



MICHAEL BROADBENT

States' evidence: Virginia 1, California 0

Just my luck to be sitting in bed on the most gloriously sunny Sunday of the year, battling with a bout of cold as I draft my monthly article. Could it be the onset of swine fever? Daphne, down to earth as always, says it is more likely to be wine fever – infected by Port not pork.

At the end of May, on an equally glorious day, my son, Bartholomew, who now lives in Virginia, drove Daphne and I to Monticello, to visit the hilltop Founding Father shrine, and to do some research at the magnificent Jefferson Library. A light lunch had been arranged at the nearby Barboursville Vineyards. We were ushered by our charming host, Luca Paschina, into a dining room overlooking a sea of vines with the (literally) Blue Ridge Mountains in the background. It could not be called a light lunch, though the food produced by their renowned and innovative lady chef was appropriate and delectable. But seven wines?

A terrific start was the estate's staggeringly (actually the staggering came later) good 2004 Viognier Reserve which had the quality and flavour to match – even exceed – Rhône's finest Condrieu. Lovely colour, natty nose, extremely good flavour and balance, dry but not austere, its alcohol a reasonable 13%. Then the 2007, paler, an unexceptional young white wine aroma, slightly sweeter, a prickle of spritz, refreshing.

The three Barboursville reds were also served in ascending vintage order. The first, the 1998 Octagon III Edition, a Bordeaux blend of 70% to 80% Merlot, the rest Petit Verdot and the Cabernets. Sweet, full, rich, excellent flavour with a

dry finish and, by any standards, superb. Next came the 2001 Octagon V Edition: deep, with a velvety sheen and fragrant bouquet. Good flavour, firm, with a very dry finish. Even better with more bottle age. The third red was the 2005 Octagon VIII Edition, a lighter style, slightly singed nose, sweeter, positive, with quite a bite.

Why, might you ask, was the range named Octagon? Because the wealthy Mr Barbour was a friend of the multi-talented Thomas Jefferson, whose architectural gems always included an octagonal design. Barbour's early 19th-

'The quarter-bottles of Californian wine served on our flight to the US were beyond redemption'

century mansion was destroyed by fire, its walls still standing below his vineyard.

The 2004 Viognier and 1998 Octagon warranted a four-star-plus rating. The next, though, was of a style that I have never really taken to, the 2001 Malvasia Reserve Passito made from Moscato Ottonel grapes sun dried on straw in the traditional Italian manner. The colour was a brilliantly rich gold; its grapey nose reminded me of honey and apricots; very sweet, of course, aromatic, with a slightly raisiny flavour and excellent acidity. It outshone, though only just, the 2005: amber gold; exotic Muscat grapiness,

apricots again and a whiff of caramel. Not as sweet as the hot vintage of 2001 and with more of a bite. Both five-star.

Alas the over-long, though delightful, sojourn at Barboursville knocked our schedule to bits. Bartholomew drove like the wind and we arrived back at his house in Richmond half an hour before the advertised start of a tasting at the Commonwealth Club of Broadbent (not me) Selection wines. I was knackered and none too pleased, but we just arrived in time. To my relief, I was provided with a chair and table at which I could sign copies of my books. The club itself is dignified and impressive, but the after-tasting dinner started with a hopeless Mojito, just passable food but, thank goodness, Bartholomew's top-selling Spy Valley Chardonnay from New Zealand.

We try to avoid transatlantic travel but needs must, and I, as a former British Airways wine consultant, always try to fly the flag. There have been changes and cuts, but the quarter-bottles served to Economy Plus passengers on our flight to the US were beyond redemption.

Daphne and I tried the white and red, the former being Cecchetti's Redtree California Chardonnay 2006, the red: Frei Brothers' Redwood Creek California Cabernet Sauvignon 2008. What a travesty! At least even this negative note might do something to address a reader's letter (May 2009 issue) about the lack of coverage in *Decanter* of American wines. Not much choice really. The top California wines are scarce and expensive, which leaves us with Gallo, whose wines totally dominate supermarkets and lesser retailers' sales. Anyway, to end the BA experience, our Business Class night-flight back was speedy and reasonably comfortable. We stuck to the French selection: an acceptable Sancerre and a 2004 chateau-bottled claret. **D**

Michael Broadbent is a senior consultant to Christie's and has been writing on wine for more than 50 years

WHAT (ELSE) MICHAEL'S BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH...

BEMOANING BEAUJOLAIS

Must be my Yorkshire blood but I cannot resist remnant lists, discontinued lines or clear-outs. But I occasionally find, to my cost, wines that are undesirable, past their best or which never had a best. A recent purchase of half-bottles of **Fleurie** was near to disastrous, the first

being a **Domaine de Roche-Gillon 2006** and a **Domaine de Chignard, Les Meriers 2007**, neither with a discernible Gamay aroma or flavour. Like motorcars, there is a glut of wine, and the endless hectares of Beaujolais are prime offenders. Time they cut down and tried harder.