Welcome to our ‘If You Like This, Try That’ informal walkaround tasting.

This tasting has been plenty of fun to pull together, and after much discussion and heated debate in the tasting room we decided it was unfair to only pick one ‘alternative’ to each wine, and so we have offered a selection.

You will find seven styles of wines around the room, wines that our Members love – and buy plenty of! On each table you will also find some alternatives to these wines; one ‘fail safe’ wine that is a popular substitute, one ‘off the beaten track’ wine that provides a more unusual option, and on some tables we will also have a ‘spend more and explore’ wine – a wine that is a more expensive alternative to the classic favourite.

There is no set tasting order, feel free to taste as you please. We ask that you keep the same glass throughout the tasting and there is water to rinse your glass out should you wish.

The Society’s sweetness code:
White wines from bone dry [1] to lusciously sweet [9]
◊ = sparkling wine
○ = white wine
● = red wine
S = screwcap closure
P = synthetic closure

CHAMPAGNE
The most iconic wine in the world, Champagne is considered a wine of celebration and often has a price tag to match. To be called Champagne, grapes picked from the Champagne region of France must undergo a lengthy method of production (méthode champenoise/traditional method) as well as adhere to certain requirements for aging. Thanks to this production process, Champagnes tend to have a distinctive yeasty or bready flavour as they are left on the dead yeast cells (AKA lees) for significant periods. But they’re not the only wines in the world that undergo this process! We’ve included two other wines made in this style – each with different outcomes but equally delicious.

1. ◊ [1] Jean de Foigny Brut Premier Cru NV
A super premier cru Champagne at a party-friendly price! This has a lovely lemony, toasty nose, a fine mousse and green-apple and flint notes on the palate. A delightful glass of bubbles.
Drink now to 2021. 12.5%
ref CH3761 £22.00 bottle £264 dozen
OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable

An elegant traditional method fizz based on chardonnay with chenin blanc, and a little pinot noir for added finesse and body. Quintessential party bubbles as the name suggests, with fine mousse, citrusy fruit and freshness. Drink now to 2021. 12%
ref SG2771 £12.95 bottle £155 dozen

WHY?
This French sparkling wine from the Loire is made using the same method as Champagne and comes from a similarly cool climate in France (albeit from the west coast of the Loire Valley). The dominant variety is chardonnay, one of the three most commonly used grapes in Champagne and also includes pinot noir (permitted) and chenin blanc (not permitted in Champagne.) One major difference between Crémant (French sparkling wine from outside the Champagne region) and the real deal itself is that the legal aging requirements for Crémant are often shorter and so these types of wines tend to be less bready than the counterparts. As you might have spotted, great quality Crémant can often be bought at a fraction of the price of Champagne!

OPTION B: Off the beaten track

3. ◊ [2] Pirie Tasmanian Traditional Method Sparkling Wine NV
Tasmania is making some excellent sparkling wines that have great elegance and character. This blend of 55% chardonnay and 45% pinot noir has undergone second fermentation in bottle and three and a half years on the lees, giving it a rich toasty note. Drink within the next 12 months. 12%
ref SG2171 £27.50 bottle £330 dozen

WHY?
Australia might not be the first place you think of when considering high acid, elegant sparkling wine – but in fact the cool island of Tasmania is considered one of the best places on the planet to produce this style of wine. This particular wine uses only grapes permitted in Champagne as well as an extended length of time on the lees; even more than is legally required for non-vintage Champagne! The result? A serious contender to Champagne and even though it’s from Down Under, it’s about as decent a replica in style as you can get.

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SAUVIGNON BLANC
Sauvignon blanc is originally from the Loire Valley in France where it continues to produce some of the most famous wines in the world in the form of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fume. However, it is the new world (and specifically those from Marlborough in New Zealand) styles that have captured the British consumer for the past decade. High acid, linear and generally unoaked styles packed full of tart fruit flavours such as lemon, gooseberry and passionfruit have become a staple in the world of wine. Generally these wines are designed to be drunk young and fresh, although as with everything there are exceptions to the rule, and work wonderfully as an aperitif or with light dishes such as salads, fish or grilled white meat.

Spy Valley’s sauvignon offers a lovely, generous example of the classic Marlborough style. This is vibrant, dry and crisp with plenty of passionfruit and nectarine flavours. A hugely enjoyable - and highly recommended - New Zealand sauvignon. Drink now to 2021. 13% S
ref NZ10571 £10.50 bottle £126 dozen
*low stock, new vintage NZ11371 to follow

OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable

Tangy and fresh with generous citrus fruit, this is a seductive and versatile white from Campania in southern Italy. La Guardiense are the main producers of the falanghina grape and we can choose the pick of the crop for our wine. Drink this year and next. 13.5% S
ref IT26491 £8.75 bottle £105 dozen

WHY?
Falanghina often expresses an attractive lemon-bursting nose, similar to the aromatics of sauvignon blanc. Like a good sauvignon it also has a touch of something green giving it an added level of complexity and some have apricot notes too. It’s often made in a light style and suits being unoaked, allowing its flavours and good natural acidity to shine through.

OPTION B: Off the beaten track

6. ○ [1] Three Choirs Payford Bridge 2018
An attractive and intricate English white with vibrant aromas of nettle and lime, and a palate which is alive with fresh ripe gooseberry. Drink this year and next. 11.5% S
ref EN1391 £9.50 bottle £114 dozen

WHY?
English still wines are finally finding their feet after living in the shadows of their sparkling counterparts for so long. The cooler temperatures here mean that grapes retain their natural acidity easily and often the main challenge is in achieving full phenolic (or flavour) ripeness. This English wine is packed with the classic green flavours of a cool climate sauvignon blanc – gooseberry, grass, maybe even some kiwi fruit – and although it has a touch of residual sugar, it is wonderfully balanced with the acidity.

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WHITE BURGUNDY (CHARDONNAY)
White Burgundy is a favourite white wine amongst Wine Society members and is undoubtedly one of the world’s most famous wines. It is 100% chardonnay and, as such, the two (chardonnay and White Burgundy) have become almost synonymous. In fact, the grape variety chardonnay is grown all over the world in a plethora of different styles and so to say ‘I like chardonnay’ would generate such a wealth of alternatives that we’ve decided to focus here on lightly oaked, cool climate chardonnay (similar to those you might find in Burgundy).

Bright, vibrant-tasting white Burgundy from high-altitude vineyards, this has been partially fermented and matured in barrels to set up a lovely tension between richness and freshness. Drink now to 2020. 13%
ref BU69551 £12.50 bottle £150 dozen

OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable
A great-value, easy-drinking New Zealand chardonnay from this great estate. Fresh, bright and delicious with tempting peach and apple aromas developing on the generous palate. Drink now to 2023. 13%
ref NZ11171 £10.95 bottle £131 dozen

WHY?
Not all chardonnays from the new world are packed with American oak and this New Zealand number is a fantastic example of how classy they can be at a fraction of the price of their Burgundian brothers and sisters. We particularly like the range of fruits here; stone fruits such as white peach, a touch of citrus zing and the classic apple aromas, all of which are staple in a good white Burgundy. Choosing cooler climate new world sites such as New Zealand, Tasmania in Australia, or colder spots in Chile and even California can deliver just the same elegance.

OPTION B: Off the beaten track
From Austria’s mother of biodynamics and minimal intervention, winemaker Birgit Braunstein, comes this pristine, sumptuous and outright delicious pinot blanc. A grape variety with a long history in Burgenland, this has fine freshness and notes of pear and pineapple fruit. Drink now to 2021. 13%
ref AA2491 £12.95 bottle £155 dozen
*low stock

WHY?
Much like chardonnay, pinot blanc is a chameleon grape variety with a propensity to make a wide range of wine styles. It can be aged in barrel, lends itself well to sparkling wine production and is part of the Burgundian vine family – in fact, in the 1980s this variety was even mistaken for chardonnay in northern Italy. Whilst the acidity is naturally lower than that of chardonnay, and the body often lighter; if handled correctly with yields properly managed – like this stellar example from Birgit Braunstein – it can make wines of great intensity and quality.

OPTION C: Spend more and explore
Broad, complex and intense, this is a fine example of the godello grape that flourishes in north-west Spain. Spain’s answer to top cru Burgundy. Drink now to 2023. 14.5%
Until the 1970s, godello was almost extinct in Spain and so you’re excused if you've not tried one before. The past few decades have seen a significant comeback and is now considered one of the finest white grapes of Spain. Much like chardonnay, it is often described as having ‘chameleon like’ properties and many winemakers say it expresses terroir in a similar way. Flavours can range from citrus through to tropical, it is expressive on the nose and it also has the ability to age.

*low stock

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RED BURGUNDY (PINOT NOIR)

Red Burgundy is usually made from pinot noir. Burgundian reds command a high price since their meteoric rise in the 1970s and whilst Red Burgundy is certainly still a member favourite; many are increasingly looking for alternatives that offer value for money. Red Burgundy tends to have light, fine-grain tannins owing to the thin skins of the pinot noir variety, this also means the wines can be light in colour and becomes increasingly pale over time. Pinot noir tends to have relatively high levels of acidity meaning these wines usually have a freshness not seen by many red grape varieties. Whilst young the flavours of fresh fruits and spices dominate but eventually these will develop into mushroom or animal notes meaning there is a huge spectrum of wines in this style.

11. • Château de Marsannay, Marsannay 2017
Marsannay offers some of the best value to be had in Burgundy. Château de Marsannay is an up-and-coming producer owned by Château de Meursault. Relatively light and pretty pinot with black-cherry fruit and soft tannins. Drink now to 2024. 13.5%
ref BU70611 £24.00 bottle £288 dozen

OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable

12. • Spätburgunder, Markgräflerland, Martin Wassmer 2016
A finely grained red from Baden in southern Germany, and a true bargain for lovers of pinot noir (known here as spätburgunder). All sweet, ripe cherry flavours (including the pips!) and great length. Drink now to 2024. 13.5%
ref GE12331 £14.50 bottle £174 dozen

WHY?
You might argue this is a bit of a cheat… Spätburgunder is actually the same grape as pinot noir; it is simply the German name for it. Whilst many do not know it’s true quality, it is considered by many to be one of the finest iterations of the grape variety in the world. Those ‘in the know’ recognise that the cool growing conditions of some of the top sites in Germany combined with limestone soils and often sunshine reflected off its rivers are some of the best you could ask for. Unfortunately though, it is often hard to get hold of as most is consumed in the domestic German market – they know they’ve got a good thing going!

OPTION B: Off the beaten track

13. • Xinomavro Jeunes Vignes, Thymiopoulos 2018*

*low stock
Bright, pure and elegant Greek red with a wonderful perfume of red fruits and a twist of fresh mint. Friendly yet deceptively complex, reminiscent of a cross between pinot noir and nebbiolo, made by the master of xinomavro and superstar of Greek wine, Apostolos Thymiopoulos. Drink now to 2023. 13%

ref GR1571 £10.95 bottle £131 dozen

*low stock

WHY?
Xinomavro (pronounced ksee-NOH-mavro) is Greece’s most talked about red variety. In 2010, there were less than 2000 hectares planted in the entire world but a renaissance in popularity has seen plantings as much as double in some areas and it’s even planted as far around the world as China! Much like pinot noir, the acidity of the grape shines through and the wines are refreshing with a light to medium body. The tannins are a little pricklier than most pinot noirs, but this prickle often adds to its racy character. Tart, bright fruits are reminiscent of hallmark young pinot and the ability of the finest to take oak and to age adds to this. What’s more, this particular example is certainly cheaper than many of its pinot noir counterparts too.

OPTION C: Spend more and explore
The joy of the 2015 vintage in Italy’s Barbaresco region is that you’re spoilt for choice as to when to open the wines: warm weather across summer and into September means the wines have immediate, floral-scented appeal and charm already, yet also the balance to age well. Colla’s Roncaglie is a perfect example. Drink now to 2030. 14%

ref IT25981 £30.00 bottle £360 dozen

WHY?
Nebbiolo is hardly an unexplored grape variety; after all it is the key component in the famous red wines of Barbaresco and Barolo. Much like pinot noir, nebbiolo can display lighter hued wines with beautiful, red fruit and sweet spice aromas that have made it one of the finest wines in the world. Nebbiolo does tend to produce wines with a fuller body and with more evident tannins which can often make it more suitable to be paired with richer dishes this can be a fantastic ‘supersized’ version of a pinot.
BORDEAUX
The most famous red wine in the world? Probably. It's certainly one of the most 'copied' or imitated. The maritime climate and the ‘perfect blend’ of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc (sometimes a little petit verdot and malbec too) come together to produce a wine that has been enjoyed for centuries. The process of blending allows different varieties to bring certain strengths and features to the wines — the structure from cabernet and the fruit flavours from merlot, for example. Because of this blending, there can also be a huge variation in style across the Bordeaux region. We’ve selected one of our best-selling Bordeaux reds to compare a range including a replica blend, a 100% cabernet and even a wine using a rare variety.

15.  ● Château Canada, Bordeaux Supérieur 2017
Delicious, well-priced claret from a small area between Côtes de Bourg and Fronsac. Majority merlot with 30% cabernet sauvignon providing freshness and backbone. Drink now to 2022. 13%
ref CB5801 £8.50 bottle £102 dozen

OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable
A lovely, ripe and fruity blend of cabernet and merlot, bringing two Bordeaux grape varieties together in a way that justifies the name 'Equilibre'. Soft, round and well balanced. Drink now to 2021. 13%
ref FC36441 £8.50 bottle £102 dozen

WHY?
Whilst this is a French iteration using the two most common Bordeaux varieties this has a key significant difference – terroir. Situated in the northern part of the Languedoc, there are some clear differences between this and Bordeaux. There is far less rain in this part of the world, and so vintage variation is less of a concern than in Bordeaux and wines tend to be more consistent... The average temperatures and sunshine hours are higher, so fruits are often well developed and can (although it's not always the case) produced wines higher in alcohol. This particular Domaine chooses to grow their cabernet on gravel soils and merlot on alluvial soils by a river side; mimicking the conditions of Bordeaux well!

OPTION B: Off the beaten track
17.  ● Weinert Cabernet Sauvignon 2008
Showing some notes of mellow maturity, cedar, tobacco and leather, but still with a firmish and vigorous palate, this red from Argentina is so lovely now, but will still improve. Drink now to 2025. 14.5%
ref AR4131 £13.95 bottle £167 dozen

WHY?
Argentine cabernet sauvignon can often be made in a more ‘fruit-bomb’ style and not comparable to old world Bordeaux, however Weinert has grown a cult following for its unique style. Most of their wines are aged for two to five years developing soft tannins and tertiary aromas such as cedar and leather more often associated with the old world. There is also an animal character to their wines caused by the yeast strain Brettanomyces which in small concentrations is thought by some to add complexity. For many others, it is a fault and is far less common in the new world — again, adding to the traditional charm’ of this winery!
OPTION C: Spend more and explore

18 ● MR de Compostella, Stellenbosch 2014*

An elegantly honed South African red made by Bruno Raats and Mzokhona Mvemve. A blend of Bordeaux grape varieties, led by cabernet franc, its tobacco and liquorice notes overlay dark spicy fruit with a hint of classy oak and fine tannin structure. Lovely. Drink now to 2020. 14.5%

ref SA12321 £47.00 bottle £564 dozen

*low stock

WHY?
Cabernet franc is an unsung hero of the wines of Bordeaux and in this blend it shines thanks to two specialists in the variety. 45% is cabernet franc along with 18% malbec, 17% cabernet sauvignon, 13% merlot and 7% petit verdot making up the rest – all the grape varieties of Bordeaux. The increased sunshine hours and lower rainfall of Stellenbosch mean this wine has higher alcohol and arguably silkier tannins when young allowing it to be enjoyed much sooner than many Bordeaux wines of the same price.

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FRUITY NEW WORLD RED WINES (ARGENTINIAN MALBEC)

Fruit-forward, rich red wines (especially those from the New World) have become increasingly popular over the past few decades. Wines such as malbec from Argentina have become a staple feature on most wine lists thanks to their easily recognisable and tasty fruit flavours alongside supple juicy tannins. They can often be drunk young and are affordable, easy to pronounce and to remember – you might call them ‘friendly wines’. So if you enjoy nothing more than a delicious, round malbec, such as the bestseller we have featured here, then we’ve got some alternatives that might surprise you.

19. ● Faldeos Nevados Malbec 2018

Made exclusively for us by Susana Balbo at her Agrelo base, Dominio del Plata, this rich, round, black-cherry scented Argentine malbec, underpinned by soft tannins, is a Society bestseller. Drink now to 2022. 14%

ref AR4011 £9.25 bottle £111 dozen

OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable

20 ● Cahors, Château de Hauterive 2016

The Filhol family have farmed this part of Vire-sur-Lot for generations and have well-exposed vines on gravel beds above the Lot River in the French south-west. Mostly malbec and a little merlot combine in this lovely, fruity and supple red with violet overtones. Drink now to 2022. 14.5%

ref FC36841 £8.50 bottle £102 dozen

WHY?
Whilst Argentina was the country that made malbec internationally famous, the variety is actually native to the South West of France and is even permitted in Bordeaux. After a severe frost in 1956 wiped out most of the malbec in the South West, growers found solace in the warmer climes of
Argentine. However Cahors, one of the only appellations still specialising in the variety, manages to make rich and vibrant wines from this varietal (albeit with more challenging growing conditions!) This particular wine uses some merlot in the blend to add softer, easy-to-drink tannins alongside the dark and brooding power of the malbec.

OPTION B: Off the beaten track
21.  • Áldás Egri Bikaver, St Andrea 2017
This Hungarian blend of eight varieties including kékfrankos, kadarka and pinot noir is a bigger and more generous wine than normal, thanks to the ripe 2017 vintage, packed with dark cherry and bramble flavours, with savoury cedar and bay-leaf notes.
Drink now to 2023. 14.5%
ref HUI1371 £11.95 bottle £143 dozen

WHY?
Being a blend, this wine has managed to take top components of eight different varieties and produce a wine that is (in our opinion) pretty universally appealing. Merlot makes up 29% of the blend so charming red fruits are in abundance as well as lush, velvety tannins and a decent alcohol level. The lead grape, however, is kékfrankos and is famed for being a crowd-pleaser packed with black and red fruits and with a spicy edge. 12 months in oak also give this wine added spice-notes and undoubtedly that new world appeal (even though it’s packed full of old world varieties).

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SAUTERNES
Few sweet wines have the status of Sauternes; the international celebrity of residual sugar. What makes this particular wine so special is the way it is grown and made – which can only be achieved because of a perfect growing environment or micro climate. The region’s proximity to the Garonne river means that morning mists and a mould called botrytis cinerea (AKA noble rot) defines its style. The rot causes ripe grapes to shrivel reducing the water content of the grapes – creating what are effectively raisins which are then pressed. This rot also imparts flavours creating incredibly complex wines so it’s possible to find lemon curd, marmalade, pineapple, peaches, flowers, pears, apricots, butterscotch, coconut and more! Because the volumes are so reduced, and harvesting is lengthy these wines tend to be very expensive.

22.  ○ [8] The Society’s Exhibition Sauternes 2015*
Beautifully floral Sauternes from the kings of noble rot, the Dubourdieux at Château Cantegril. This fresh and zesty blend is 93% semillon and 7% sauvignon blanc, with notes of citrus, candied pineapple and tangerine in abundance with a background note of marmalade and hay enveloped by fresh acidity.
Drink now to 2026. 13.5%
ref BW5871 £20.00 bottle £240 dozen
*low stock

OPTION A: Fail-safe and affordable
This is a glorious, succulent and peachy nectar from the Dordogne, made in the style of Sauternes. Though fully sweet, it retains great delicacy and freshness — a wine that would do justice to a pavlova. Drink now to 2024. 13.5%

ref FC35981 £13.50 bottle £162 dozen

WHY?
A Sauternes-style for under £14?! This wine uses the same grape varieties (sauvignon blanc, semillon and muscadelle) and the same processes but comes from further upstream and so cannot call itself Sauternes. It’s slightly lighter and less concentrated but matches the hallmark acidity and sweetness of its famous neighbour with classic apricot flavours. An ideal alternative.

OPTION B: Off the beaten track


A prize-winning Umbrian gem with an entrancing bouquet and flavours evocative of honey and apricot. A Barberani original to rival Sauternes with equally exotic aromatic bouquet and generous liquorous sweetness to match desserts but with a light clean touch. Drink now to 2025. 11%

ref IT26181 £25.00 50cl bottle £300 dozen

WHY?
Noble rot is not exclusive to the well-known corner of western France. In fact, noble rot occurs all over the world and can be found here in Italy’s Umbria where it is known as Muffa Nobile. This example, using the orvieto grape variety, gives the classic sweet and spicy aromas as well as high acidity and charming levels of sugar. It’s not an exact swap for Sauternes, but many would argue its delicacy is actually an improvement. We think there is a time and place for both!