

Snipped in the bud

Harpers picks the palates of trade and press tasters at the 1997 London Wine Trade Fair



The London Wine Trade Fair

THE VENUE: Olympia Grand Hall

THE DATE: 20-22 May

THE CROWD: Everybody who is anybody and a few who, sadly, are nobody

THE CHAT: Gosh, I haven't seen you for ages (with a sly look at name badge)

ON OFFER: A mere 10,000 wines

TALKING POINT WINES: See Harpers Wine of the Show, p3.

The comments:

Adam Seigel, marketing manager, Roberson's

"The Wine Fair was well-organised and not over-crowded as in previous years. I was particularly impressed with the New World section especially South Africa, North America and Chile's offerings. My favourite wines from the New World were from Morris & Verdin's American section. Among these I was very impressed by the Qupé Syrah, Bien Nacido 1995 and the Jade Mountain Côte de Soleil 1995. The Old World also had a couple of gems, most notably from the Anthony Byrne Fine Wines stand. The Zind-Humbrecht Tokaji Pinot Gris 1993 and Pinot d'Alsace 1995 were my favourites."

Andrew Montague, sales director, Geoffrey Roberts Agencies

"The Fair was very good for us this year and gave us a great opportunity to launch our new team to the trade. I felt the wine selection was more balanced than in previous years, for example no overwhelming presence of France or Spain. The quality of wine was as good as ever but I felt the gallery level is neglected. Therefore next year with the Fair expanding into two halls, it will be

better and I will be able to have more room on the stand. I was particularly impressed by a couple of wines on offer from Spain and Argentina, the Enate in particular, caught my attention."

Chris Hardy, buyer, Majestic

"I managed to scour the Fair with a few 'gaps' on my list in mind, but found the whole experience a bit of a nightmare – you are constantly waylaid by people you don't have time to meet, and missing out on people you desperately want to see. So 'Half Time at Bordeaux' was a welcome pit-stop. Château de Sours Rosé came out as particularly fresh and appealing. But though general quality levels were good, I didn't feel that the wines for tasting did true justice to what Bordeaux can really offer today.

"I was very impressed with the wines on show at the Portuguese and South African stands; the Portuguese in particular showed real innovation, making modern, appealing wines, packed with ripe fruit. In some ways they lean towards New World styles but retain essential Portuguese characteristics. My colleague Jeremy Palmer found the Argentinians among the most exciting finds of the show."

Simon Woods, co-editor, Which? Wine Magazine

"I think what was noticeable was the way people were doing business, rather than how much business was being done – it all seemed a lot more 'focused' this year. Personally, I had my own hit list and stuck pretty much to it: England, Germany and Argentina.

"I was impressed with the English

Wine Producers, both in terms of how they presented themselves, and with the product that they chose to show. They resisted the temptation to taste the very latest wines and releases, and instead settled on the vintages that were simply showing the best. It was all very professional.

"However, I was surprised by the showing from Germany: for such a big seller in the UK, there seemed to be a relatively small representation. I took another look at the 're-launch' wines and was more

■ favourably impressed this time around. I don't think this is what great German wine is about, but if this is what they have to do to attract new customers, then good for them.

"The organisation wasn't that great for Argentina – I think they would have benefited from some more knowledgeable

staff on the stands. The producers were showing their top wines and there appeared to be quite a gap between what they perceived to be their best efforts, and what the UK market actually wants. That's not to say that they can't or don't produce some great wines – I thought the Catena range particularly good – simply that their idea of a top wine wouldn't necessarily match a UK buyer's choice. Some redirection is needed if they want to address the UK seriously as an export market, but you can definitely see the potential."

Steven Spurrier, wine consultant

"The wines that most impressed me, not the greatest, but some of the most enjoyable wines to drink as well as being well-priced and well packaged, were those made by Jose Neive in Estramadura, Portugal. I particularly liked his Espiga and

Portada range, both in red and white. These are really delicious wines with flavour and personality."

Jason Danciger, director of purchasing, Pelican Group

"With the English wines the best I tasted were from Chapel Down probably due to the midas touch of winemaker/consultant Stephen Skelton. The white 'sur lie' was interesting and the Tenterden Estate Dry was quite pleasant with its crisp clean fruit. What was outstanding were the reds with the Epoch I 1995 easy-drinking 'luncheon claret' like style and the superb Epoch Reserve Red 1995, it just needs a little more time in bottle but would surprise the hell out of anyone in a blind tasting.

"AB Wines had the much-sought after-award winning Domaine Zind-Humrecht wines from Alsace. Very interesting Pinot Gris vendage tardive Clos Jesba, rich and spicy Gewürztraminer (Turkheim) and Rieslings to die for.

"Vinum had some unbelievably good single estate 1995 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo from Baronne Cornacchia with its rich plummy fruit and sweet prune finish. The cool crisp Pinot Bianco '96 with its lemongrass aromas was a good commercial choice.

"Clos du Val wines from California are always magnificent and I always enjoy Chereau Carre's oak-aged Muscadets. Jaffelin's cru Burgundies were up to their usual high standard with winemaker Bernard Repolt on unusually good behaviour awaiting at any second the birth of his first 'bebe'.

"The best label of the entire show had to be from Morris & Verdin with two rather good wines from the USA. The "Ca 'del solo" Malvasia Bianco picturing an art deco designed fun schoolgirl on a bicycle and the "Big House red" depicting an escape from prison scene. These Monterey wines tasted as good as the labels." ■

