

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

The Mamba Awards

By mid-July the tasting season is over until term starts again in early September, so it's a good time to leave the country. The last event I attended was the ninth Mamba Awards at Michelin-starred The Harrow at Little Bedwyn, an event supported by *Decanter* since its inception and designed to highlight the most interesting Australian wines on offer in the UK.

The theme chosen by chef-owner Roger Jones always centres on two grape varieties, this time Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. About 60 wine industry representatives tasted all 103 wines and ranked their top three from each variety. From 69 Chardonnays ranging in price from £9.99 to £95, *Giaconda's* 2012 from Beechworth in Victoria came first (my vote also, comparing it to a Bâtard-Montrachet), Tyrrell's Vat 47 2007 from the Hunter Valley in New South Wales was runner-up and the Landsborough 2013 from Michel Chapoutier's joint venture Tourmon in Victoria's Pyrenees came third. After *Giaconda*, my second and third votes went to the Dawson & James 2011 and Tolpuddle 2013, both from Tasmania.

There were 35 Pinot Noirs to taste, ranging from £7.13 to £44, the group voting for Dalrymple's Cottage Block 2013 from Pipers River in Tasmania (also my first), then Tapanappa's Foggy Hill 2010 from South Australia's Fleurieu, which I would have taken for a Burgundy, and Ten Minutes by Tractor's Wallis 2013 from Victoria's Mornington Peninsula (my second place, also very Burgundian). My third place went to Grosset's 2013 from the Adelaide Hills.

A busman's holiday

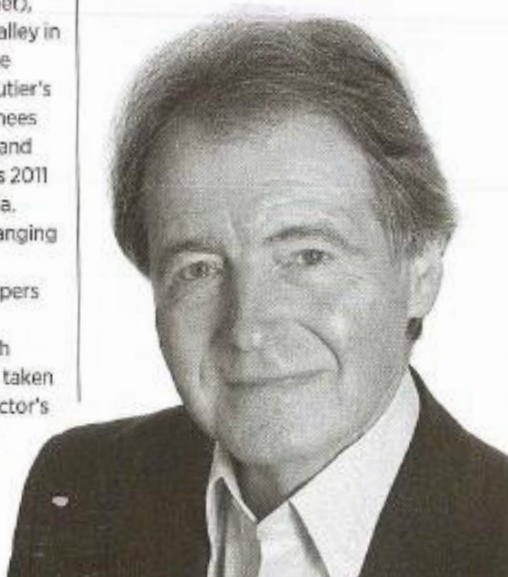
Even on holiday, driving through France on the way to Tuscany and back again, wine is never far from my thoughts, and an evening spent with John Livingstone-Learmonth, the DWWA Regional Chair for the Rhône, before hitting the Eurotunnel set the bar pretty high. The pinnacles were a superb *Domaine Paret, Condrieu* 2014, a spicy and classy *St-Joseph* 2010 red from Jean-Claude Marsanne, a densely rich *Les 3 Coeurs, Ventoux* 2015 red from *Domaine de la Pigeade* and a simply beautiful *vin doux naturel Ambré* 2009 from *Domaine des Coteaux des Travers* in Rasteau.

We spent the first night in France with another DWWA Regional Chair – Burgundy's Jasper Morris MW – at Bouilland just north of

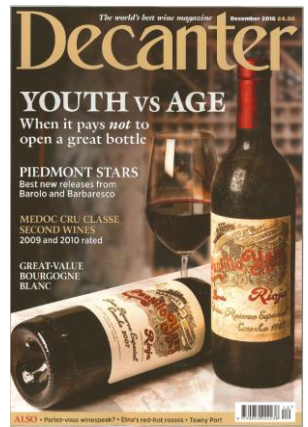
Beaune. After a visit next door to Becky Wasserman, doyenne of the region's wine brokers, who we have known through five decades, we started with Legras' *Hommage à Gérard Barbier* – a rich, creamy Chouilly grand cru blanc de blancs Champagne of great class. The three wines over dinner were Jean-Claude Bessin's *Valmur Grand Cru, Chablis* 2002, showing great firmness and length; Comtes Lafon's *Santenots du Milieu 1er Cru, Volnay* 2004, drinking beautifully; and a marvellously youthful *Aux Beaux Bruns 1er Cru, Chambolle-Musigny* 1990 from Ghislaine Barthod.

After a tasting the following morning at Remoissenet, we had lunch with just-retired merchant Roy Richards and then it was off down to Fleurie to stay with Canadian-born Denise Diesen, who is just closing her final fine wine fund. Another evening of classics with David Moret's *Perrières 1er Cru, Meursault* 2010 and *Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste* 2005, both just opening up, and a floral and fresh *Fleurie Beaujolais – Domaine de la Grand Cour, Vieilles Vignes* 2013 – with the cheese.

Crossing into Italy after an early start over the beautiful *Col de Mont Cenis* south of Val d'Isère, we followed Roberto Bava's instructions to arrive late afternoon at his family compound in Piedmont's *Cocconato*.



'Driving through France to Tuscany and back again, wine is never far from my thoughts'



The much-travelled Bava is the public face of this traditional yet futuristic company, while one brother runs the vineyards and the other the cellar. They share two passions: the strengthening of the recently created Alta Langa DOCG, and the renaissance of the vermouths that made the region around Turin famous in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Alta Langa was the birthplace of Italy's bottle-fermented sparkling wines in the 1880s yet, while being classified by UNESCO, has struggled for recognition with a mere 200 hectares of 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir at 200m on white soils, producing three million bottles. The Bavas have acquired one of the oldest (1891) local producers, Cocchi, and their Bianc di Bianc 2010, Pas Dosé Pinot Noir 2008 and Rosé Spumante 2008 are Barolo bubbles of the highest quality.

A tasting of vermouths distilled with some of the dozen aromatics from the Cocchi Botanical Library was a revelation: Americano Bianco like a lifted Lillet, Americano Rosso a gin-free Negroni, a richer yet more bitter Torino Storico was bettered by Dopo Teatro Amaro (wormwood, quinine and coriander), only to be surpassed by an aged Barolo Chinato based on Giulio Cocchi's original (and still secret) recipe.

After this, it was down to Tuscany for a week in Chianti and a little longer in Brunello, with three new discoveries - very classy wines from Gagliole (Castellina in Chianti), charming ones from Castello di Selvole (Castelnuovo Berardenga), and a strikingly elegant range from the young Villa Pinciana in southern Maremma's Capalbio. Finally a long-promised visit to historic Petrolo in the Colli Aretini east of Siena, where Luca Sanjust's 100% Merlot Galatrona is one of Tuscany's greatest wines. I don't have to tell you it was a great holiday! 🍷

Steven Spurrier is Decanter's consultant editor and a renowned taster