

Ulster Business resident wine critic, Philip Rees had a busy summer season during which he was a guest at three wine tastings hosted by well-known Belfast-based dealers. This month, he tells us how he got on...

FRENCH CONNECTION

At a tasting hosted by Bottle Green, seven wines were presented from their French Connection initiative, which seeks to offer an Old World entry level range of wines to compete with the New.

The range is designed to provide good value wine in a modern, approachable style that retains its French character. They certainly offer an excellent alternative and are definitely worth trying.

The wines tasted were a Sauvignon Blanc/Grenache (£4.99); Reserve Viogner (£4.99); Reserve Chardonnay (£4.99); Shiraz/Grenache (£4.49);



Reserve Merlot (£4.99); Classic Cotes du Rhone (£4.99) and a Classic Bordeaux (5.99).

I would highlight three for special mention.

The light style Viogner was very



A lingering taste of summer...

well made and at £4.99 is excellent value. This is a good wine and would go well with aromatic dishes.

The Côtes du Rhone showed good fruit and tannins together with a little spice and this is a good value wine at £4.99.

And the Classic Bordeaux is from a number of producers and at £5.99, compares favourably with other offerings. This predominately Merlot-based wine showed good fruit ripe with tannins and a fair finish.

French Connection can be sourced from Stewarts Wine Barrels and from independents.

JAMES NICHOLSON

James Nicholson's tasting was an excellent affair with almost 30 producers represented. I would highlight a few of the more tempting offerings.

I always enjoy well-made wines from Alsace and Jean-Christophe Bott, Domaine Bott-Geyl certainly falls into this category.

The five display wines were excellent and I would highlight two:

The Riesling Riquewihl 2001 had a very good nose and palate and is ready to drink. The Pinot Gris Furstentum Grand Cru 2001 is a beautifully constructed, feminine-style wine, showing finesse, some sweetness and excellent length. It will keep for at least 10 years.

Alex Krause from Bonny Doon was in excellent form. All their wines are good, but I find it hard to pass the Sangiovese.

Alex informed me that Bonny Doon would be adopting the Stelvan closure for all their wines from next year.

Isaure de Pontbriaud-Cribiore from Loire-based Domaine du Closel showed five very well-made wines from the region. The Clos du Papillon 2002 will age well and expressed good fruit and length. The Clos du Papillon 2003 (moelleux) is sweet, subtle and elegant.

Finally, Zuani, an excellent wine from Italy (Friuli), displayed super fruit on the nose and palate accompanied by some mineral notes. It was well balanced and complemented by a long finish.

WILLIAM COLE VINEYARDS

LA Drinks recently launched a new Chilean range from William Cole, an American who began life in Wyoming.

Nine wines were presented for tasting, covering three ranges: Mirador (£6.99); Alto Vuelo (£7.99) and Columbine (£9.99).

I have selected three wines which I think stood out:

Mirador Sauvignon Blanc 2004 showed lemons and other citrus fruits with some floral aromas on the nose and palate combining with good crisp acidity.

Alto Vuelo Sauvignon Blanc 2004 expressed lemons and grapefruit on the nose and palate and, like the Mirador, had good crisp acidity. The wine also had a good finish.

Alto Vuelo Carmenere 2003 showed excellent jammy fruit on the nose and palate. This big wine was quite soft and had a good finish.