



## Gilbey's go all out with tasting event



Italian wines showed well at the Gilbey tasting

Is recession turning to recovery? We don't know yet but what we do know is that the wine trade has seen a lot fewer tastings than usual this year, with the social life of journals, in particular, witnessing a decided downturn!

Gilbey's, however, rolled out the barrel in fine style recently, with a mega tasting event, which showed not just their entire portfolio, but also offered the chance to taste a range of very fine Irish cheeses. A huge crowd attended and, according to Gilbeys, both interest and orders were highly encouraging. Prices, in general, have not risen since last year and it's certainly a good time for retailers to strike bargains and pass on improved value to their customers.

Picking absolute highlights was tough, but South Africa, Spain and Italy showed especially well, with prices generally right for what was on offer.

The Fairview range from South Africa was very tasty stuff. The Goats do Roam (€10.89) label is well known but still offers value. The 2009 white, an interesting blend of rousanne, viognier and the underused but often very decent white grenache, was especially characterful. Pegleg Carignan (€18) from Swartland is a wine I've always found consistent and the 2006 was no exception, being a warm and juicy crowd pleaser which carried its 14% alcohol well. Fairview Beacon Shiraz 2006 (€28), from Paarl, also packed a high alcohol punch, but the wine was well concentrated with hints of classic French character.

Klein Constantia is one of the older South African estates and noted for its whites. Of the 2008s, I preferred the sauvignon blanc (€15) to the riesling- it was in softer style than the norm in Europe or New Zealand, but it had very decent fruit. The

famed dessert wine, Klein Constantia Vin de Constance 2005 (?49) was one of the stars of the show. Made from noble rot grapes, it was richly flavoured, with honey, marmalade and apricot notes, but it had fine balancing acidity to cut the sweetness. An expensive treat but a good gift wine.

Turning to Spain, Marques de Murrieta manages to be both traditional and yet produce clean, consistent wines- a balancing act that's not easily achieved. The top wine is Dalmau Reserva Rioja 2004 (€89). French oak is used for ageing and a spoonful of old vine cabernet is added; it's a very good wine but perhaps a little too modern in style for fans of old fashioned Rioja. The thing is, though, that it's a good wine with lovely long black fruit flavours to the finish. Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva 2001 (€43)



Harvesting at Marques de Murrieta in Rioja

is in much more classic style, evolving nicely and probably just approaching its best drinking years; soft leathery strawberry and ripe red fruits characterise the palate. Murrieta Reserve Rioja 2005 (€20) has lovely dark fruits and decent structure and, despite 14% alcohol, it could slide down deceptively easily. Good value and drinking well, it will keep for a while.

The house of Faustina is one which has long managed to bring decent Rioja to large numbers of people, at a decent price- the current Reserva retails around €15.80. The new releases were consistently good, but the Gran Reserva 1998 was lighter than some vintages and probably should be drunk relatively soon. 2001 Black Label Gran Reserva 2001 packed a heftier punch but was also extremely elegant with smooth strawberry and darker fruits. Traditionalists will be glad to hear that 50% American oak is used, with the balance being French, giving lots of the velvety spices older Rioja lovers associate with the style.

Gruppo Italiano Vini supply much of Gilbey's

Italian offering but it is well chosen and offers good value to consumers. Melini Chianti Classico La Selvanella (€22.50) can be light in some vintages but the 2005 shown here was very good, with traditional bitter cherry flavours. It is aged entirely in traditional large wooden botte, which is so much kinder than to the sangiovese grape's often dry tannins than the 225 litre barrique. The keenly priced Chianti Classico Granaio 2007 (€16) also had those classic bitter cherry elements and is drinking very nicely now. Castello Monaci Primitivo 2008 from Puglia, had lovely liquorice and plum flavours and was decent value at €10.99.

Luigi Calissano Barolo 2005 (€35) offers ordinary wine buyers a taste of classic tar, roses and cherry, at a price that can be afforded, while Le Grilliae Vernaccia di San Gimignano 2008 (€15), had a touch of yellow fruit succulence but good balancing acidity- a very good wine with grilled white fish.

Moving to France, Ch. La Lague Haut Medoc 2004 was a pricier item, at around €60 retail, but it had greater length and balance, I thought, than the 2006, which was also shown. The latter is enjoyable but may not hold so long- we shall see! Meantime, for those leaner of pocket, there is Mademoiselle Haut Medoc 2006 at around €17, which has flavoured dark and plum fruits and decent length for the price. Elsewhere in Bordeaux, the consistent Frank Phelan St Estephe 2005 showed well.

Austria and Germany are not easy sells at any time but Gilbeys are offering a new range of each. Laurenz V is the Austrian and there are some very appealing Gruner Veltliners from Kamptal, at prices from around €15, all with good character in a grape which looked like become quite trendy in Ireland before the crash happened. The Germans are from the Lingenfelder estate in the Pfalz. This is one of the warmer regions of Germany and its rieslings are not quite so austere as those from the Mosel and Rhine but they are still of high quality and price is generally better for consumers. The Bird Label Riesling 2007 (€14) is quite classic and there is also a nicely aromatic Gewurztraminer along with some late harvest bottlings.

Prices approximately retail. For full details on all wines [email@gilbeyscsc@diageo.com](mailto:email@gilbeyscsc@diageo.com).

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