

Andrew Kay's Food & Drink

One swallow

It may not a summer make but when it comes to tasting Oliver's wines at Blanch House it certainly makes for a good time

Of all my many, many vices I guess that wine is my favourite. I love good wine and although no connoisseur, I have a decent palate and an open mind. (Sit down those of you at the back who called out 'Open sewer'.)

Quite often I get into heated debates about my love of wine because I am a fan of sweet wines, German wines, Lebanese wines and wines that others dismiss willy nilly. My tastes may be catholic but it doesn't make me a fool. Those of you who have only a love for dry white and fruity red need to open up a little.

All this said, I was rather delighted to be invited to sample some very fine wines indeed at a presentation, with dinner, by Oliver Wines.

I was impressed for a start that they clearly stated that this would be a non-smoking event. The guys obviously take things very seriously. I only wish that it had been a no-cologne event too, as someone had a hefty perfume that could have clouded even the most abused palate.

Tasting sheets were provided with space for us to write our own comments, although I have difficulty in drinking left-handed and writing at the same time. Maybe as the multi-tasking species, women can manage this. The format was pretty informal, with the owners simply pouring a sequence of wines for us to taste and chatting with us all as they went along.

The great treat was that we were tasting wines that have not yet been bottled, wines that had been drawn from the cask especially for the occasion from Chateau Pape Clement and Bernard Magrez. It would appear that Bernard Magrez has a great many fingers in a great many wineries on a global scale, so we were in for a treat.

Starting with Chateau Haut Mouleyre, the cask samples came from the 2005 vintage which will not be released until 2009. It may seem odd tasting wines like this, but many people invest in wine at this stage in the hope that they will be making a good, if not great, investment. To be frank there is of course an element of risk, but judging by the wines we tasted, not a big one.

We moved from one wine to the next, a few of us sniffing, sucking, swilling and spitting, but most of us swallowing. To be honest it was too good to waste and I had no car to drive home.

We ended up with an amazing wine from Morocco that had us all begging for seconds – a superb Chateau Les Grands Chenes Prestige 1999 that had us

in delights, and a mystery wine which, it turned out, came from Uruguay, another of Monsieur Magrez's digits.

I could have gone home happy at that point but dinner followed, and to clear the palate we all had a glass of champagne. This was no event for the faint-hearted.

In the dining room the Blanch chef had done his stuff too. A dish of grilled scallops with puy lentils was a great match for a Chateau Fombrauge 2004 Bordeaux Blanc.

Perfectly cooked 28-day-hung beef fillet married well with 2002 and 1999 vintages of the same house's Grand Cru Classe St Emilion and the same concept of two vintages of one wine worked once again with a selection of cheese, this time 1999 and 1997 Chateau Pape Clement Grand Cru Classe Graves. Now, I bet you're all thinking how much can this guy drink. Well I do have an absolutely enormous capacity for wine, especially in small portions of excellent quality. So it was no problem trying the Chateau Latrezotte 2003 Sauternes which, confusingly, I think was announced as a Barsac. Whatever, it was pretty good and a fine wine with a lemongrass crème brûlée.

By the end, conversation was lively and the assembled tasters left feeling well served and well educated too. I made it home by 2am to a snoring James.

I happen to know that Oliver Wines has a tasty offer if you log onto the website at www.oliverwines.co.uk with a mixed case for £69 including local delivery – not of course the 2005 wines that we tasted, but good wines nonetheless.