



### CLUB MEETING

**Wednesday 6 June 2018**

**Commences 8pm** (please be punctual)

*Remember our new addresss - see below.*

### Guest Presenter

**Dave O’Leary**  
O’Leary Walker Wines  
Clare Valley SA

For those of you who have been at the club since the Alma Days, you will remember that OLW was the Penguin Award for Best New Winery way back in 2000.

Prior to this they had both cut their teeth for over 25 years crafting some of the best wines of their generation for other companies. It was after a couple of beers they decided to take control of their own destiny and craft small batches of wines from some of the best vineyard sites in SA. This is what they have been doing since.....

Guests are most welcome  
Please contact President – James Taylor

### April Committee Meeting

The committee meeting for this month was held at the home of Chris & Denise Herbert.

Our theme this month was wines from Tasmania. The Tasmania region is quite diverse with sites ranging from the Tamar Valley near Launceston (in the north of the state and comparatively warm) to the Coal Valley (in the south of the state and almost in Hobart).

The Straightsmen Pinot Noir 2008 (Flinders Island) – 8 points (Tony)

Nocton Vineyard Pinot Noir 2015 (Coal River) – 15 points (Gerald)

Riversdale Estate “Centaurus” Pinot Noir 2012 (Coal River) – 19 points (Chris)

While there weren’t many wines (attendance was slightly down), all of the wines showed varietal character and were of good quality. The original vineyards in Tasmania may have been planted for sparkling wine but Pinot Noir is thriving there now. Wine Collection

Please remember that if you ordered wine at any club night, it is your responsibility to collect or arrange collection by another member if you can not attend.

Any queries regarding this, please contact Cellarmaster Chris Herbert.

### Purchases by guest/s

Note – members are responsible for payment for any wine purchased by their guests and for payment for other Club activities their guest signs up for.

### Calendar of Events 2018

- 24 June Day Trip
- Casual Dinner
- November – AGM
- December – Christmas Dinner

Dates are to be advised.

*See next page for interesting article:*

### Change of Venue

A reminder that Club meetings will be held at The Elsternwick Club which is located at 19 Sandham Street Elsternwick (off St George’s Road one street behind the RSL).



#### The Shiraz Club of Victoria Inc.

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# Has wine gone bad?

'Natural wine' advocates say everything about the modern industry is ethically, ecologically and aesthetically wrong – and have triggered the biggest split in the wine world for a generation.

By Stephen Buranyi

*Extract from The Guardian website.*

If you were lucky enough to dine at Noma, in Copenhagen, in 2011 – which had just been crowned as the “best restaurant in the world” – you might have been served one of its signature dishes: a single, raw, razor clam from the North Sea, in a foaming pool of aqueous parsley, topped with a dusting of horseradish snow. It was a technical and conceptual marvel intended to evoke the harsh Nordic coastline in winter.

But almost more remarkable than the dish itself was the drink that accompanied it: a glass of cloudy, noticeably sour white wine from a virtually unknown vineyard in France's Loire Valley, which was available at the time for about £8 a bottle. It was certainly an odd choice for a £300 menu. This was a so-called natural wine – made without any pesticides, chemicals or preservatives – the product of a movement that has triggered the biggest conflict in the world of wine for a generation.

The rise of natural wine has seen these unusual bottles become a staple at many of the world's most acclaimed restaurants – Noma, Mugaritz in San Sebastian, Hibiscus in London – championed by sommeliers who believe that traditional wines have become too processed, and out of step with a food culture that prizes all things local. A recent study showed that 38% of wine lists in London now feature at least one organic, biodynamic or natural wine (the categories can overlap) – more than three times as many as in 2016. “Natural wines are in vogue,” reported the Times last year. “The weird and wonderful flavours will assault your senses with all sorts of wacky scents and quirky flavours.”

As natural wine has grown, it has made enemies. To its many detractors, it is a form of luddism, a sort of viticultural anti-vax movement that lauds the cidery, vinegary faults that science has spent the past century painstakingly eradicating. According to this view, natural wine is a cult intent on rolling back progress in favour of wine best suited to the tastes of Roman peasants. The Spectator has likened it to “flawed cider or rotten sherry” and the Observer to “an acrid, grim burst of acid that makes you want to cry”.

Once you know what to look for, natural wines are easy to spot: they tend to be smellier, cloudier, juicier, more acidic and generally truer to the actual taste of grape than traditional wines. In a way, they represent a return to the core elements that made human beings fall in love with wine when we first began making it, around 6,000 years ago. Advocates of natural wine believe that nearly everything about the £130bn modern wine industry – from the way it is made, to the way critics police what

counts as good or bad – is ethically, ecologically and aesthetically wrong. Their ambition is to strip away the artificial trappings that have developed in tandem with the industry's decades-long economic boom, and let wine be wine.

But among wine critics, there is a deep suspicion that the natural wine movement is intent on tearing down the norms and hierarchies that they have dedicated their lives to upholding. The haziness of what actually counts as natural wine is particularly maddening to such traditionalists. “There is no legal definition of natural wine,” Michel Bettane, one of France's most influential wine critics, told me. “It exists because it proclaims itself so. It is a fantasy of marginal producers.” Robert Parker, perhaps the world's most powerful wine critic, has called natural wine an “undefined scam”.

For natural wine enthusiasts, though, the lack of strict rules is part of its appeal. At a recent natural wine fair in London, I encountered winemakers who farmed by the phases of the moon and didn't own computers; one man foraged his grapes from wild vines in the mountains of Georgia; there was a couple who were reviving an old Spanish technique of placing the wine in great clear glass demijohns outside to capture sunlight; others were ageing their wines in handmade clay pots, buried underground to keep them cool as their predecessors did in the days of ancient Rome.

Sebastien Riffault, from the Loire Valley, runs the 10-year-old trade body L'Association des Vins Naturels. He told me his basic technique was simply “making wine like in a previous century, with nothing added”. This means using only organic grapes, picked by hand, and fermenting slowly with wild yeasts from the vineyard (most vintners use lab-grown yeasts, which Riffault says are engineered “like F1 cars, to speed through fermentation”). No antimicrobial chemicals are added to the wine, and everything is bottled – bits and all – without filtering. The result is that Riffault's *sancerre* comes out a deep amber colour and very sweet, tasting like crystallised honey and preserved lemons. It's excellent, but far from the “pale yellow” with “fresh citrus and white flowers” described in the French government's official guidelines for *sancerre*. “It's not for everyone. It's not made like fast food. But it's totally pure,” Riffault told me.

Just 20 years ago Riffault and his contemporaries were ignored, but now they have a foothold in the mainstream, and their approach could transform wine as we know it. “We used to struggle” the Burgundy natural winemaker



Philippe Pacalet says. "People weren't ready. But chefs change, sommeliers change, whole generations change," he went on. "Now they are ready."

At first glance, the idea that wine should be more natural seems absurd. Wine's own iconography, right down to the labels, suggests a placid world of rolling green hills, village harvests and vintners shuffling down to the cellar to check in on the mysterious process of fermentation. The grapes arrive in your glass transformed, but relatively unmolested.

Yet, as natural wine advocates point out, the way most wine is produced today looks nothing like this picture-postcard vision. Vineyards are soaked with pesticide and fertiliser to protect the grapes, which are a notoriously fragile crop. In 2000, a French government report noted that vineyards used 3% of all agricultural land, but 20% of the total pesticides. In 2013, a study found traces of pesticides in 90% of wines available at French supermarkets.

In response to this, a small but growing number of vineyards have introduced organic farming. But what happens once the grapes have been harvested is less scrutinised, and, to natural wine enthusiasts, scarcely less horrifying. The modern winemaker has access to a vast armamentarium of interventions, from supercharged lab-grown yeast, to antimicrobials, antioxidants, acidity regulators and filtering gelatins, all the way up to industrial machines. Wine is regularly passed through electrical fields to prevent calcium and potassium crystals from forming, injected with various gases to aerate or protect it, or split into its constituent liquids by reverse osmosis and reconstituted with a more pleasing alcohol to juice ratio.

Natural winemakers believe that none of this is necessary. The basics of winemaking are, in fact, almost stupefyingly simple: all it involves is crushing together some ripe grapes. When the yeasts that live on the skin of the grape come into contact with the sweet juice inside, they begin gorging themselves on the sugars, releasing bubbles of carbon dioxide into the air and secreting alcohol into the mixture. This continues either until there is no more sugar, or the yeasts make the surrounding environment so alcoholic that even they cannot live in it. At this point, strictly speaking, you have wine. In the millennia since humans first undertook this process, winemaking has become a highly technical art, but the fundamental alchemy is unchanged. Fermentation is the indivisible step. Whatever precedes it is grape juice, and whatever follows it is wine.

"The yeasts are the key between the vines and the people," Pacalet told me, in a reverent tone. "You use the living system to express the information in the soil. If you use industrial techniques, even if it's a small operation, you're making an industrial product." Viewed in this quasi-spiritual way, the winemaker's job is to grow healthy grapes, tend to the fermentation, and intervene as little as possible.

In practice, this means going without the methods that have given modern winemakers so much control over their product. Even more radically, it means jettisoning the expectations of mainstream wine culture, which dictates that wine from a certain place should always taste a certain way, and that a winemaker works like a conductor, intervening to turn up or tamp down the various elements of the wine until it plays the tune the audience expects. "It is important a sancerre tastes like a sancerre, then we can start to determine levels of quality," says Ronan Sayburn, the head of wine at the private wine club and bar 67 Pall Mall.

In France, which remains the cultural and commercial centre of the wine world, the acceptable styles of winemaking aren't just a matter of history and convention; they are codified into law. For a wine to be labelled as from a particular region, it must adhere to strict guidelines about which grapes and production techniques can be used, and how the resulting wine should taste. This system of certification – the appellation d'origine contrôlée (AOC), or "protected designation of origin" – is enforced by inspectors and blind-tasting panels. Wines that fail to conform to these standards are labelled "vin de France", a generic designation that suggests low quality and makes them less attractive to buyers.

Some natural winemakers have rebelled against this legislation, which they believe only reinforces the dominant styles and methods that are ruining wine altogether. In 2003, the natural winemaker Olivier Cousin opted out of his local AOC, complaining in a letter that meeting their standards meant that "one must beat the grapes with machines, add sulphites, enzymes and yeast, sterilise and filter." When he refused to stop describing his wine as being from Anjou, he was actually prosecuted for labelling violations. In response, Cousin put on a good show, riding his draft horse up to the courtroom steps and bringing a barrel of his offending wine to share with passers-by. But he ended up changing the labels.

"The AOC are liars," Olivier's son Baptiste, who has taken over several of his father's vineyards, told me. "The local designations were created to protect small producers, but now they just enforce poor quality."

*For more on this article go to the following link:*

**<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/15/has-wine-gone-bad-organic-biodynamic-natural-wine>**