

## JUNE PRESIDENT'S REVIEW

### SOMETHING DIFFERENT

THE VENUE: Barrio's Restaurant  
77 Lower Heidelberg Road'  
Ivanhoe

HOSTS: Peter McMeiken & Steve Pierrehumbert

THEME: Meat and "three veg" (Divulged at the conclusion of the meal)

#### **Hors d'oeuvres:** -

Mediterranean vegetable and goats cheese tarts.  
Beef tartare on croute.

Wine; Kiwi Fruit Sparkling – Organically grown at Toolangi, Victoria.

The two appetisers were very tasty with all ingredients complimenting each other. The wine came out of left field. It was certainly different, and not in the Chardonnay/Pinot mould. It was suggested that it might have been a Loire Valley Chenin Blanc bubbly. Surprise, surprise – a Kiwi Fruit wine – and a good one at that. I believe Steve purchased the last three bottles.

#### **Entrée:** -

Walnut and Frangelico crumbed lambs brains with flat pancetta, burnt butter and sage sauce.

Wine 1 – Huia Pinot Gris, Marlborough, N.Z 2007

Wine 2 – Pewsey Vale Riesling, 2005

Brave men are Steve and Peter to serve up lamb's brains to such a gathering. However, apart from a couple of abstainers, the dish was well received. The crumbed coating was particularly good and the two wines were well suited.

#### **Main**

Herb crusted lamb rump with parsnip puree, ratatouille and white wine jus

Wine 1 - Taylors St. Andrews Clare Valley Shiraz, 2003

Wine 2 - Yalumba "The Signature" Cab./Sav. Barossa Shiraz, 1999

Wine 3 – Yalumba Barossa Shiraz, 2000

We went from one end of the lamb to the other and a delicious dish it was too. Baking in a hot oven for 12 minutes gave this piece of meat the fine texture and colour that is characteristic of lamb. All three wines complimented the main course and they all had aged well under cork, although there was some bottle variation. (See appendix for my comments on wine closures, a subject raised by Kit with reference to an Epicure article by Jeni Port) The unknown theme for the night created a bit of confusion for some of us but it did add to the flavour of the night.

## **Dessert**

A 3 Vegetable tasting plate.

Vanilla bean panna cotta with poached rhubarb.

Warm chocolate brownie with beetroot ice cream and chocolate sauce.

Carrot cake with orange and mint salad, honey labne.

Wine – Kiwi Fruit Liqueur – Organically grown at Toolangi, Victoria.

This dish had something for everyone – a great way to finish the meal. The wine had us guessing and you would think that we would learn from the bubbly experience and put two and two together and pick the Kiwi Fruit connection. Alas it was not to be. The wine was great, albeit not in the traditional sticky mode.

A very interesting night thanks to Steve and Peter – well done. The restaurant was great and the service good. The guys were adventurous with the brains and Kiwi Fruit, but most of us found it interesting and entertaining.

## **THE CLOSURE DEBATE.**

Kit raised the issue of cork versus screw cap (Stelvin) when he found some bottle variation in one of the reds. He referred to Jeni Port's article in a recent Epicure where she detailed the results of a tasting of Grand Merlot, which had both cork and screw cap closure of the same 1996 vintage.

Jeni Port found the wines under the two seals to be markedly different. This is how she described each wine: -

*“Wine No. 1 was orange-red-cum-mahogany, clearly showing some age. The nose was fungal and mushroomy – not unpleasant but not clean or fresh – with a dominating earthiness and some musky spice.*

*The palate was strong, once again, on meaty, leathery, earthy notes with stewed plums and a pleasant dusty finish. This wine, it was later revealed, was under cork and frankly, it showed.*

*Wine No. 2 was similar in colour but markedly cleaner on the nose with no fungal or mushie characters. Instead, there was a freshness and vitality to it, with musky spice and lifted aromas. The palate, too, was cleaner and livelier, with the plumminess more evident and the finish more defined.*

*This wine was under screw cap and the freshness we now associate with wines sealed under the closure was very much apparent, even 13 years after vintage.*

*A taste of the second bottle of each wine (poured on a neighbouring table) revealed an even greater discrepancy. The wine sealed under cork was corked, mildly but irretrievably. The second bottle under the screw cap looked to be an identical twin to its screw-capped sister.”*

There is more than one issue here. It is more than just cork versus Stelvin. The Jeni Port argument raises the matter of how and why we age our wines.

Most wines are made to drink shortly after purchase, but those winemakers who make wine to put down, do so with the belief that time will mellow and mature a wine. A red wine has to have a good balance of acid, tannin and fruit flavours in order to stand the test of time. It also needs more sulphur to prevent oxidation. We cellar our wines with the belief that a wine will improve with age and that it may gain more complexity with time in the bottle.

If this is the case then there is a compelling argument for corks over Stelvin. Wine No. 1 in the above tasting supports my case for cork. If I could develop in my wine

most of the characteristics that Jeni Port describes in that wine I would be over the moon. “...*leathery, earthy notes with stewed plums and a pleasant dusty finish.*”

If one was to be critical of this wine it could be said that it may have been a better wine a few years ago. It may be a little over the hill.

If you had a wine that was imminently drinkable when bottled with a Stelvin closure you could enjoy that wine for many years since it would retain its freshness. That is the main reason for something other than cork. The other point is that using a Stelvin you eliminate the risk of cork taint.

Jeni Port refers to some winemakers that are using a ‘Diam’ cork. This is a cork, which has been treated with carbon dioxide that removes any TCA, the compound which gives the wine corked taint.

I have used these ‘Diam’ corks in all my wines since 2004 and have not had one corked wine.

Anyway, where is the romance in unscrewing a metal cap – it’s like taking the cap off a stubby of VB.

Rest my case.