

Yotam Sharon

Just About Time (and Wine)

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A Chenin blanc Tasting

A few days ago we got together with a few winemakers for a tasting of Chenin blanc wines. Each brought one or more, but the point was to learn a bit about this variety in an informal, relaxed way – and this goal was achieved.

While Chenin originaes and shines in the Loire Valley, in rather cool terroirs, it does remarkably well in warmer parts of the world, such as Swartland in South Africa and in warm – indeed hot! – parts of Israel. Ze'ev Dunia's Sea Horse Chenin, whose 12' was one wine I've particularly enjoyed here, comes from sweltering Gedera – and trust me, I live in nearby Mazkeret Batya. Still, there's very little Chenin planted in Israel – even less old vines. Like Carignan, it seems amazingly immune to warm climate, and even where nights are warm as well maintains fresh fruit and acidity. That said, also like Carignan, it may not be that simple to vinify and is not an overall easy to sell crowd-pleaser. Still, I would love to see more planted, across various local terroirs.

With that, on to the tasting.



The South-African and French Chenins

Skerpioen – 2013 Chenin + Palomino. Eben Sadie Family Wines, Swartland 14% Vines planted from 1958 to 1967

Very pale, light greenish tinge. Nicely lifted, pithy fruit, a touch of wax. A bit reduced, flinty, Quite full fruit on the palate, very mellow and soft fruit, a bit low on acidity, though some minerality and phenolics give tension and length. Will probably acquire more complexity with aging. Opens up nicely with air.

Rudera 2006 Stellenbosch (Teddy Hall) 14%

Golden green. Quite petrolly, kerosene on the nose. Some oxidative notes, nice spiciness with air, turmeric? A bit of asparagus. Quite concentrated, with ripe citrus fruit, than high acidity on the finish. Past it's peak yet pleasant, for me.

Château Pierre-Bise, Anjou 2010 - oxidized.

Château Pierre-Bise, 2011 Savennieres Roche aux Moines 14%

Golden, with some green. Very classic chenin nose, with caramelised apples, a slightly aldehydic note, bit of petrol, some dust. Has a phenolic core, a bit like a tannic cider, which is quite intriguing and appetizing. A food wine. Quite serious.

Château Pierre-Bise, 2011 Savennieres Clos le Grand Beaupreau 13%

Light gold. A bit honeyed, a bit jura like, yet a strange note of cilantro. Less full on the palate, high acidity, quite austere. Needs time?



The Israeli Chenins

Shvo Vineyard 2011 13.5%

Very pale silver. Reductive, a bit of sweet oak, very subtle. Obvious minerality. Pithy, sweet white fruit, perhaps a bit thin compared to others, in this context but still for me an original expression of the variety, from one of Israel's maverick winemakers.

Matar 2013 Chenin blanc 13.2%

Very pale. Good chenin nose, some green apples. A bit lean on the palate, acidity not too high but lacking balancing fruit, for most of us. A different expression of Chenin. early-harvested probably, and well in line with Tal Pelter's crystalline vision of whites.

Sea Horse "James" 2013 13.5% – feels more.

A bit reduced at first, not unlike the Shvo. Than some tropical notes, though overall still young. Very fleshy fruit, baked apples, quince, very long. I've noticed a bit of VA here in past tastings, but not here. Acidity is very balanced. Very good but needs a bit more time, judging by the 2012.

Sea Horse "James" 2012 14.5%

Still very pale, greenish tinge. Different on the nose, smoky minerals, nicely complex. Very full on the palate, lower acidity, yellow fruit – peach with some quince. Pretty long. Very high on pleasure factor. One of the best so far.

I can't help but wonder that if this had a classier label, a heavy bottle and a wax capsule like Eben Sadie's wine, and if Zeev Dunie had lived anywhere but in Israel, than he would've been a star and the James Chenin would be a highly sought-after bottle. Kudos to Zeev and to his grower in Gedera, Baruch Langer.

Domaine Huet Vouvray Le Haut Lieu, Sec 2011 13%

Pale gold, real minerality, flint, subtle quince notes. Powerful on the palate, striking, mouthwatering acidity, balancing the subtle sweetness. Very long. On a different level. Serious and tasty at the same time. Best of the non-Israelis and perhaps best of all here.



Huet's 2011 Le Haut Lieu – a winner