

WHITEWATER VALLEY WINE SOCIETY
September 2024 Tasting
Wines from the Balfour Winery Portfolio
Presented by Janina Doyle, WSETDip

We started our autumn tastings by welcoming back Janina Doyle, one of our most popular previous speakers. Since Janina was last with us in 2019, she has moved on to Balfour Winery in Kent, where she is Brand Ambassador. Balfour Winery is one of England's leading wine producers, pioneers for both English sparkling wines, and a new wave of English white and red still wines. Making over 400,000 bottles of still and sparkling wines each year, Balfour is one of England's most respected and renowned wineries, combining world-class winemaking with a spirit of innovation. Members had the opportunity to taste some of the most expensive wines ever presented at our tastings, including some of their top-rated premium products.

It isn't often any member has the opportunity to taste four sparkling wines, made following traditional methods, at the same occasion but here was our opportunity. Our first was **Leslie's Reserve Brut NV** [12%, £35], named in honour of the owner's wife. Pale lemon in colour, this wine made of predominantly Chardonnay, had good bubbles and mousse in the mouth. It was delicate and bone dry with citrus and green apple flavours and hints of spice provided by the small percentage of Pinot Noir/Meunier/Gris.

Our second wine was a **Balfour Brut Rosé 2019** [12%, £65.00], their Flagship wine - a Gold Trophy Winner, that was a pinkish-gold colour. Again there were good bubbles and mousse in the mouth and a distinctive 'bite' on the palate. Made from a blend of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier it had some cranberry flavours backed by notes of burnt orange and herbs. This single vineyard wine was a favourite!

Next came a **Blanc de Blancs 2018** [12%, £60.00] that was bright and shiny in the glass. Made from Chardonnay grapes grown on Kent's clay and chalk soils from a fabulous harvest, this wine is dependent on the best conditions and ripest fruit and so is only made occasionally. The mousse was fine and sustained and on the palate it was clean and fresh with elements of white pepper and herbs.

Our last sparkling treat was a **Blanc de Noir 2020** [12%, £50], a blend of Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. This wine had aromas of violets followed by red apple, blackcurrants and hints of citrus on the palate - quite a savoury, rich and complex wine with a crunchy acidity. By comparison with French Champagne, these wines were more dry and zingy on the palate, without the creaminess and toasty element. Generally they were well received by Members.

Our still wines started with **Luke's Pinot Noir 2023** [12%, £35.00] which had a light red colour and was totally translucent. Served chilled, it was a classic cool-climate Pinot Noir with a delicate aroma of red berry fruit and a hint of spice. Very lightly oaked there were hints of red berries and spice on the palate.

It was followed by the first-ever-released English **Albariño 2022** [11%, £25.00] that had a pale lemon colour. Sauvignon Blanc in style this was fresh and fragrant, citrus- zesty [despite added sugar] tempered by a slight saline minerality. It needed food and was not to some members' taste.

Next came a **Liberty's Bacchus 2023** [11.5%, £25.00] made from grapes from the highest south-facing slopes of the Balfour Estates as this particular grape variety needs maximum sunshine. It was a very pale lemon in colour and less acidic on the palate than the previous wine and perhaps slightly reminiscent of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc? Its zippy citrus taste had been carefully mellowed by oak ageing and was preferred to the previous wine.

Our final wine of the evening was a **Cinque Ports 2019** [12%, 40.00] from the Winemaker Selection Range made from a blend of 5 of the grapes permitted to make Champagne in France. It was slightly less dry than previous wines where the ageing in French oak barrels and a prolonged resting on lees in tanks added some texture and subtlety. It won Gold at the Wine GB 23 Awards.

This was a most interesting single vineyard tasting of English wines. On general reflection the sparkling wines were better received than the still wines but tastes vary. Our grateful thanks must go to Janina for her zippy and zesty, knowledgeable presentation that kept her audience alert and on their toes! Thank you, Janina!