

# Spring into Summer Wines at the Inverness Botanical Gardens – May 2023

By Ormond Smith

Springtime heading into summer is the time of year when buds appear on plants and flowers begin to blossom (although on an evening of thick clouds overhead and distinctly early spring temperatures) so what better venue for our **Spring into Summer Wine Tasting** than the Floral Hall at the Botanical Gardens in Inverness. Breaking new ground (if you'll pardon the pun!), Goustein Scotland arranged exclusive use of the venue for this tasting, with wine stations placed strategically around the Floral Hall so that the forty or so members and guests would get the opportunity to enjoy all the exhibits, indoor and out and including the sunken Cactus House. Unfortunately this had to be hastily amended due to a fallen metal spar on one of the mezzanine stairways so the wines were centrally dispensed in the conservatory which led to a most convivial atmosphere but perhaps to the lack of confreres wandering around the Tropical and Cactus houses.

On arrival, all were served with a welcoming glass of suitably chilled **Crémant de Bourgogne, Blanc de Blancs**, a Méthode Traditionelle Brut and 100% hand harvested Chardonnay grapes from 30 to 35 year old vines and produced from the renowned co-operative Cave de Lugny in southern Burgundy (Waitrose £15.50). Pale yellow in the glass with flecks of gold, the nose exhibited fragrances of hazelnut, fresh butter and almonds while the palate, dominated by the typical Chardonnay nuances, displayed a freshness, with a touch of delicacy and subtleness. A perfect start to the evening particularly with the accompanying cold smoked salmon mousse with cracked pink peppercorn and citric zest canapés.

Following the provided map of the Hall took the attendees to wine station 2 in the conservatory and



**Conversation flowed, as did the wine!**

after opening remarks from the Connetable, the champagne flutes were exchanged for normal wine glasses containing a **2021 Weissburgunder** from the Pfalz region of Germany and available from M&S at £9.50. Weissburgunder is the German name for the Pinot Blanc grape and in this example, showed as an elegant wine with subtle hints of apple and almonds on the nose, while the palate showed freshness and fullness with citrus led nuances of lemon rind, grapefruit and limes. Ideal with both seafood and poultry.

With the majority now happily ensconced in the conservatory the second still white of the evening was dispensed, a **2019 Lorca Fantasia Torrentes** (Wine Importers {Edin} £11.75) from the Famatina Valley in La Rioja, Argentina. These grapes are grown at 900 metres above sea level and trained on the Pergola system. A greenish yellow in the glass, the nose is pronounced with jasmine and citric notes and our palates were tempted with exotic fruits, freshness and with good acidity and a satisfying long finish. For those who have never tasted Torrentes, think along the lines of floral nuanced Sauvignon Blanc. Ideal as an aperitif, or with seafood or Asian dishes and even cheese! Interestingly, with both whites having been chilled



**Relaxing in the Tropical House**

on ice, several members opined that the Torrentes was “a bit flat” or “bland” - by allowing it warm slightly, the characteristics of this wine bloomed, which emphasised the constant problem of over-chilling white wines before serving. Canapés with caprese salad and balsamic reduction and fresh botanic basil accompanied the Torrentes.

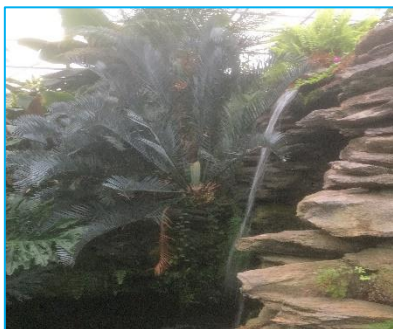
Bridging the gap between white and red was a **2021 Cape Coral Rosé** (Woodwinters £13.50) from Waterkloof in the Stellenbosch wine area of South Africa. Made from the Mourvèdre grape which produces some great rosé wines worldwide, this wine was pale salmon pink in the glass with aromas of peppered strawberries, tangy redcurrants and crushed wild herbs. These notes are continued onto the elegant, fine-textured palate, enlivened by crisp acidity and appealing notes of wet slate (the winemakers notes, not the writers ... honest!). The vines for this Mourvèdre grow on ocean-facing slopes with very low yields thereby concentrating the flavour. Wild-yeasts are fermented in old, large wooden vessels which they used to do once upon a time in the Mediterranean.



**The spectacular and enticing Cactus House**

With the spectacular Cactus House as a backdrop, we were indulged with our first red wine of the evening and this accompanied with canapés of smoked liver paté with port and cranberry jelly was a rather excellent Gamay wine from Beaujolais, a **2021 Les Mouilles** from Juliéнас and made by the acclaimed Domaine Pardon. Deep ruby to the eye with fresh yet powerful flavours of strawberries, cherries and a touch of white pepper on the palate, this wine did not disappoint. Grown from grapes on south facing schist and granite soils which ensure perfect ripening, this silky, juicy and easy drinking Gamay could be kept for up to six years. An ideal accompaniment to red meat, cheeses and that classic French dish, coq au vin! Available from Majestic Wines at £11.00.

The final red on the evening, prior to dining, was a **2021 Serbal Cabernet Franc** (de Burgh Wines, Kelso - £13.00) from Bodega Atamisque in Tupungato-Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina and grown at an altitude of 1300 metres. Interestingly, the Uco Valley is reputedly not named after a river but a pre-Columbian Indian chief who introduced irrigation to the area (history lesson over!) and the altitude of the Tupungato vineyards sees cool nights. producing delicate fruit flavours and acidity levels to make malolactic fermentation desirable. Bright red in the glass with delicious pure red berry fruit with characteristic fresh lead pencil, graphite and pepper notes on the nose, leading to a palate ripe with cassis fruit and touches of tobacco and chocolate on the finish. This unoaked example of



Cabernet Franc epitomises the quality emanating from this French owned and run winery. By this time, glass in hand, several confreres were noticeably “absent”, to be found taking in the floral delights of both the Tropical and Cactus Houses.



Tasting over, the culturally and vinously satisfied confreres and guests retired to the café area of the Floral Hall where, in fitting tribute to the previous weekend's inauguration, Coronation Chicken was served with accompanying salads and cheeses and paired with a **Coteaux de Varois Rosé** (M&S £10.00) from Provence - light, dry and fruity with red fruits and a floral style and this went well with the Coronation Chicken as did the **2021 Fleurie** from Beaujolais (Tesco £10-00) with typical Gamay characteristics - fresh berry and cherry fruits on the nose - fruity, lightly acidic with a bit of body and hints of spice on the palate.

All in all, a most pleasant evening, even for those who were perhaps not overly horticulturally minded and possibly opening up a new avenue for consideration for tasting venues in the future ..... who knows? Thanks are due to the Botanic Gardens management for their co-operation in making this event the success it undoubtedly was and not forgetting the Highland Rugby Club chef who prepared the culinary delights.

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