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The Wine Gang Newsletter

March 2010 edition

March's report from The Wine Gang

Oregon & Washington

This was a tasting laid on by Discover Oregon Wines and Washington State. We were impressed by the diversity of the wines in the line up and, though the quality was very variable, we found pockets of world-class wines that were genuinely thrilling. For more information, visit www.oregonwine.org and www.washingtonwine.org

Dry Whites

L'Ecole No 41 Semillon 2008

Washington, United States

Dry White (Cork), 14.2% abv

Great complexity on the nose - crushed nuts, a touch of elegant fragrance, hints of lemony razzle-dazzle. The palate is round, large in the mouth with plenty of texture, creamy nutty flavours followed by a mouthwatering and powerful thrust to the finish. Nutty and zingy and an out-and-out success.

93/100 - £16.50 at *The Wine Treasury*

Domaine Drouhin Oregon Chardonnay Arthur 2007

Oregon, United States

Dry White (Cork), 13.5% abv

Serious value on offer here for lovers of fine Burgundy. Mild nutty aromas with creamy hints lead to a palate of decent quality fruit - pure and richly flavoured - with mineral complexity and mouthwatering long-lasting flavour. Excellent.

One of this month's Five Best Value Wines

93/100 - £16.30 at *Berry Bros & Rudd*

Columbia Crest Winery H3 Horse Heaven Hills Chardonnay 2007

Washington, United States

Dry White (Cork), 13.5% abv

Nutty, complex, lactic and creamy aromas. Nutty and round on the sip yet deftly tinged with a tang to the finish. Toasty almond, creamy length and altogether pleasing. Good value too - one to match with creamy fish dishes.

92/100 - £13.82 at *Everywine.co.uk*

Charles Smith Wines Fu Girl Riesling 2008

Washington, United States

Dry White (Screwcap), 13.0% abv

Bit of a revelation this one. Sniff it and there's a honeyed tone. When you get your tongue involved there's an off-dry twist but balanced with mineral zing and a svelte texture. Balanced, polished and impressive length. Good wine.

90/100 - £7.28 at *Bibendum*

Firesteed Cellars Oregon Pinot Gris 2007

Oregon, United States

Dry White (Cork), 12.5% abv

There's an enticing light floral fragrance to this wine with pear flavours and well-judged residual sugar to present the fruit without losing too much zing. Bright and fresh on the length and overall a good glass of white with subtle aromatics at play.

89/100 - £14.95 at *Liberty Wines*

Duck Pond Pinot Gris 2007

Oregon, United States

Dry White (Screwcap), 13.5% abv

Pear and honeysuckle aromas, the palate is bright to the point of being a touch bitey on the finish. It starts off promising but segues into a searing edge on the finish which we felt could have been a touch friendlier.

87/100 – £12.30 at *The Wine Treasury*

Chateau Ste Michelle Dry Riesling 2008

Washington, United States

Dry White (Cork), 13.0% abv

Lime aromas and a hint of talcum powder. There's a soapy touch on the glug which we would like to have seen sharpened up, but there is some soft citrus appeal. A reasonable quaffer.

87/100 – £10.79 at *Berkmann Wine Cellars*

Columbia Crest Winery Grand Estates Pinot Grigio 2006

Washington, United States

Dry White (Cork), 12.5% abv

Might have been better closer to the vintage but we felt this wine has seen better days. There's some floral character to the nose but on the palate it feels a touch abrupt on the finish as though the brighter flavours are no longer backed up by fruit beneath. OK but buy a fresher vintage if you can.

85/100 – £9.40 at *Oliver's Wines Club*

Dry Reds

Andrew Will Sorella 2007

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.3% abv

Liquorice dark fruit with an engaging tussle of dark spice on the nose. The palate is lush - dark and voluptuous and full of fruit. Layered and stylish with grainy tannin that will age for 5 or more years. Complex and masterful wine.

One of this month's Five Wines to lay down

93/100 – £37.67 at *Everywine.co.uk*

Northstar Winery Merlot 2006

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.7% abv

NB currently only the 2005 vintage is available but hold out for the change to 2006 - a wealth of black cherry on the nose with a flourish of enticing sweet fragrance. Stacks of fruit on the palate, tight tannin, sparky brightness, layers of savoury fruit with structure and great complexity. Will age for 4-5 or more years and worth hunting down.

93/100 – £29.95 at *Halifax Wine Company*

Charles Smith Wines Boom Boom Syrah 2007

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.0% abv

Fragrant niffs, dark fruit, deep spice and coffee grounds. Sip it for a whirl of rich fruit, full and vivid. Sweet smoke, sweet vibrant spice, smokey touches along with cocoa and mint flashes. Complex wine underpinned by quality black fruit and will age a further 3-5 years to unfurl its layers.

93/100 – £10.19 at *Bibendum*

Leonetti Cellars Merlot 2007

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.3% abv

It's a touch closed at the moment but this Merlot is one to lay down and re-visit. Black cherry, liquorice, dark tapenade, savoury spice, nutmeg and tight tannin with a drying finish. Complex and tight, this is a baby but give it a few more years and we suspect it will justify its hefty price tag.

92/100 – £53.95 at *Noel Young*

Andrew Will Champoux Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.1% abv

A Bordeaux blend based on Cabernet Sauvignon, this has an inviting cherry fragrance to the nose. The palate is accomplished - silky yet with dense tannin with a tight fruity finish. It works, in fact its rather gorgeous with a squirt of freshness and a pronounced modern character. It's a touch pricey but if you've got the loot to splash, it's a classy wine.

92/100 – £40.00 at *Berry Bros & Rudd*

L'Ecole No 41 Syrah 2006

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.8% abv

Smoke, spice and dark fruit on the nose. This is wine that offers savoury intensity and plenty of rich black fruit along with a dose of spice on the finish. It's just held back off a gold for us by a touch of alcohol heat which may be tempered by pairing it with a hearty dish such as a bold stew or meaty pie.

92/100 – £25.50 at *The Wine Treasury*

Cristom Vineyards Mt Jefferson Cuvée Pinot Noir 2007

Oregon, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 13.5% abv

Perfumed Pinot with a svelte palate replete with powerful fruit, purity and a mineral streak. This will appeal to lovers of both Central Otago and Burgundy. Layered and long-lasting in the mouth. Brill.

92/100 - £24.95 at Flint Wines

Columbia Crest Winery H3 Horse Heaven Hills Merlot 2006

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.1% abv

Pale colour for Merlot, but don't be put off. This is fragrant with dark cherry, plum and vanilla pod aromas with a tightly structured palate - fine tannin, drying to the finish so one to match with food and will benefit from up to 5 more years in bottle. There's a bitter chocolate tang, some acidity to the finish with long-lasting flavours.

92/100 - £13.82 at Everywine.co.uk

Chateau Ste Michelle Syrah 2006

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 13.5% abv

Great value here for a smoky deep red with hints of chocolate and mint that power across the nose and palate. Impressive for the money and one to match with the best steak and kidney pudding money can buy.

92/100 - £9.99 at Berkmann Wine Cellars

Cristom Vineyards Eileen Vineyard Pinot Noir 2007

Oregon, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.0% abv

Wonderful fragrance - a trilogy of flowers, freshness and spice. Class on the palate too, the fragrance persists, lots of refreshing verve, long lasting flavours and a final flourish of spice. Uniquely Oregon Pinot.

91/100 - £39.50 at Flint Wines

L'Ecole No 41 Cabernet Sauvignon 2006

Washington, United States

Dry Red (Cork), 14.4% abv

This has plentiful cassis and hints of cocoa on the nose along with some intense blackcurrant notes on the palate. The structure is butch and the tannin very drying. It will last a few more years in bottle and needs big food. A decent glass of wine, but we're not quite convinced we'd shell out thirty big ones for it.

89/100 - £29.50 at The Wine Treasury

Sparkling Whites

Domaine Ste Michelle Blanc de Noir NV

Washington, United States

Sparkling White (Cork), 12.0% abv

Not bad value and an interesting change from Prosecco, Cava or another New World sparkler. Creamy aromas and a touch edgy on the finish so perhaps one to deploy in fizz cocktails at your summer parties.

86/100 - £10.99 at Noel Young