

Brentwood Wine Society

The Wine Press

Spring edition

April 2025

EDITOR'S NOTE

I was pleased and surprised to be asked to join the Society's committee. I struggled to think what I could offer to the Society given my limited knowledge of wine and the wine scene.

So, I offered to produce a newsletter three or four times a year. Not to in any way replicate the work of the website but rather to complement it.

Of course there are dozens of wine newsletters on the web, though they are mainly designed as marketing tools for vineyards, wine sellers etc.

I envisage a space where members of the Society can publish anything they wish about wine, for example, your favourite wine, a wine you have recently come across, a visit you have made to a wine region or vineyard, wine and food partnerships you enjoy - indeed whatever you think may be of interest to other members.

If you send your contributions to knowlespj@btinternet.com I will undertake the task of producing The Wine Press.

Philip Knowles



NEWS IN BRIEF

Trump proposes a 200% tariff on imported alcohol products

Even though Trump has been known to retreat from dubious claims about tariffs, the wine and spirits industry is taking this recent threat very seriously. Most American importers are adhering to the US Wine Trade Alliance's (USWTA) guidance issued in mid-March warning its members to cease wine shipments from Europe.

Europe's wineries can ill afford to be dragged into a trade war with the United States. According to the International Trade Center, the US comprises almost 20% of the EU's total wine exports, accounting for a total of \$14.1bn of exported beverage, spirit and vinegar products from the EU in 2024.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

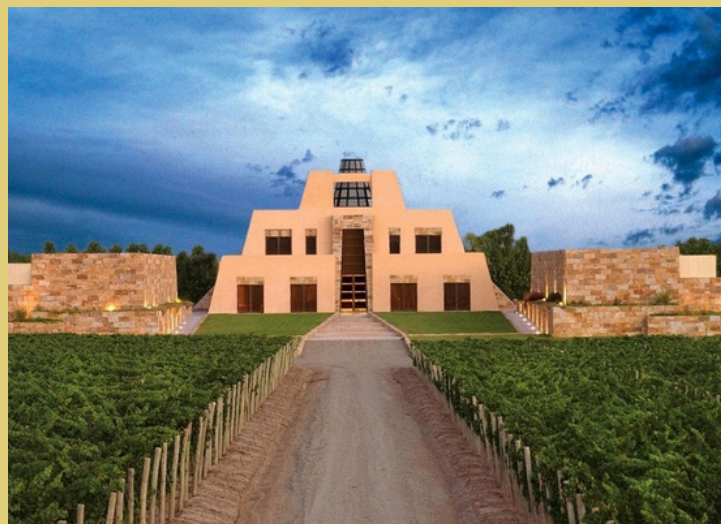
The European Union, one of the most hostile and abusive taxing and tariffing authorities in the World, which was formed for the sole purpose of taking advantage of the United States, has just put a nasty 50% Tariff on Whisky. If this Tariff is not removed immediately, the U.S. will shortly place a 200% Tariff on all WINES, CHAMPAGNES, & ALCOHOLIC PRODUCTS COMING OUT OF FRANCE AND OTHER E.U. REPRESENTED COUNTRIES. This will be great for the Wine and Champagne businesses in the U.S.

Essex bucks the trend

Around the world vineyard values are falling, based on the 12 month average change 2024-2025. Marlborough down 33%, Los Carneros, California down 15%, Cotes du Rhone down 10%, Barossa Valley down 10%.

In contrast the average vineyard value in Essex was up 22%, outperforming other wine producing areas of the UK.

A note of contrast, Essex wineries produce around 2 million bottles annually, Marlborough around 350 million bottles.



Bodega Catena Zapata

Argentinian wine producer Catena has been voted "The World's Most Admired Wine Brand" 2025 in the 15th edition of the ranking

It's the first time since 2020 that the brand has topped the list having been in the runner-up spot in the rankings last year.

Italy's Gaja, which moved up eight places on its previous ranking, took the runner's up spot alongside the accolade of Most Admired Wine Brand in Europe, while veteran of the list La Rioja Alta completes the podium.

The World's Most Admired Wine Brand is voted for by a hand-picked academy of sommeliers, buyers, wholesalers, Masters of Wine and writers.



Essex vineyard

WINE TIMES

MOMENTS IN HISTORY

The Languedoc Riots

Despite being ravaged by phylloxera and later downy mildew, the opening of the port of Sete, the completion of the Canal du Midi and the arrival of the railways meant that by the late nineteenth century the Languedoc was producing or importing vast quantities of cheap wine.

However, all was not well. The government was encouraging the import of very cheap Algerian wine, the fake wine industry was flourishing using imported dried grapes mixed with water or sometimes concoctions without grapes at all. Chaptalization, the addition of sugar to fermenting wine to increase the alcohol content in wines grown in cooler climates than the Languedoc was legal (though banned in many countries this practice is still allowed in France under certain tight restrictions). Taxation on wine growers was high.

The wine harvests of 1902 and 1903 were very poor. Production in France fell to 3,500 million litres. Prices were high at 16 francs (1902) rising to 24 francs (1903/4) per hundred litres. The government decided to allow chaptalization of cheap imported wines. 1904 and 1905 however produced abundant harvests, production in France soared to 6,600 million litres and prices fell to six francs per hundred litres. Languedoc wine sales deteriorated while supply increased.

The combination of imports, chaptalization, fake wins, over production and taxes ruined many wine growers, their workers and the whole wine supply chain.

The region was politically radical and the first tax strike took place in February 1907. For the next six months the region was in turmoil. Weekly demonstrations were held growing rapidly in number. 600 demonstrators in Beziers in March, 25,000 in Lezignan in April, 100,00 in Narbonne in May, 250,000 in Carcassonne on the 26th May. 6- 800,000 in Montpellier on June 7th.

The government refused to agree to any of the demands of the wine growers. The protests were peaceful but the Government led by Georges Clemenceau decided to send in the army.



On the 19th June some of the leaders of the movement were arrested, one in Narbonne. The citizens of Narbonne tried to restrict the activities of the army and in the confusion the cavalry fired on the crowd killing two people including a 14 year old boy. On the next day the cavalry opened fire again killing five people.

The 17th Line Infantry Regiment consisting mainly of reservists and conscripts were transferred to the town of Agde. When they heard of the gunfire they mutinied. The region was on the verge of insurrection and the government feared the mutiny would spread to other regions.

Reluctantly the government gave way.

On June 29th June 1907 legislation was introduced prohibiting the manufacture or sale of manufactured wines. Watering of wines and the adding of sugar was curtailed by a heavy tax on any sugar used and tight regulation of the maximum amount of sugar allowed.

In August the government agreed to exempt wine growers from taxes on their crops of 1904, 1905 and 1906. In September a law was passed stating “No drink may be owned or transported for sale or sold under the name of wine unless it comes exclusively from the alcoholic fermentation of fresh grapes or grape juice”.

The Narbonne insurrection is celebrated annually to this day. Fast forward to November 2023 and Frederic Rouanet head of the wine makers union announces a demonstration to be held in Narbonne. Their complaints, high taxes, lack of help from the government with higher production costs, cheap imports from Spain, low prices for their wines.

Spanish tankers carrying wine were intercepted and the wine destroyed.

The government responded by offering a €20 million emergency support fund for winemakers, a €200 million fund to turn surplus wine into industrial alcohol and a €38 million fund to grub up vineyards in Bordeaux to prevent future over supply.

The main driver of many of the problems seems to be a 70% drop in wine consumption in France in the last 60 years!!

The Art of Uncorking (OR GEEKS CORNER)

In the early 1790's a vicar, the Reverend Samuel Henshall, hit upon an idea to improve the corkscrews in use (though some claim he stole the idea from an Irishman Thomas Read) whatever is true the idea was genius.

Corkscrews in use at that time consisted of the handle, the shaft and the helix, what we would now call a straight pull. Henshall's idea was to fix a disc between the shaft and the helix. The underside of the disc was serrated so when it came into contact with the cork it compressed it and loosened it from any adhesion to the bottle, additionally it stopped the corkscrew from penetrating the bottom of the cork thus reducing the risks of bits of cork entering the wine.

Henshall was not a successful man, he was frequently in debt and was taken to court on at least three occasions for not paying bills. His career floundered, failing on several occasions to secure ecclesiastical promotion or academic posts he sought. However, he was astute enough to secure the help of Matthew Boulton, the Birmingham engineer, soon to be super famous for his collaboration with James Watt in the invention and production of the Boulton Watt steam engine.



Matthew Boulton

Henshall and Boulton worked on the design of the corkscrew for some 18 months and on the 24th August 1795, he was granted a patent for his corkscrew. The first patent for a corkscrew in the world.

Trouble however was ever present. He couldn't afford to pay for his part of the patent costs and he soon fell out with Boulton over a number of money issues. His corkscrew was, however, produced by Boulton's company during the time of the patent and by many other manufacturers once the patent ran out.

Henshall died in 1807 at the age of 42 and the story goes that many of his corkscrews were buried with him.



So, to value.

If you are lucky enough to find an original 'in patent' corkscrew, which will have Henshall, stamped on the top of the disc, it will be worth many thousands of pounds.

'Henshall type' corkscrews i.e. produced after the patent ended at the turn of the nineteenth century are much easier to find and vary greatly in price. Those with a manufacturers mark can make upwards of £150 dependent on condition. Those without any marking are normally priced from £60 upwards.

The one in the photograph, from my collection, dates from the early / mid nineteenth century, it is unmarked but in superb condition with a decorative shank, complete helix and the original badger hair brush, so around £80 to £100 pounds.

World OF WINE

Focus on Chinese wine

When I worked in China for the first time, over thirty years ago, wine was hard to find in restaurants even in Beijing. Great Wall of China red wine was just about the only wine available – and even I could tell it was not very good.

How things have changed.

Archaeologists have established that wine has been produced from grapes for hundreds of years in China though for the most parts 'wine' was made from cereal, millet and rice and fruits, lychees and plum predominated.



Illustration of wine production dating from the Ming period

China's first modern winery was established in Changyu in Shandong Province in 1892, and production was dominated by a few large companies. Changyu Pioneer Wine, Great Wall of China Wine Co. and Dynasty Wine Ltd. However, because of the low average income little wine was consumed by the domestic market. In 1980 Remy Martin set up a joint venture company in Tianjin with Dynasty Wine Ltd, a movement followed by many French Wineries since.

From 2000, as the Chinese economy boomed, so did home consumption and by 2005 90% of Chinese wine produced was consumed locally, by 2023 680 million litres of locally produced wine was being consumed annually making China the fifth highest wine consuming nation in the world

and in a recent report by Xin Ou in 2025 it was claimed China is now the largest grape producer in the world with the third largest area under vineyards – though it has to be said this claim is disputed.

The main grapes grown in China are Cabernet Sauvignon, Marselan, Carmenere and Merlot.

While Cabernet still predominates, so much Marselan has been planted in the last five years that it is now the second most common variety.

Recently, smaller independent wineries have been experimenting with many other grape varieties – still mainly those popular in France. There is a great affinity between Chinese and French wine and wineries. Many French wine enterprises have set up in China and France is by far the largest exporter of wine to China.

There are 12 main wine producing regions in China but five predominate in size and quality.

The largest region with over 40% of total Chinese production is in Shandong Province where are found the Yantai, Penglai and Qingdao wine regions. They are on the same latitude as Bordeaux and have mimicked that region in wine varieties and the building of chateaux!



Ningxia vineyard

Ningxia is reputed to be the home of the best wines in China. It is the second largest region by production and again initially mimicked Bordeaux. In 2011 the Ningxia winery of Helan Qingxue won the Decanter World Wine Award for the best red Bordeaux varietal over £10.

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Wine tasting in Spain

The result was met with scepticism some experts doubting the veracity of the source of the grape. So, a rematch, under the control of French and Chinese experts, was held later that year. Five wines from Bordeaux competed with five wines from Ningxia. In a blind taste four out of the top five were from Ningxia.

Hualai and Changli in Hebei Province surrounding Beijing is the third largest region and home to the Great Wall of China winery. Because it is so cold in Changli the vines have to be buried in the winter in contrast to the heat experienced by some vineyards in Ningxia which borders the Gobi Desert.

The fourth region is Xinjian in North West China – I could find little about the wine of this region but its climate means high sugar content and low acidity, one reviewer described its wine as ‘flat’.



Yunnan vineyard

Finally there is Yunnan, a Himalayan terroir at an average altitude of 2,600 metres. Moët Hennessy have recently invested in a 500 acre vineyard planted with cabernet varieties.

Growth of the Chinese wine industry in this century has been phenomenal. Still dominated by red wine – 90% of the vineyards produce red wine while only 20% produce white wine – clearly some produce both.

In 2023 China exported 3.27 million litres of wine worth an estimated \$33 million – however this is dwarfed by home consumption which peaked in 2023 at 680 million litres.

For more info see www.winesofchina/pages/chinese-wine-guide

Whilst in Spain last month we attended a Spanish wine tasting organised by the Club Internacionale de Nerja. The club is a volunteer run association originally set up in the late 1930s. We now have over 500 members from many different countries. We have our own premises in central Nerja and this was our first wine tasting we have run.

Our host was Cristian Aron a certified WSET level 3 professional. Originally from Bucharest he has studied and taught around the wine producing world before settling in Spain.



Christian Aron

To accompany the wines each table of four people shared a great tapas board of meats, cheese, breads, humus, olives etc.



We started with a welcome cava – Conde de Caralt- from Catalonia in North East Spain – the area where the first Spanish sparkling wine was produced by the Raventos family in 1872. The grape combination Macabeo 30%, Parellada 20%, Xarel-lo 50%, is typical

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of cava and the same grapes as used in the original sparkling wines 150 years ago. With 12% alcohol it was described as crisp with characteristics of citrus and apple. A moderately priced cava for Spain (around €10 locally). It was a good start.

Next came a sherry, a Manzanilla – La Gitana. Produced by the Bodegas Hidalgo – one of the very few family owned Bodegas still extant, it is reputed to be among the best Manzanilla produced in Sanlucar de Barrameda. 15% alcohol, acidic and dry it has apparently been rated in the top ten in the world, five years in a row, based on a price to quality ratio. It retails for around €10 in Spain.



Bodegas Hidalgo

Cristian expressed consternation that in the UK sherry is almost exclusively an apero whereas he claimed that if the sherry is selected correctly it is the perfect accompaniment to any food. He suggested we try this one with fish.

The first white wine of the evening was a white Rioja. Produced by the Mitarte Winery it is produced from hand picked viura, malvasia and garnacha blanco grapes. This particular rioja is only available from the winery, though they do export other white Riojas to the UK.



Mitarte Winery

It has 13% alcohol content. Because of the way Cristian purchases his wine from the Mitarte Winery no price could be offered, but he estimated it at around €10 to €15. Described as simple and clean with 'a cool acidity'.

Before we moved onto our next wine Cristian gave his opinion "that most Chardonnay produced in Spain is terrible but this one is great". So we tasted a 2021 Dominio D Fontana Chardonnay (90%) and Viura (10%) blend produced at the Fontana Bodegas in the tiny village of Ucles, which is situated 700 metres high in central Spain.

Described as "a Chardonnay displaying primary fruit flavours without any of the vanilla and buttery notes found in examples from warmer climes – aromas of orchard fruits". At 13% alcohol this organically produced vegan friendly wine was received well by everyone.



Back to the Mitarte winery for our next wine a 2024 red Rioja. A blend of tempranillo, garnacha and viura. At 14% alcohol this wine was intense on the nose with the usual ripe fruit notes, it came over as very fresh and balanced. Cristian explained that this was part of the new trend for Rioja – not a Crianza or Reserva but produced for immediate consumption. It's not made to age but is typical of a family wine made for consumption in the locality. "It will not age" we were warned "just go bad". Well that will not be the fate of the four bottles at the tasting.

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A 2022 Tal Cual came next. A favourite of mine since the label featured a corkscrew and little else. An organic wine made from 100% Prieto Picudo, one of the major grapes in the Tierra de Leon in Northern Spain, where it is produced by the Bodegas El Sueno de las Alforgas. Plenty of red fruit and floral notes with a mineral touch. The producer is one of just six Masters of Spanish wine. Coming in at 14% alcohol it retails in Spain for only €7!!



And so our final wine of the evening – unexpected – a red produced from the garnache grape. Except it wasn't unexpected since it is available in one of the local wine merchants in Nerja and a favourite of many of the Club members. Very easy on the palate with sour cherry and cedar wood aroma. 14.5% alcohol produced by the Vino de Pago de Ayles in Aragon North east Spain. In the Spanish wine quality pyramid Vino de Pago occupies the highest level. There are only 20 Vino de Pago in Spain and de Ayles is the only one in Aragon. Given that fact the local retail price of €6.95 is amazing.

So what did we learn?

Spain has the largest surface area under vines in the world with 961,000 hectares and is the third largest producer at 13.6% (2023 figure) of the world's production of wine.

It's not all Cava and Rioja. There are many inexpensive excellent Spanish wines According to Cristian Spanish wines are normally not sold for keeping at home but rather retained on the vineyards and released to the market when ready to drink, so many will not store well.

Was the evening a success? Certainly. Were we in a fit state to fly home the next day? Just about.

A BARREL OF LAUGHS

I have just heard on the grapevine that doctors have cultivated a new grape variety that acts as an anti-diuretic to help with incontinence. It's called pinot more.

I was drinking wine with my wife, when she said "I love you so much, I don't know how I could ever live without you".

I said "is that you or the wine talking?"

She said "it's me talking to the wine!"

The editor accepts no responsibility for grammatical,, speling, factual errors or the quality of any wine mentioned