

The 007 Burgundy and Champagne Tour, May 2017

John Trusler



The Double 0 Sevens of 22 souls, together with our tour guides Julian White and Justin Rhodes, met in the Bayswater Road Coach Park at 7.30 am on Monday 15th May. We knew we were in for a superb time but were all surprised by the sheer luxury of our coach. Plush seats in pairs facing over a table, toilet, kitchen, tea and coffee machine, chilled still and sparkling water, and snacks - a truly first class air-conditioned travelling environment. The coach is huge enough to challenge all parking spaces.



Once on board, with luggage stowed and sitting comfortably, at 8 am precisely Justin was pouring our first glasses of 1er Cru and Grand Cru champagnes, accompanied by delicious smoked salmon sandwiches. And so our tour was underway and was to prove an exciting, superbly organised experience from tutored tastings, to the best wines that the Champagne and Burgundy Regions have to offer.



Lunch on board the coach was a luxury picnic of giant proportions prepared by The Food Show served with excellent Burgundy. We arrived at the Mercure Hotel in Reims around tea time. No, not tea; more champagne! Then we moved off to Le Grand Café where we were joined by Philippe Brugnion and Traudi Kaiser who joined us for the tour. Our Burgundy knowledge started with Chambolle Musigny 1er Cru les Charmes.



Next morning we left Reims for Beaune. Since we were only visiting the Côte d'Or, a tutored tasting of Burgundy from other parts of the region was helpful. Lunch in the Restaurant Chez Guy in Gevrey Chambertin, directed by Julian whose first favourite Burgundy appellation is Gevrey-Chambertin, was followed by a visit and tasting with Domaine Trapet-Rochelandet.



Our next hotel was The Mercure Beaune Centre. Here we experienced an example of Julian's expert organisation. We did not have to stand in queues in reception waiting to check in, like the other coach parties were, merely a quick word from our guide and mentor with the receptionist and a tray appeared laid out with card keys, room numbers and guests' names and we were in our rooms complete with luggage within five minutes...



... so we met in the hotel garden for more champagne before taking a short walk to La Table Gourmande for a memorable meal and superb wines, including Saint Romain and Pommard 1er Cru of Domaine Coste-Caumartin.

The next morning we found ourselves breakfasting in our own private salon with fresh fruits and all the usual breakfast foods. Caution, however, caused us to eat frugally since we were now very aware of the exceptional food and wine we were to be served at both lunch and dinner throughout the tour.



Our visit to Domaine Coste-Caumartin and a tasting with Benoit Sordet was followed by an exhaustive tasting with Vincent Bachelet and lunch there. Tasting the 2015 vintage in barrels and the previous bottled vintages and older ones with lunch gave us all the full spectrum of Burgundy.



Every lunch and dinner included the most wonderful wines from Puligny Montrachet to Latricières Chambertin, some in magnums. I shall cherish the memories of our tour. So well organised, briefings on grapes, wines and regions, the preparation and distribution of tasting notes, maps and how to judge the wines we were tasting. To experience Grands Crus of great vintages was remarkable.



Corton Pougets, Charmes-Chambertin

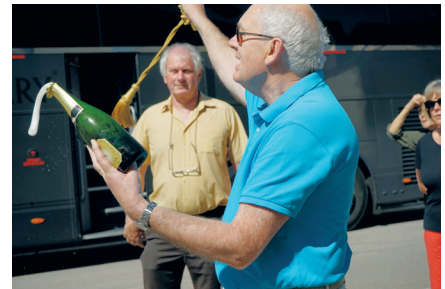
In addition to the serious side of our trip we were introduced to sabrage. Eleven of our party achieved good clean bottle openings and are now certified sabreurs.



Sabrage in Pommaro



Since I was already a sabreur I was offered a magnum of champagne to open with the sabre following which I became a Chevalier-Sabreur. All part of a thoroughly enjoyable five days of sheer indulgence.



Philippe & Julian arranging the drinking!

On our return we called in to have lunch at Philippe Brugnon's domaine in Champagne and an instructive tour of his caves. More Champagne and some fine Nuits-Saint Georges.



One final point - Julian White made it very clear from the outset that there would be no extra costs at all. He said we could leave our credit cards and wallets at home. This proved to be no idle sales talk - it was perfectly true.