

Wine and Food November 2017 Report
Function No 324
Wednesday November 29, 2017

Was this our best ever function?

Function 324 was held in the Members Dining Room with 317 members and guests in attendance. The AGM of the MCC Long Room Wine and Food Society preceded the lunch, with Robert Rouch being elected chairman and Beth Benson and Stuart Stockdale vice-chairs. The meeting also elected Ian Johnson to life membership of the society. Greatly deserved!

Chairman Rouch opened the event by backgrounding guest chef Jerome Mulryan and guest winemaker Andrew Baldwin prior to handing over to MCC CEO Stuart Fox who gave the annual briefing of the club's activities and outlined some future plans.

The lunch had commenced in the Long Room but non-traditionally, with the members being offered a 2017 Penfolds Cellar Reserve Fiano to accompany the interesting range of delicious canapes – chicken skin comte and dill, duck parcel with orange star anise and eel with apple wasabi and lotus root. The Fiano, first released in 2016, is sourced from a single vineyard in McLaren Vale and is a unique Australian expression of this Italian grape variety.

For the entrée, English-born Jerome created a beautifully presented dish based on strips of King George whiting accompanied by dusted soft shell crab, oyster aioli, tartare remoulade and sea greens. The dish was accompanied by the eleventh vintage of Bin 311 Chardonnay (2015), which is sourced from the cool-climate region of Tumbarumba, and the acclaimed Penfolds Reserve Bin 16A Chardonnay. Penfolds describes the latter as a single-region style with a distinctive Adelaide Hills Chardonnay persona. They were two very different wines with some dispute among those present as to preference.

Andrew Baldwin, a native of Eden Valley, then spoke about some of the history of Penfolds and its famous wines before discussing the three white wines we had sampled.

The main course of roast rose veal was a simply presented, melt-in-the-mouth veal fillet accompanied by asparagus, carrot, macadamia nut and black garlic. Judging by the mostly empty plates, the offer was of the appropriate size and universally enjoyed. To accompany the veal Penfolds provided two iconic wines from the 2015 vintage – their most highly collected wine (Bin 389) and one of their earliest-to-sell-out wines, a Bin 407.

Bin 389, or “baby Grange”, is a South Australian multi-regional Cabernet Shiraz blend with grapes from Wrattonbully, McLaren Vale, Barossa Valley, Coonawarra, Robe and Padthaway. It was first made in 1960 by the legendary Max Schubert, and was the wine that helped to forge Penfolds' solid reputation with red wine drinkers.

The cheese was sensational. When Jerome was later asked why he chose it, he replied: "Because it's my favourite cheese!" He also gave a wonderful response to a question from the floor: "Where can I buy this cheese?" "Chadstone." Max McCalman, the self-stated premier cheese expert of America, suggests that the Brillat-Savarin cheese should be paired with a Pinot Blanc (a semi-dry white). Will Studd, the Australian cheese maker, suggests "young triple creams work pretty well with lightly oaked, medium-bodied white wines such as Chardonnay and Verdelho."

But he says as each cheese matures it becomes runnier and tastes sharper, which is problematic as these harder elements tend to clash with any hardness in wine such as the tannins in even quite light red wines such as Pinot Noir. Perhaps neither chap has tried it with a St Henri? The 2014 St Henri Shiraz was considered by many as the stand-out wine of the day.

Peach Melba is a dessert of peaches and raspberry sauce with vanilla ice cream. The dish was invented in 1892 by the French chef Auguste Escoffier at the Savoy Hotel in London to honour the Australian soprano Nellie Melba. The chef later varied the dish – topping the peaches with a raspberry puree – to mark the opening of the Carlton Hotel in 1900.

The dessert received high marks for its superb presentation, and the mascarpone and basil distinguished it from the traditional. The dish was accompanied by the legendary Grandfather Rare Tawny which has an average age of at least 20 years. The Grandfather name dates back to 1915, when an oak cask containing the finest blend of available Tawny material was set aside for the exclusive use of the Penfold family. This wine was known as The Grandfather due to the age of the oldest Tawny in the blend.

During the second discussion on the wines, the winemaker's response to Keith Frampton Snr's query about the order form: "I don't see Bin 407 on the wines for sale!" was, after checking the list, "Neither do I", much to the mirth of those present! It had all been "allocated".

This was the last formal function for 2017 with the Christmas party set to complete a most successful year for the society's members. We hope you were able to attend and wish a Merry Christmas to all.

Andrew O'Brien

