

James The Sommelier - Aperitif Wines – Floc de Gascogne

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

Aperitif wines

As digestif/dessert wines have been covered it would make sense to comment on their antithesis- aperitif wines. As the digestif wines are consumed after a meal or with a dessert, the aperitifs are consumed before. Where a digestif is normally sweet, an aperitif can be bitter. Where the digestif is the cherry on the cake to quench ones hunger, an aperitif is purposefully meant to stimulate appetite- to stoke the fire as it were. You get the picture. They both have opposing properties but compliment each other as the perfect book ends to a meal.

Again, however, we have another type of drink based on wine and with a story, a history that was born from a *raison d'etre*. Like Port wine, the basis of an aperitif was created for a practical function. A French chemist developed a wine based medicine to allow for a more pleasant way to take quinine as a way of fighting malaria. Due to quinine's bitter taste he concocted a potion with added herbs and spices and the brew was so well received that the recipe was guarded ever since.

Who would of thought? A alcoholic beverage coming from something medicinal. Either way, the aperitifs on offer nowadays are few and far between but as a general rule there are three types that compliment respective food groups: port-style, vermouth-based and sherry-based. Of course, there are others such as ouzo, which is the traditional drink Greece, and also arak that is mostly drunk in the Middle East and served with mezze.

Floc de Gascogne- Port-style

The classically French aperitif wine, Floc de Gascogne, is one that should be tried at any opportunity. It stands to reason that something that has been on-running from the 16th century should be given the benefit of the doubt. The Floc is a *vin de liqueur* meaning a fortified wine (much like Port) in the French style. It is made from a third of Armagnac and two thirds of grape juice. In the typical French way, rules of appellation must be followed, which means that both the ingredients must come from the same vineyard. As it is a blend, I suppose it would be cheating to nick someone else's quality grapes!

Floc is produced in either a white or a rosé form. Both are sweet and between 16-18% in alcohol content. Like sherry or port it comes in a Tom Thumb version of a wine glass and is typically served chilled but never on ice. Almond, jasmine, roses, honey, black fruit and condiments are characteristic notes. The variety of tastes and flavors is a common trend throughout aperitif wines stemming from Joseph Dubonnet's aim to take away the unpleasant taste of quinine in his ingested mosquito repellent.

Tips: Do not store Floc for longer than three months after opening.

For more information about wine join our wine classes at That Little Wine Bar, 54 Chow Thye Road,
George Town, Penang

Email info@thatlittlewinebar.com for details