

Spurrier's World

Decanter's globetrotting consultant editor gives us a round-up of recent tastings, his views on current issues in the wine world and top bottles to drink or keep

Impressed in Budapest

My first visit to Hungary was in 1996, courtesy of Hugh Johnson and Ben Howkins, to visit the Royal Tokaji Wine Company (RWTC) in the village of Mad. Mad lies in the centre of this most historic wine region, whose vineyard classification dates from 1700 and whose wine graced imperial and royal tables across Europe. Communists were still in power, but private investment had recently been permitted to revive Tokaji's fortunes, which had slumped badly under the cooperative system, early investors being the RTWC and AXA-Millésimes, at its Disznókő winery. Some 15 years later, these two estates command the highest respect, as do locals Itsván Szepsy and Izabella Zwack (Dobogó). Meanwhile the Austrian Esterházy's have regained their estate, joined by Pablo Alvarez from Vega Sicilia and Michel Reybier from Cos d'Estournel and many others. The Furmint-based Tokajis have led the way for Hungary's wine revolution, which now stretches across the country.

This was plain to see from the hundreds of exhibitors at the VinCE wine fair in Budapest in late March. I travelled there alongside Siobhan Turner, CEO of the Institute of Masters of Wine, and Peter McCombie MW, who with fellow MWs Caro Maurer (Germany), Josef Schuller (Austria) and Frank Smulders (Holland) had their own MW Workshop Room. My contribution was to assist a Piper Heidsieck masterclass by chef de cave Régis Camus, who also blends the very different Charles Heidsieck, both of which saw their reputations regained from the mid-1980s under the brilliant Daniel Thibaud; then to give a blind tasting of 12 Cabernet blends from around the world.

'To see Hungarian Cabernet blends placed within such company indicates how far it has come'



There were six wines in the Piper tasting: the vibrant, Pinot-dominated Brut NV, blended from 100 different crus; the excellent 60% Pinot Noir/40% Chardonnay 2004, a year giving both high quantity and quality; then four vintages of the little known Piper Rare, usually a 70% Chardonnay/30% Pinot Noir blend from only grand cru vineyards, produced only in the best years, the first vintage being 1976: the delicate but rich 2002, a great year that combines precision and complexity, took my top vote, closely followed by the 1998 in magnums, then a vivacious 1988 and a creamy 1979.

For my tasting, assisted by Agnes Nemeth, editor of *VinCE* wine magazine, the wines were served blind in this order: Malatinszky, Kovesfold, Villány, Hungary 2009; Myskhako, Grand Reserve, Kuban, Russia 2008; Nicolas Catena, Mendoza, Argentina 2008; Château de Pez, St-Estèphe, France 2007, Sauska, Cuvee 7, Villány, Hungary 2008; Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, Artemis, California, USA 2007; Tenuta Belguardo, Mazzei, Tuscany, Italy, 2007; Te Mata, Coleraine, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand 2007; Torres, Mas La Plana, Penedes, Spain 2007; Cape Mentelle, Margaret River, Western Australia 2006; Montes Alpha, Apalta Valley, Chile 2007; Rustenberg, Peter Barlow, Stellenbosch South Africa 2007.

More than 200 people tasted the wines blind and voted for their top six. The results were (my own ranking in brackets): Stag's Leap (2), Torres (1), Tenuta Belguardo (6), Sauska (10), Malatinszky (3) and Nicolas Catena (5). To see Hungarian Cabernet blends placed within such company indicates how far Hungary has moved towards quality - the 2007 vintage of that Sauska wine won a Regional Trophy at last year's DWWA, while the Villány region in the south is famous for its Cabernet Franc, with wineries Attila Gere, Heumann, Gábor Kiss and Vylyan challenging Malatinszky and Sauska for top honours. I'll be back next year to discover more.

Steven recommends... (for full details of UK stockists, see p90)



TWR Winery, Toru, Marlborough, New Zealand 2010

£18.50 **Harvey Nichols, Swig**
Toru means 'three' in Maori and this 70% Gewurztraminer, 21% Riesling, 9% Pinot Gris is from biodynamically farmed vines, picked as a field blend and co-fermented: cashew and rose nose, beautiful fruit palate, lifted off-dry finish. **Drink 2012-2014 Alc: 13.5%**



Marjan Simcic, Pinot Noir Reserve, Goriska Brda, Slovenia 2008

£26.50 **Bancroft**
Fine, earthy fruit with the natural sweetness of Pinot Noir, but this is more Slovenian than varietal, boasting good acidity and fine depth from 13- to 36-year-old vines on marl, slate and sandstone soil. A lovely wine. **Drink 2012-2016 Alc 13.5%**



Navazos, La Bota No 32 Manzanilla, Sanlucar De Barrameda, Spain NV

£23-£28 **widely available via UK importer Rhône2Rioja**
Navazos founders Jesús Barquin and Eduardo Ojedo (Real Tesoro, Valdespino, La Guita) selected a single barrel for this bottling: fresh but almost silky for Manzanilla but with tangy depth; very fine. **Drink 2012 Alc 15.6%**