

MICHAEL BROADBENT



One too old at 10 years, another perfect at 200

Hard on the heels of Ogga (January issue), comes another curiously named wine, Sasso Arso, a 2006 Montepulciano d'Abruzzo from Villa Bizzarri. I'm too lazy to find an Italian dictionary and wonder if its bizarre name is subliminally aimed at the Japanese market. It sounds like 'ah-sooo', a rather ruminative, nebulous phrase that often punctuates Japanese conversations. Or perhaps it is a subtle tribute to the present – at the time of writing – Japanese Prime Minister, Mr Taro Aso.

But enough of this speculation. What about the wine? Medium-deep cherry red, touch of youthful spritz and long legs; precocious fruit, with a whiff of oak and what, in Burgundy, is occasionally described as *merde* (surely not connected to Arso?) If claret, I would describe the smell as 'farmyard', its character 'rustic'. A better flavour than nose, fruity, refreshing, reasonable weight (alcohol 13%) and dry finish. Perfect with a pheasant and mayonnaise sandwich.

Apropos vinous bedfellows, another excellent combination. With my favourite mellow, nutty, 20-year-old tawny Port – Graham's – fresh walnuts, from a pretty little sack sent to me by the Trefethens, grown on their wine estate in the Napa.

Now for a couple of disasters. The first, probably my fault, kept too long in our London flat's Eurocave, Gérard Thomas' Premier Cru Blagny, Meursault 1999. Its colour gave the game away: yellow-gold, too deep; maderised nose; dried out. My (last) back-up bottle had a

somewhat healthier, paler, yellow colour; a whiff of bottle age, better flavour but a touch of bitterness on the finish. A few days later, another premier cru: a domaine-bottled white Burgundy from Michel Morey – Les Caillerets 2000. Though showing some bottle age, what totally ruined the wine for me was its excessive oakiness on nose, palate and aftertaste. I should have spotted the oak when noted at an early trade tasting but, always susceptible to youth, I was much taken by it and bought a case. I seem to recall tales of white Burgundy around this period being below standard, despite its price. Buyers beware.

'I had selected it as a sure-fire winner. No grape specified. A Malmsey? Who cares? It was a glorious wine'

Following the above grumpiness, a superb range of old Madeiras, tasted at a pre-sale masterclass at Christie's. A huge collection from the private cellar of an 'impressive mansion' of one of the oldest British Madeira families in Funchal, the Leacocks, who arrived on the island in 1741, founding their business around 1760. It was an opportune time, for, despite the

competition of dozens of British shippers, the 17th-century sales of Madeira were prodigious, not only to England. It was the only wine to survive the hot, humid bowels of the sailing ships, becoming the staple drink in the American colonies, the West Indies and for British regiments and traders in India and the Far East.

No room to mention all the wines selected for tasting. Three superb five-star Sercials, the youngest a 1927 SJ (initials not Jesuit but of the Leacock's vineyard St-John or São João) bottled in 1937: glowing amber colour, characteristic high-toned tangy fragrance; sweet for a Sercial, great length. The 1890 slightly deeper amber with pronounced apple-green rim; ethereal bouquet and flavour – like crystallised violets. The 1870 similar in colour and with a whoosh of singed, tangy, scent; medium-sweet, superb flavour, great length.

Then, a rare, strange, unfamiliar, Lomelino 1836 Bastardo, sweet, soft texture, lovely taste, followed by two examples of another rare, shy, difficult grape, Terrantez, the best of the pair being HMB – Henrique Menezes Borges, from the 1870s, a collector and dealer in old and rare Madeiras. Bottled in 1920, it had a bronze colour, tapering yellow-green rim, symptomatic – for me – of age and quality; tangy of course, very rich, its power and great length tamed by its superb texture.

Finally, I had selected as a sure-fire winner, the renowned Solera 1808. No grape specified (though 'Leacock Madeira' was stencilled on the bottles). A Malmsey? Who cares? It was a glorious wine. A glowing, warm, tawny colour; the most perfectly harmonious bouquet and flavour. Very sweet, very rich, soft, perfect shape, balance and flavour. By the end of the tasting the fumes in the room were intoxicating. **D**

Michael Broadbent of Christie's has more than 50 years' experience in wine. In the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards, his book *Vintage Wine* (Websters-Harcourt) was named Best of the Best out of all the annual wine book winners over the past 12 years (it won in 2003).

WHAT MICHAEL'S BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH...

LOVELY WINES FOR LOVELY FOOD

Red Burgundy for a change, and a **Domaine Rossignol-Trapet, Gevrey-Chambertin 2005**, a village wine bought from the ingeniously named wine merchant, Private Cellar. All I can say is that it was a perfect accompaniment to Daphne's best-ever roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

At The Cantina, an adjunct to London

wine attraction Vinopolis, they recommended **Jean Sipp, Cuvée S Riesling 2005** to accompany the most succulent scallops I've had in ages. A pale, very fragrant Alsace, dry enough, perfect body, flavour and acidity. Try The Cantina: it has remarkably good food, an exceptionally wide range of wines (devoid of first growths) and is very reasonably priced.