leaving out the Mourvèdre. There were mixed opinions on the main course, with many feeling that it lacked presentation and a few were disappointed with the overall taste but for the wines, the nose of the Chatus led with dried figs, quince and cherries with hints of vanilla and liquorice but at the writer's table, the appeal of the well structured, full bodied wine was detracted from by the slightly chalky texture in fairness, it was still a young wine with up to ten years aging potential – nevertheless it went well with the Cassoulet. The Gigondas, with three years more ageing than the Chatus, assailed



**Cassoulet de Boeuf avec
Haricots Verts, Broccoli et
Gratin Dauphinois**



**Le Gateau Ardechois à la
Crème de Marrons et Glace
Vanille**

the nasal senses with notes of crushed plum, cassis and cherry preserve which carried forward onto the palate, ground anise coming through on the mid palate and a satisfying finish with hints of lavender, thyme and light tobacco and it also paired well the Cassoulet. It was a close call but the Gigondas proved to be the more popular with the members.

While discussion continued on the contrasting qualities of the two red wines, the accompaniment to the dessert was being dispensed into our glasses, a **2019 Beumes de Venise Domaine de Grand Montirail**, that classic Rhône dessert wine made with the Muscat grape, luscious and delicious but not cloying. That Muscat has been cultivated around the Vaucluse département of Provence for some time can be evidenced in the writings of that renowned Roman historian, Pliny the Elder, who wrote “The Muscat grape has

been grown for a long time in Beumes and its wine is remarkable” nearly 2000 years ago!! The closing dish, **Le Gateau Ardechois à le Crème de Marrons et Glace Vanille** (Chestnut Cream Gateau) was most acceptable, and the pairing with the Beumes de Venise, the intense floral flavours of the Muscat grape coupled with hints of Lychee, mango and pear and the full bodied flavours of tropical fruits and a luscious, lasting finish was a perfect finale to an excellent evening. The Loch Ness Country House Hotel had once again fulfilled our requirements and the overall ambience, conviviality and the wine selection amply encompassed the ideals of the Goustevin, “good food, good wine and good company”.

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Additional information about the wines can be found below.



Wednesday 16th November 2022

Loch Ness Country House Hotel

“Food & Wine Comparisons featuring the Southern Rhône Valley”

Wine information – wine 1 – With little or no quality sparkling wine produced in the Rhone we chose Blanquette de Limoux from close to Carcassonne near the Pyrénées in Languedoc, this is the world’s original sparkling wine, created by Benedictine monks in 1531 and is made with the Mauzac grape (90%) and 10% Chenin Blanc, blended and bottle aged for 12 months. The Mauzac grape is specific to the Limoux area and is known locally as “Blanquette” due to the fine white down which forms on the vine leaves – in the local dialect of Langue d’Oc, Blanquette means white.

Wine information – wine 2 - This wine is a genuine rarity, made with 100% Clairette grapes from vines planted in 1955 at an altitude of 300 meters. The grapes are hand-picked towards the end of September, pressed and vinified in barrels with 30% in new oak. The cuvée is then stirred and aged on fine lees for 9 months. Flashy now, will age well up to 2030.

Wine information wine 3 - A Decanter International Winner for best Rosé. Owned by Goustevin Scotland member Sir David Murray, the 290 hectare Estate of Chateau Routas is nestled between the old town elegance of Aix-en-Provence, and the white sand beaches that line the Gulf de Saint Tropez. Sitting at an altitude of 350 meters provides cooler nights contributing to wines that combine both freshness and grape complexity. The blend of Cinsault (46%); Grenache (30%); Syrah (15%) and Cabernet Sauvignon (9%) are harvested and fermented separately prior to blending which is followed by two or three rackings to ensure that the new wine is crystal clear –the wine is then bottled in the January.

Wine information – wine 4 - The Chatus grape is the oldest grape of the Ardèche region grown around the Cévennes Mountains. It is referenced in writings from the 16th century. Indeed, the oldest plot currently in use today dates from 1883 in the village of Vernon. It is also of small production, only 57 hectares left in France grown by a handful of growers on terraced slopes bordered by dry stone walls locally called “faisses.” Chatus is a late-ripening variety, the grapes are picked by hand and the wine is partly aged in top-quality oak.

Wine information – wine 5. As the name suggests, this wine comes from the Gigondas region just east of Orange in the Rhône valley. The AC allows Mourvèdre to be grown but is not used in this cuvée. The Grenache and Syrah vines (with an average age of 45 years) that produce this Gigondas are deeply rooted on the hillsides of the Amadieu family estate, 400 metres above sea level, where the scent of the “garrigue” (low level shrub land) that grew there for centuries still perfumes the vines that have replaced it. The grapes are hand-picked and a 21 day fermentation in concrete tanks extracts only the best from each grape variety. A traditional ageing of 12 months in foudres (large oak vats containing over 1000 litres thus avoiding too much wood contact) and barriques (barrels) allows a blending of 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah with the delicate oak flavours and subtle natural micro-oxygenation of the wine. This wine should age well.

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**Wine information – wine 6.** The village of Beaumes-de-Venise is in the Vaucluse département in the Provence region, 26 kilometres from its capital Avignon. It is located at the foot of Montmirail Mountain, well protected from the Mistral, crossed by the La Salette River and surrounded by vineyards. The wine is made entirely from the small-berried Muscat de Frontignan grape and carries a minimum alcohol level of 15%, achieved by the addition of neutral spirits during fermentation. It is clear that the vineyards on the windswept slopes of the Dentelles de Montmirail in the southern Rhone Valley have been around for some time - nearly two thousand years ago, the Roman historian Pliny the Elder wrote "The Muscat grape has been grown for a long time in Beaumes and its wine is remarkable." We're sure you will agree!!

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