

# *New World Wines*

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## *Newsletter*

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My summer travels this year took me to France revisiting a few old friends and meeting potential new acquaintances (I am talking about wines here!). First stop was the Loire Valley and an unscheduled visit to Chateau du Hureau in Saumur Champigny, where I met winemaker and owner Philippe Vatan. I had purchased his 2003 Cuvee Lisagathe based on a tasting at the Angers wine fair in January and thought it destined to be a Loire classic. We tasted the whole range of his wines but perhaps most interesting was the comparison between two versions of his 2003 Fevettes, one filtered the other unfiltered. The wines were served blind (ie. without him identifying the cuvee). It turned out the unfiltered cuvee was poured first and my notes read, "considerable structure, lovely pure fruit and a long finish". Notes for the filtered version, "fruitier on the nose, more candied, slightly shorter with a more compressed finish". Discussing the wines afterwards Philippe felt that the unfiltered cuvee was going to last longer and age much more harmoniously. He said that if he had more courage he would bottle all his wines unfiltered (unless there was a potential problem), but the market, or part of it, demanded wine that would not have any potential post bottling issues. For this cuvee he bottled about half of the wine unfiltered.

I have ordered a considerable quantity of the 2003 Fevettes (unfiltered) and additional quantities of the 2003 Lisagathe. 2002 is also considered a good vintage in the Loire and 2004 also looks promising. While 2003 is certainly atypical it should make for some brilliant drinking over the next 3 - 15 years. I subsequently purchased a copy of the Guide Hachette 2005 and noted that both the 2003 Lisagathe and Fevettes had been rated the very best wines in their appellation.

The issue of filtration or 'natural' wine was to come up a number of times in my travels. Like many I am attracted to the concept of organic farming and more natural treatment in the wine making process. Most if not all of the wineries I represent in France practice organic viticulture, meaning no pesticides or artificial fertilizers in the vineyard, restrained spraying (copper sulphate only) and a minimal use of sulphur in the wine making process. Some have gone even further and adopted biodynamic principles. I find it very revealing to take a walk through the vineyard. The vines of those with respect for the soil invariably look healthier and seem to have naturally lower yields than those where short cuts are taken. Naturally prices are a bit higher but so, dramatically in some cases, is the quality.

My other visit in the Loire was to Domaine du Colombier in Chinon. The domaine had first come to my attention in 1989 when Fong and I were visiting the area and tried a wine from the domaine at Chinon's best restaurant, Au Plaisir Gourmand. Suitably impressed we visited and attempted to buy their remaining stock of 1985s. A magnum of 1986 was all that was available and I remember drinking it with pleasure in Bermuda some years later. This time I met with Christine, the daughter of Madame Loiseau. She and her husband now ran things and she took me through their current offerings. Unlike Chateau du Hureau and Yannick Amirault from Bourgueil these wines are for earlier drinking but the top cuvees will still last 5 - 10 years. We tasted the 2002s which were elegant and typical but once the 2003s were poured I realized that I would focus my attention on this vintage. I felt somewhat guilty about neglecting the 2002 reds from the Loire as it was a very good vintage and much more representative of the style of the region than 2003. However as the 2003s were available I have chosen what I believe will be extremely attractive wines in the years to come.

#### Tasting Notes:

- Chinon 2003 (regular cuvee) - very smooth with lovely soft tannins and considerable depth (drinking window now - 5 years).
- Vielle Vignes - a step up with powerful red and black fruits on the nose, notes of blackberries and a long finish, albeit with considerable sweet ripe tannins (2-10 years).
- Clos du Martinet - made from vines over 40 years old situated on a limestone plateau, not nearly as round and voluptuous as the Vielle Vignes but with mineral notes and good structure it is likely to evolve more slowly but perhaps be the best of the wines in the end (3-10 years).

I just noted that in a recent edition of the Wine Spectator the Vielle Vignes received 90 points. The wines will be good value when landed in Bermuda in October ranging from \$13 - \$18 a bottle.

A visit to St. Malo, massively and impressively reconstructed after being bombed in the Second World War, followed and we met up with the Pinchuk family and Sebastian Haubourg and his wife, Louise, and son, Max. You may remember Sebastian as the sommelier at Fourways and later at La Coquille. He has now opened a small restaurant in the city with a superb wine list (Le Chasse Maree, 4 rue du Grout Saint-Georges, 35400 Saint Malo, tel: 02 99 40 85 10, email: seblecoyotte@hotmail.com).

Swapping Fong and Jess for Mike Bolt at nearby Dinard airport we headed for the Jura, via Chartres. For those who have never been I cannot recommend the Cathedral at Chartres more highly. The stained glass windows were stunning and I was advised by Mike, who is something of an authority on such things, that they are among the greatest in the world.

The trip from Chartres to the Jura took us through Chablis. I was interested to taste at Domaine Jean-Marc Brocard so as to get a handle on the 2003 and 2004 vintages. We tasted the 2003s in the bottle with consistent notes like 'lovely ripe fruit but not much

depth or acidity'. We were fortunate to meet up with the Domaine's new winemaker Patrick Piuze to taste the 2004s from the tanks. The Vaucoupin and Montmains stood out among the premier crus and the Les Clos among the grand crus. The wines showed good depth and liveliness with a freshness that the 2003's did not have. I ordered all three of these cuvees and they are now available in Bermuda.

I have not found anyone, either before the trip or since, who had ever been to the Jura or even knew exactly where it was. My interest had first been piqued by a Pinot Noir imbibed at a bistro in Montreal earlier this year. It was from the Jura and was quite delightful. Research showed that the region was less than an hour northwest of Beaune and since it appeared to be quite hilly it seemed a sensible place to head in the middle of summer.

As it turned out it was a beautiful area, relatively uncommercialized. We stayed in Arbois, a wine town in the northern part. I had heard that the wines were unusual and somewhat of an acquired taste. It turned out that there are two camps, the traditionalist and the modernist. We tasted several excellent examples of the latter from Francois Ganevat.

The traditionalists allow some of their wines to be exposed to air and therefore some oxidization occurs. The dominant white grape varieties are Chardonnay and Savignin with the reds split between Trousseau, Poulsard and Pinot Noir. The Trousseau we tasted seemed rather lacking in body but I was advised that they developed nicely as they aged.

At the end I was not convinced that the wines would attract enough interest to warrant importing them. However if the price is right I may bring in several of Francois Ganevat's wines.

While in Arbois we stayed at Jean-Paul Jeunet (9 rue de l'Hotel de Ville, 39600 Arbois, telephone: 03 84 66 05 67, email: jeunet@receptionfrance.com). The main attraction was its 2-star Michelin restaurant and we enjoyed two superb meals (each 6 courses) at 35 Euros and 65 Euros respectively. Accommodation was perfectly acceptable at 85 Euros a room/night. The area is lovely and I highly recommend it.

Thus ended the first part of the trip. In the second Mike and I headed for Burgundy 'working' our way down from Gevrey Chambertin in the north to the Beaujolais region in the south. Along the way I found a number of new producers to import but details will have to wait for the next newsletter.

Currently in the planning stage are several dinners to be held over the winter, details of which will be published soon. In the meantime I am having an open house at the warehouse on Harvey Road on Saturday 10th December from 10am – 1pm. All the new wines will be in stock with a number available for tasting. There will also be some discontinued wines on sale. So come stock up for Christmas.

**John M. Sharpe**

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