

## Drymen Wine Club

March 2009

In honour of the credit crunch we decided to theme the evening on cheap wines. As if the February evening had not been cheap enough! Without resorting to paraffin and paint stripper, the brief was to find the cheapest wine in each category. I'm not sure I want to admit to some of the things I drank that evening.

We don't see Amelie Pelletier nearly often enough. Amelie is a French cryptographer who works for the MoD. Consequently she never talks about her work – or she would have to shoot us. Being French, she was apologetic for the sacrilege she was about to commit as she poured champagne into our glasses. Amelie have no fear. Bubbly, biscuity, easy drinking, Comte de Corbeau Epernay Brut from Virgin Wines at £15 a bottle did not disappoint.

The sharpness of the champagne was a stark contrast to Geoff's find at Aldi. A sweet quality Spatlese from the Rheinhessen region, there were no complaints at the taste or the price, £4, which comes down to the bigger buying power of Aldi rather than a criticism of the wine.

It looks like the budget supermarkets are the places to get really good deals so that you're not buying cheap in the sense of quality and you are getting a bargain. Julia, who took great pains to tell us that she did not regularly buy from Somerfield, produced a Lindeman's Chardonnay at under £4. I asked to see the receipt to prove the price although my later research showed that this was a half-price special offer. Still a bargain.

John had never brought his slim, piano-teaching wife to any of our meetings and it was a treat to be invited to their converted-barn home. The east end of their building has full-width arched glass doors through which you can view the distant twinkling lights of the city ten miles away. Sylvia, who is called Slyv for short, is also an accomplished cook and we were presented with a feast of finger food ranging from raw creations to delicate sushi canapés and dim sum.

Lindsay and Jamie were conspicuous by their absence. Rumour was that they had booked a last-minute weekend in Amsterdam. Which just proves the power of chocolate liqueur. Closer to home, Consuela announced that she was getting ducks for the garden. Real ducks, she added; the type that quack and lay eggs. So Geoff can look forward to a steady supply of omelettes in his lunch box.

Call me a wine snob, and plenty of people email me with just that comment, but I'm always worried when someone unscrews the top from a bottle. I felt relatively safe though as this was Walter's choice and he's a bigger snob than me! He, too, had gone on a pilgrimage to Aldi and returned with an oak-aged claret. Very fruity and under £4, a good start to the second half.

When I see St Emilion on a label, I am reminded of a mad dash to the airport with a brief stop in the eponymous village. Bunches of tiny plum grapes hung from the ancient walls of the old town. Tourists wandered from café to wine shop, sampling and buying the local produce. But I'm wandering now. Lussac Saint Emilion from Morrison's at £5.45 was a half-price special offer – and what an offer – an £11 bottle of wine with pedigree at a real bargain price.

How do you finish off an evening like this? I'd given that task to Eric. Sorry, Eric, although not sorry with your choice. The danger with a reduced price Sauternes is that it is past the shelf-life and trickles granules of bitter crunchy sugar into your glass. Not so the Chevalier de Pastel Sauternes. A beautiful golden liquid full of jellied fruits, at £7.50 from Tesco, not to be missed.

So much for The Crunch! We ate and drank pretty well for a party in a recession. In actual fact, none of the wines was a disappointment and, given the prices, many were a complete joy.