

Michael Broadbent

'The problem was a surfeit of wines and so many proprietors to meet'

FOR A COUPLE of days in September, Italian wines were almost coming out of my ears.

The first event was both monumental and memorable. It was a tasting and dinner at the Italian Ambassador's beautiful residence, a large mansion in London's Grosvenor Square, for the Istituto del Vino Italiano di Qualità Grandi Marchi. This association of 19 family-owned estates was in town for a tasting organised by the Institute of Masters of Wine, preceded by consumer and trade tastings organised by *Decanter*.

On this evening, the proprietors manned their tables in three palatial rooms, after which the 200 attendees reassembled in three reception rooms on the floor above. The problem was a surfeit of fine wines and so many proprietors to meet. The two hours allowed insufficient time to do the tasting justice. My notes were perfunctory because it was such a rare opportunity to meet, at one time and in one place, the entire assembly of Grandi Marchi producers.

This, however, was made up for at the dinner. The first course was octopus terrine, against which I did not make any wine notes. But the following three courses were better matched by the 19 proprietors' wines. For these I made, if not copious, reasonably adequate notes.

What follows reminds me of the young man at a Livery Company dinner whose duty it is to introduce the guests but with time only to mention those of the Masters – 'but all most welcome'. So, in order of service, I shall just mention some of the more exceptional wines we enjoyed.

Rating five stars was Tenuta Lageder's 2009 Am Sand Gewürztraminer from Südtirol-Alto Adige; very pale, with an amazingly fragrant scent which I kept going back to, and an exquisite flavour. This was followed by another 2009 – Silvio Jermann's idiosyncratic 'W...Dreams...' Chardonnay from Venezia-Giulia; glorious, with a hard, firm finish. Next, worth a mention but only out of curiosity, was Gaja's 1984 Gaia & Rey Chardonnay from Piedmont. Showing its age now, like apples left on a shelf in a barn. A Gaja rarity, I suppose.

Next was Lungarotti's Rubesco, Torgiano Rosso Riserva 2006, with grapes from its Monticchio vineyard in Umbria. It was Harry Waugh who, in the early 1950s, when I was at Harveys of Bristol, imported Rubesco for the first time, always as charming as the family. This

What I've been drinking this month

A lunch at Chez Bruce in London's Wandsworth.

A generous glass of Champagne on the house.

Then a more sensibly sized carafe of white: Cantina Terlano's Terlaner Classico 2010: pale,

delicious, slightly spicy nose and flavour. Very dry finish. Then, a big mistake:

out of interest, a similar-sized carafe of Quinta de

Tourais 2009, a Douro red I hadn't heard of. From its

intense opacity I should have been warned: dry,

full-bodied, knockout drops. Almost

undrinkable. Too late, I asked the sommelier for its alcohol content. It had

14% on the label but was almost certainly 14.5% or 15%, perhaps more.

The next mistake was not to have taken Alka Seltzer

when we got back to the flat. Never again.

was followed by Tenuta San Guido's Sassicaia 2007 from Bolgheri – as delicious as expected, and with time in hand.

I must jump to another old friend, Franco Biondi Santi, whose Tenuta Greppo Brunello di Montalcino was typically impressive but, as always, needing time, patience and air. And yet another old friend, Michele Chiarlo of Barolo, whom I first met years ago at a wine fair in Germany. I've mentioned his wines before in my articles, and this time it was his 2007 Cannubi which was delicious but tannic.

Lastly, certainly the most unfamiliar wine, and now for me unforgettable – from Sicily, Donnafugata's Ben Ryè Passito di Pantelleria 2009: warm amber, a most original, complex, honeyed, fragrant nose, medium-sweet, complex, and equally unfamiliar flavour. Different, delicious. It paired a dark and white chocolate mousse. A fitting end to a memorable dinner. I didn't drive home.

In days of yore, to be eligible to sit for the Master of Wine examination, one had to have a minimum age of 25 and at least five years' experience in the British wine trade. At that time all were male. Now, the Institute of Masters of Wine is truly international. And just to demonstrate how far we have moved on, the current chairman, Lynne Sherriff MW, is not only female but hails from South Africa. With this spectacular Italian event she has raised the Institute of Masters of Wine to new heights.

Two days later I had been invited to a more intimate Cà del Bosco lunch hosted by Maurizio Zanella, a principal producer of Franciacorta sparkling wine. I remember vividly our first meeting. He was leaning languidly against the door of a large, old Rolls Royce. Hair long and wild, his manner jovial and full of bonhomie.

His lunch took place at L'Anima, a fashionable Italian restaurant in the City. It was hard to find and there was lots of roadworks. Even with an A-Z map, I got lost and was unforgivably late. Maurizio was as warm and hospitable as always, though now with rather less hair on his head (mind you, my hair is now white). I had to catch up with a range of his wines, including an excellent Curtefranca Bianco (Chardonnay and Pinot Bianco) and Curtefranca Rosso (Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere, Merlot, Barbera and Nebbiolo). His half dozen or so Franciacorta sparkling wines ranged from a very good non-vintage to the outstanding Annamaria Clementi 2003 – for me the Dom Pérignon of Italian sparkling wine for its finesse and elegance.

I wandered back to Liverpool Street Station in a blissful haze. **D**

Michael Broadbent of Christie's has been writing on wine for more than 50 years. This is his 416th column for *Decanter*

