

THE Golden Sabre

2021

Santé, Bonheur..
...Champagne !



The Magazine of the Confrérie du Sabre d'Or in the UK & Ireland



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Your Editor

REFLECTING on the past 20 months

Well, it's all over, bar the shouting. Or so we thought. Just when we believed the coast was clear, another wave of pandemic pandemonium swooped in. Fortunately, we had from the start selected a date well into the year for our Reopening Party. When midsummer's day was not to be our release from house arrest we were able to continue with our arrangements. The result is seen on our front cover.

We now have an array of words and expressions that were not in general use but are today commonplace. Coronavirus, Furlough, social-distance, self-isolation, Covid and Road Map. Life will never be quite the same and we shall learn to live with the virus. No change there then. We have been living with so many already, and our cool approach is helped by bubbling effervescence, in our hearts as well as in the glass.



With far less to report on due to the Covid this is a smaller edition of our journal but we shall return to normal for the next one as the events pile on in 2022.

So, take a glass of champagne and read the ramblings and enjoy the pictures of our members who have survived the past months and decided to carry on, with business as usual.

'Santé'

The Ambassador and his Council



Sam Rhodes, Julian White, Justin Rhodes, Judy Tayler-Smith, Gerard O'Shea, Dominique LARGERON, Vic Laws MBE and David Herbert

THE *Golden Sabre*

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From The Ambassador



At the time of writing this, we had only recently emerged from under the heavy stone of the pandemic. I can report to you that, during the long months, no stone was left unturned. We have kept the membership informed through the website and many of us have enjoyed virtual meetings.

My greatest worry was the sheer boredom and lack of club activity might lead to a general switching-off for our

members, resulting in a fall-off of the membership. The upside, if there is one under these circumstances, is our indomitable spirit which rises to the challenge of resisting illness and boredom. The other worry is that the disease might have taken several of us. From all the reports, we are mostly in good health, solidly sound, firm of purpose and ready for the next challenge- the reopening events and getting back to normal.



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Our membership has actually increased. The Voucher Gift that we introduced for this year has been successful because we have 50 new active members. It is important that they enjoy this first year, for them free of joining fee and subscription. It is also vital that they continue their membership next year and enjoy our events next year as well.

Meanwhile in Ireland, *The Shelbourne* also emerged in the summer this year and enjoyed reopening their weekly sabrage sessions, having launched their Laurent Perrier Champagne Terrace and Nisea Doddy shows us how to do the perfect sabrage.



Nisea Doddy, the Sommelier

I wish all our readers a great festive season and look forward to seeing everyone in 2022.



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The 20th Anniversary Gala Ball

Millenium Gloucester Hotel London



Autumn 2019

We returned to the hotel which had given us a great Tenth Anniversary Ball in 2009. A spectacular event with three pipers leading in the groups of Councillors, Echevins, Connétables and large numbers of new Chevaliers and Officers. The sabrage of the new Commandeurs and Grands Commandeurs preceded a dinner at which nothing smaller than magnums were served.







Step this way, Alicia





The new commanders



Bring on the Methualem!



A great party for us all

Grand Reopening Champagne Soirée

30th July 2021



Nearly 250 members and their guests rallied to our Reopening Tasting of Growers' Champagne at the Copthorne Tara Hotel, Kensington. Everyone enjoyed unmasking and drinking nine cuvées from the houses of Georges Vesselle, Jean Milan, Vincent Lasseaux and Philippe Brugnon with bowl food to match. It was an opportunity for a number of new members to make their novice sabrage.





Julian White & Vincent Lasseaux



'Great party, Gerard!'

Chinese banquet at The Phoenix Palace

The Year of the Rat, 2020 was brought in with a Chinese banquet at The Phoenix Palace. Was the rat a portent of what was to come? In the Chinese zodiac the Rat represents wealth and surplus due to their fast reproduction. Married couples prayed to the rat in the hope of having children. Our year of the rat was very different. Marriage was a problem, but reproduction was a likely occupation during the lockdowns.

The novice sabrage, with the Champagne Georges Vesselle non-vintage included Bruno Vesselle and his wife Emmanuelle, who joined us for this banquet with their champagne.



We sat down to enjoy a further five cuvées of the Champagne House – Georges Vesselle including their famous Bouzy Rouge, which Bruno introduced.

Smith & Wollensky Grand Tasting

In the same month, February, we squeezed in a grand tasting of 40 wines at Smith & Wollensky, arranged by Julian White.





JULIAN WHITE Agencies

Wonderful Champagne from

Philippe Brugnion 1er Cru, Rilly la Montagne
Jean Milan, Grand Cru, Oger
Georges Vesselle, Grand Cru, Bouzy

Superb Burgundy from

Domaines Vincent Bachelet of Chassagne-Montrachet;
Roger Belland of Santenay; Coste-Caumartin of Pommard;
Raoul Gautherin & Fils, Chablis; Chapelle, Santenay;
Camus Père & Fils of Gevrey-Chambertin,
Maisons Jean-Philippe Marchand and
Nicolas Potel and many other producers

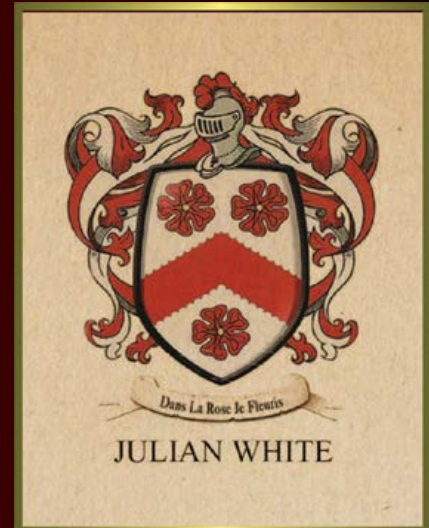
Beaujolais Crus of Jean-Paul Dubost

Superb Wines of all Regions

Loire Wines: Domaine Cherrier & Fils, Sancerre
and Domaine Cédric Bardin, Pouilly-Fumé

Bordeaux: Domaines Fabre, Cissac, Haut Médoc;
Vignobles Garzaro, Saint Emillion & Pomerol

Rhône & Provence & SW France: Maison de Cascavel;
Maison Brotte; Côtes du Rhône and Ventoux;
Châteauneuf du Pape; Domaine Barville; Les Vignobles Gayrel
Domaine La Boulandière, Pays d'Oc



Armagnac - Delord Frères;
Cognac - Jean Fillioux

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in bottles and Magnums

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The Lowdown on Lockdown or Reflections on a Zoom with a View



March 2020 heralded the transition to a world where all the parameters changed. Committed technophobes became adopters; masked people arriving at your door was no longer alarming; measures were only relevant if you stopped pouring; and dressing for dinner only required half an outfit, as long as you didn't stand up in front of your webcam! Judy and Simon Tayler-Smith have closely examined how they occupied their time.



During the extended time when everything we knew became a recollection of lost reality, the stalwart support of one friend that was never virtual remained - Champagne! Its cork could pop out when we couldn't, its bubbles were more active than most households and its personality couldn't be silenced by muting. It soothed us, it

schmoozed us and we all seemed to indulge in it. The British consumed far more Champagne than normal during lockdown, with retail sales by volume increasing 3% by the end of 2020 and an astonishing 13% in the festive period. All may have changed but clearly preferred tipples remained the same.

We spent the year and a quarter exploring an alternative reality that would make 'The Matrix' seem unremarkable, attending a wide range of Zoom and Team events that surely couldn't have been envisaged before lockdown. To paraphrase the movie's catchphrase: 'welcome to the unreal world'! From exuberant tastings of wine, whisky, gin, beer, smoked salmon and cheese, to Christmas lunches and black and white-tie dinners with breakout rooms for different courses, to walks, tours and bingo; the variety of what could be done with a delivery service and a computer was truly amazing.

We even spent *Burns Night* live from the virtual surroundings of Burns Cottage in Alloway, with a raft of attendees from around the globe.



So much was suddenly possible and geographies, time zones and occasionally even dress sense were meaningless. The only pre-requisites were a good internet connection, the ability to operate the mute button and the understanding that a conversation doesn't really work between 42 people at the same time. If all else failed you could just sit back, smile and pour another glass knowing there was always

safety in numbers, the toilet was nearby and you didn't need to drive home.

Reflecting on a few of the memorable highlights in the wonderful world of Zoom and virtual events, we have opted to look back at a small sample. Many Sabre d'Or members joined in a number of occasions. In the days of the first lockdown on 26th June 2020, Julian White led a very enjoyable tasting of his own wines for the *Cripplegate Ward Club*. The event showcased wines with interesting facts, amusing anecdotes and convivial conversation.



Later in December, during lockdown phase 2, Gerard, our ambassador and Julian were guest speakers at a splendid Christmas Champagne Party. The event was organised by *Women in the Livery* and attended by a virtual audience of over 100 people.



Gerard played a video from the 'QI' programme of Julian demonstrating sabrage, the occasion when he gained his moniker of *'Julian the Magnificent'*.

They both provided a characteristically flamboyant overview of buying and tasting Champagne. The event concluded with a hat competition. Remaining in lockdown phase 2, the last of the



events to spotlight was the 20th Anniversary of the *City Livery Wine Circle*. Julian presented on the theme of organic and biodynamic wines, taking in examples from the Rhône and Burgundy. It was a fitting way to toast this milestone anniversary. We all then entered an extended phase of lockdown, with promises of full relaxation in July. By the time you read these lines we will, hopefully, have a respite from the loss of normality, an opportunity to 'see' real people. During this dreadful period, we have been seeing on screen some real people and most certainly some great functions, which Zoom and Teams provided.

In closing, a particularly unusual memory of the pandemic was being installed as a Warden of the *Worshipful Company of Basketmakers*. This involved being badged and gowned whilst seated in order to stay in view of the webcam. We also can't sign off without mentioning the two Livery Past Masters' Associations formed during the pandemic for 2020 and 2021, respectively named 'The Zoomers' and 'The Unmuteables'.

You may have periodically experienced the 'elephant in the Zoom', whereby there's been a burgeoning topic that no-one has had the temerity to mention. Perhaps there was a case of 'antisocial distancing', where someone used health precautions as an excuse to snub those they found to be a source of irritation. We do hope you managed to have some enjoyable times during lockdown, whether your preferred tippable was Champagne or even a 'Furlough Merlot'. Here's to what's left of 2021 and the opportunity to meet again over a glass of Champagne or two in the best Confrérie tradition..Santé.

Judy is the Embassy Chancellor and Maître des Armes, while Simon is Connétable de Londres.

“Are You a Placomusophile?”

asks John Foley

Ouch! – sounds painful, but not at all. In fact, being one is rather fun. Open a bottle of fizz and not only do you get to enjoy the contents but part of the packaging, too.

The term ‘placomusophile’ derives from plaque de muselet – the metal cap or plaque secured to the cork by the wire muzzle or muselet – plus of course ‘phile’, denoting someone with a fondness for something.

Although colourfully decorated plaques (also called capsules) have been around since the early 20th century, collecting them – placomusophilia – is a relatively recent hobby, having only really taken off since the mid 1980s. It is now increasingly popular, with thousands of enthusiasts not just in France but all over the world. Our Ambassador Emeritus has a large collection. Even our Ambassador Gerard O’Shea keeps a fine display on his bedroom wall, to remind himself of past Champagne tours.



Gerard’s Tour Memories

With more than 30,000 different Champagne caps in existence placomusophilia might also be a never-ending hobby. Designs range from the brand name to coats of arms, logos, vineyard implements, local scenes, portraits of animals or family members, and historical figures such as Jules Verne and Van Gogh or fictional characters such as Poirot. Some producers regularly commission new ones – for a particular cuvée, or to celebrate an anniversary or other special event such as the Millennium or the World

Cup, or merely to distinguish from their previous caps. De Venoge, for example (one of around 1800 Champagne houses), has created around 250 different plaques. Other houses change their designs less frequently.



Brugnon Placomusophilia

Since 1996 the ‘bible’ for the serious cap collector has been the Guide Lambert. Originally one volume, it has now grown to three, comprising a total of more than 700 pages with colour photos of most caps, plus the approximate value of each, with prices ranging from less than a euro for the most common to €1000 and above for rarer designs. To buy the most sought-after, Pol Roger 1923, would set you back in excess of €4000.

As a Champagne Order we gloss quickly over the idea of collecting the capsules of other sparkling wines. Fortunately, the majority of collectors concentrate on Champagne.

Incidentally, to encourage collectors some Champagne houses have created series of caps purely for sale. Such caps, which will never see a bottle of bubbly, are hardly the real McCoy!

But to return to the original question: ‘are you a placomusophile?’ If you’re not and would like to be, or have doubles to swap with other collectors within the Confrérie, contact **John Foley at** info.erewbon@mac.com



Our editor captured in capsules!

It was the evening of **Flying Corks** across the Grand Union Canal as **The Boat Inn** celebrated the End of Summer Sabrage party.



A great time was had by all.

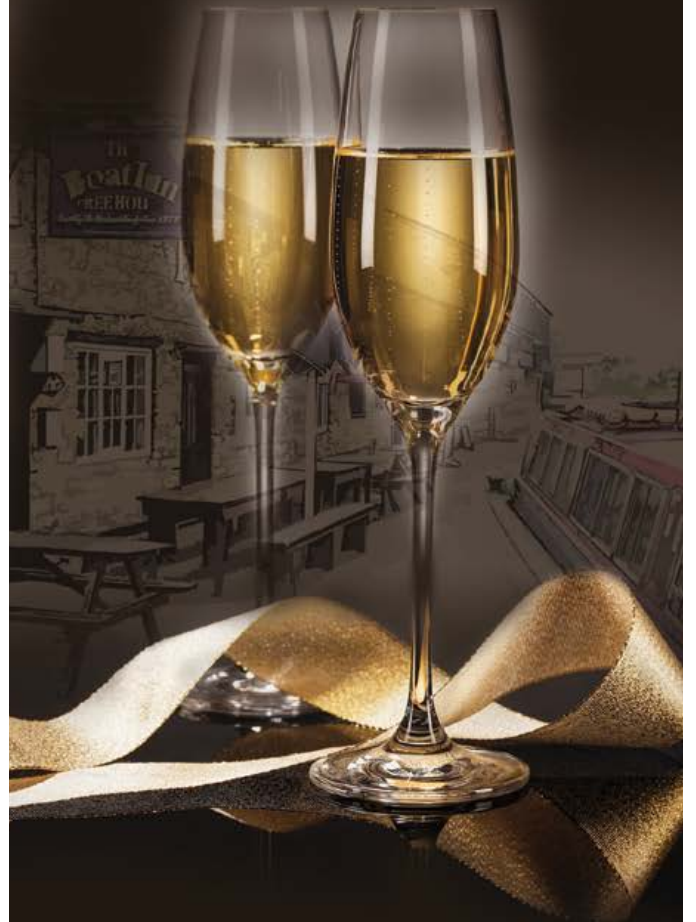
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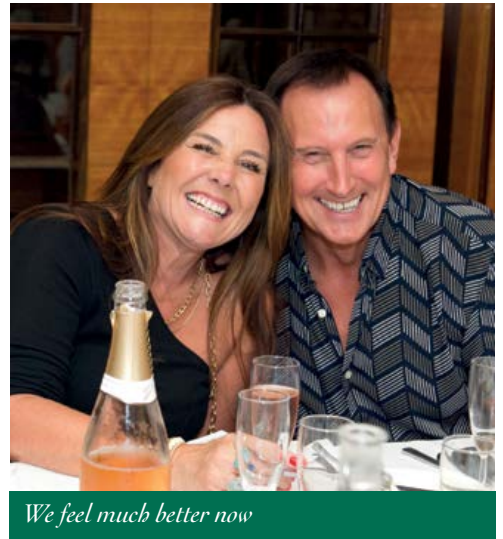
Vincent Lasseaux limbering up



More please!



Rosé makes my eyes go funny



We feel much better now



Famille Collier



Howzat



Guess who?



'Just a tincture'



Locked down. No, locked in cellar

Chelsea Flower Show 2021

Chelsea Flower Show was in September instead of May and some celebs made it to the Jacques Amand Stand for sabrage and Champagne.



Crystal



Craig Revel Horwood



Antbea Turner



Downton's Carson Again



Antbea Turner and Mark Armstrong



Constant en Famille



Big Moments need Big Bottles



We have a new d'Artagnan

The Caveaux

A full directory of the Caveaux de Sabrage will be included in The Golden Sabre 2022 and the following years. Meanwhile for the details of the Hotels and Restaurants that are Caveaux de Sabrage go to www.goldensabre.co.uk/caveaux



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