



Raymond Chan Wine Reviews

www.raymondchanwinereviews.co.nz

Raymond Chan, 45 Alexandra Road, Hataitai, Wellington 6021, New Zealand
Tel: (04) 386-3726, Cell: (027) 272-8808, Email: raymond@raymondchanwinereviews.co.nz

Only wines of bronze medal standard (15.5/20 or ★★) and above will have reviews published in www.raymondchanwinereviews.co.nz unless instructed otherwise by the supplier.

Reviews of wines receiving an assessment of less than bronze medal standard are provided to the supplier as confidential feedback.

Reviews and ratings may be quoted and republished provided they are acknowledged to 'Raymond Chan' or 'www.raymondchanwinereviews.co.nz'

Beefsteak & Burgundy Club of Tinakori at Whitebait

24 February 2015

They say that there's been a downturn in fine dining. However, when Paul and Louise Hoather closed down the iconic White House in Oriental Parade in Wellington, it wasn't the loss of another high-end establishment due to tough times. The Hoathers have replaced it with two new eateries, aimed at the top level. Charley Noble in the Huddart Parker building and Whitebait in the new Clyde Quay Wharf complex cater differently to the market, the former satisfying protein seekers and the latter for seafood devotees. Charley Noble is set amidst the bustling CBD and Whitebait is on the wharf adjacent to the sea.

Paul Hoather is the co-owner and chef at Whitebait, and he has his wife Louise's brother-in-law Khan Danis as the head chef. Louise's sister, Catherine, married to Khan, is the pastry chef, so it couldn't be more a family business. Out front as restaurant manager is Ian Carnegie. Since Whitebait opened in late November last year, the word is that it is very, very good, and the critical reviews have been outstanding. It's an ideal place for the Tinakori Beefsteak & Burgundy Club to go. The White House was traditionally the first choice to mark the start of the new dining year, so it was appropriate that Whitebait has taken its place. www.white-bait.nz

The Luncheon

This was a luncheon of two halves. The food half was simply excellent if not outstanding. The entrée and main courses were prepared, cooked and served in great style. The wine half was a disappointment. I know the intentions of Dean, the winemaster were good, but some flaws made the wines less than ideal for enjoyment. It is very difficult to select wines to accompany the dishes well, without actually trying the wines and the food together beforehand. And then, the wine master must meet a budget. And the wines selected must test the diners, and not be giveaways in identification. I know, as I've been there...

On Arrival and Starter

On arrival, a glass of sparkling wine was served in flutes. The glassware set off the wine to show a straw-yellow colour with some persistent bubble. On nosing and tasting it, there wasn't a great deal of character. The bouquet was light and indistinct, and certainly there was a lack of autolytic yeast and bready character. Palate much the same, the wine generally dry, with crisp mouthfeel, and a subtle aromatic fruit expression and possibly a leesy-sacky note. The more it warmed up, the more noticeable the phenolics. Clearly not a quality-focussed wine.

Could this be a simple, European sparkling? After all, the fruit was weak, and there seemed to be a less than clean winemaking issue of what could be sulphides. The coarse texture and drying palate suggested less than method champenoise quality, these wines designed to showcase fine textures. The only visible clue was that it was in small bottles, 375 ml or less. The wine was the **NV Deutz 'Marlborough Cuvee' Methode Traditionnelle Brut**, in 200 ml bottle. We've all been warned about how small bottles of bubbles are designed to be drunk straight away, as the proportion of air to wine is very high, with the onset of deterioration bound to be rapid. This is what's happened

here. This wasn't a good start. However, some attendees thought the wine a New Zealand sparkling and deemed it good. Clearly they had good bottles.

Served after we were seated, and to accompany what was left of the sparkling wine was the canapé. **Crostini with crush chickpeas, tomato, olive and basil.** Textbook crunchy, crisp, toasted bread, and a salty, herbal, palate whetting invitation to the rest of the meal. The wine didn't really interact and sat in the background.

Entrée

The next wine, a white was in much better condition, and indeed more correct and characterful. The combination of lime fruit, honey and toast immediately led one to Riesling with some bottle age. This was confirmed by the yellow hues to the colour, and rounded, rich palate. A softly concentrated core and weight from fruit extract rather than sugar suggested warmer climate than Mosel. But New World or Old World. For me, it could have been either a more southerly part of Germany, say the Pfalz. New Zealand was the better alternative, and definitely South Island if I was heading down this track. The lovely 'custard and cream' unctuousness from the bottle development spoke of an age I'd have said around 2008/2009. The acidity now soft and integrated.

A little surprise on revelation followed. It was the **Gibbston Valley 'Le Fou' Central Otago Riesling 2010.** A single vineyard wine from the old vines on the 'Home' block in Gibbston. Some research has revealed it to be 10% alc. and 25 g/L residual sugar. The wine appeared a little more forward than might have been expected to me.

The Whitebait staff served **Snapper and clam cerviche with kumara crisps.** A wonderful dish with the fish fresh and firm, and subtle in flavour, given a little seaside twist from the clam. All moist, and the fish melting away in the mouth, while the clam gave some texture. A little heat and spice too, which grew, and lovely green leaf for cooling. The kumara crisps gave a balancing sweetness and texture too. Interestingly, the sweetness in the Riesling worked with the heat, but generally, the sweetness level was too high, and the acidity too low. Toast and honey with snapper and clam doesn't really go together...

Main

On serving, the first notable feature of the red was its pale red colour. Faded garnet with orange and tawny hues on rim. Then a tightly concentrated bouquet with good classical intensity. The fruit was light and not easily identifiable in a varietal sense, as powerful, spicy, sweet and cedary oak overtook the fruit. The fruit was earthy and savoury, rather than up-front and aromatically clear, suggesting European. The European path was reinforced by the firm, dry mouthfeel. Again the fruit expression not obvious, the earthy, chalky textures and flavours talking about Europe. The feature of the wine was the sweet oak. Rioja came to mind immediately, but its firm line and tight austerity seemed out of line. The other though was a lean New Zealand, Hawke's Bay Merlot from a light and less than generous year.

How wrong and how right could one be? The wine was **Stonecroft Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay Zinfandel 2011.** This had no sweet blueberry pie flavours here. No bramble, undergrowth and blue fruits. And no rustic, rounded, accessibility. The vintage was warm and wet, so one could understand the intensity. Did the wet season affect the notoriously thin-skinned Zinfandel variety here? The lack of fruit suggests this was the case. 15 months in seasoned American oak, and the compromised fruit explains the oak dominance. Tempranillo from Rioja would have been a good guess after all. Also Merlot from a weak year in Hawke's Bay!

The main course served was **Roast spring lamb with braised greens, olive caper and anchovy sauce,** with sides of **Rosemary and garlic fried potatoes.** A hearty dish for lunch, and maybe better suited to dinner, but delicious and perfectly executed, the meat being tender, pink in the middle, juicy, sweet and salted to the ideal. The vegetables infused and held together by a piquant, salty, savoury sauce that was rich and binding, forming the sauce for the meat. A treat to see lamb

as it should be. And the potatoes judged to show the rosemary and background garlic, the texture more roasted firm than fried. The diners were delighted with this dish and the potatoes too! Surprisingly the wine matched the main course in terms of cut and intensity, and texture as well as offering a counterpoint in flavour, the sweet and cedary oak giving the food yet another layer of flavour. This complemented the lamb, and didn't conflict, so its place in the scheme of things was justified!

Afterthoughts

As suggested in the introduction, the winemaster is often on a hiding to nothing. There's no chance to taste the wines with the food that's going to be served. Pricing constraints and what is in stock affects the final choice. It was unfortunate for me that the size of the bottle of the sparkling wine, the sweetness level and secondary development of the Riesling, plus the lack of varietal character and oak dominance of the red worked against the presentation of the wines. The food and service were faultless, and the setting of Whitebait is excellent. Maybe I'm a little tough in my wine expectations, but the lunch really was excellent overall, and all the attendees seemed to enjoy the experience. It usually is the case at the Tinakori Beefsteak & Burgundy Club lunches.

Whitebait, Clyde Quay Wharf, Wellington, Tel: 04 385-8555, Email: info@white-bait.nz

The Beefsteak & Burgundy Club

The Beefsteak & Burgundy Club organization was founded in Adelaide in 1954 with the aim of its members sharing knowledge and experiencing great wines and food and fellowship on a regular basis. With over 150 branches around the world in countries as diverse as Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Japan, the U.K. and the U.S.A., it is an international success. In New Zealand there are ten branches, with five located in Wellington. The meetings are run on a semi-formal basis, with officers and committee including a Foodmaster and Winemaster who co-ordinate the meals and wines respectively. The Adelaide parent body oversees administration and maintains a constitution to provide a framework and uniformity, but it is a relaxed and enjoyable time attending the meetings and the occasional international conventions. For more information, go to www.beefsteakandburgundyclub.org.au where you can find out about joining an existing club or forming a new branch.