

Churchill's Tastingresult



Friday April 14th, Alfred & Kamilla, Sverigesgade 10, Odense, Denmark

It is 11:45 on a Friday morning, and the sun occasionally provides warmth between the threatening clouds and into Alfred & Kamilla's beautiful and inviting premises at the harbor in Odense. Six tables are covered with white tablecloths in a room with high ceilings, exposed beams and plenty of windows. Together, it creates an airy, open, bright and inviting setting for a special tasting with excited and expectant guests.



The first small steps to this tasting took place over four years ago, when Henrik G, in connection with another arrangement with Churchill's, opened up and suggested to Johnny Graham that he could hold the winemakers dinner at The Vintage Port Club, as we do at an annual basis with a selected house or brand.



After his acceptance, many agreements have been made, partly postponed by Corona for over two and a half years, and finally by Johnny's appointment as "Winemaker of the Year—Fortified Wines", by Grandes Escolhas Magazine, at a big event on March 3rd this year. A great achievement to be proud of!

Well, back to the harbor of Odense. With a mixture of the club's own and those kindly lent by Niels Strøjer, in the days leading up to this, we had shipped a good 750 glasses and 45 decanters to Alfred & Kamilla. That's what it takes when 33 people have to taste their way through 21 wines—including calculation for what can break.

To the sound of the 12 strikes of the church bells, we set about opening and decanting four magnums and 34 normal bottles. The decanters were labeled with the





year and refrigerated as soon as possible. After approx. one hour and fifteen minutes, the task was done, and we could happily state that not only did we manage to get all the corks up i one piece, but even more gratifying was that the aroma was fine in all the bottles. And yet; The aroma in both bottles of the Gricha 2005s was "special", but we didn't think there was anything wrong with it. It would later turn out that nothing seemed to be wrong with the taste.

Ricardo Nunes regrettably, for personal reasons, had to cancel shortly before departure. However, he had previously, together with Johnny, set the taste order. It thus became a journey from the first vintage in 1982, chronologically through the years, and up to the most recent wines from 2020. In order for the tasting to be both manageable and the wines not too hot, the whole setup was divided into two flights, where the first flight included 11 wines up to and including Gricha 2004, and the second started with 2005, and thus containing the last 10 wines.



To briefly return to the corks, it was Johnny's specific wish that they be taken up with Durand or the like, with a view to getting the corks all up in one piece. He did not give a thought to the fact that we could thus end up ruining the text on the corks, which for some has a partly great meaning and significance. The corks from the two 1982 and the one from 1985 magnum were very wet. The 1985 was even so loose, that we were concerned about the contents, but it appeared that the bottle's seal had preserved the contents. Before the tasting, we were therefore aware of two vintages, but not enough to any greater concern.

One hour before the start, at 14:30, we started pouring the wines, and a little over three quarters of an hour later, all the glasses were full - well, now I say full. We had respectively 16 and 17 glasses for each bottle, so approx. 4 cl. for each glass and in that way, a little less than we usually do for a tasting. Bearing in mind that we got 21 glasses and most of the



participants also had to participate in the subsequent dinner with another three ports and three wines, the thought was that the level was fine.



Johnny had prepared well and had brought personal notes for each wine and vintage that he shared with us; Winter and summer weather and temperature, harvest start time and the wines' composition of grapes/wines from different farms.

He started by telling about his own family background and origins (as a Graham) and how the house Churchill's and the name came about. This is how we were also introduced to his wife, Caroline, who has provided her name to the house, and also sat by her husband's side all evening.

Johnny is now a man of mature age, which is why he has also left part of the responsibility for running the company to his eldest daughter Zoe and her husband (and American) Ben. However, Johnny still wants to continue the fun bits of the operation, for example this evenings event. As a 71-year-old, it was therefore an achievement that he for three solid hours, was standing up and led us through the wines, gave his comments and answered questions. Respect for that.

At this point we could start tasting the wines. It was important for Johnny to point out that his goal has been and still is, that the foundation of the house's style is that there is freshness in the wine and that the wines appears drier than average.





The next three hours were spent tasting our way through 21 port wines, only interrupted by a short break of approx. 15 minutes, during which we poured and distributed second flight glasses on the tables. We had a table with glasses ready, and a good group of helpers who took the glasses away as they were poured. A method which turned out to have many advantages.

Johnny's stories about wines and flavors were well complemented by the participants' sporadic questions about among other content in the different vintages, production methods, grape varieties, and single vineyard production. He talked about among other things, the importance of the milestone that occurred in 1999, when they chose to buy Quinta da Gricha, thus gaining control over the entire production process. He also told the story that they failed to get the fermentation started in the fall of 1999 because there had been no production on the farm for many years, and the natural yeast cells were therefore not present in the production environment. They had to transport the must elsewhere, in order to initiate the fermentation process and continue production.

When we came to Gricha 2005, it was partly the first wine in the second flight, and for Johnny, it was important to taste it against the previous and last bottle in the first flight, Gricha 2004. The background is that Gricha 2005 for Johnny is to denote as the quintessence of Quinta da Gricha—which he therefore describes as a classic Quinta da Gricha port wine. Thoughts back to the smell of the wine a few hours ago began to swirl in my head, but for no reason at all. Although the color of the wine was light, the aroma and taste were flawless, which is also reflected in the score.

This is followed by the young and very young wines. Of which several do very well, especially 2011, which ends up—relatively clear—at the top of the participants' evaluation.



Several of the participants were surprised that there—the year's greatness taken in consideration – a Gricha was not made for the year. In addition, Johnny could explain that it had also been made, but because the bottle manufacturer had announced after bottling that due to a mistake, there were glass residues in the bottles, they had to throw it all away.

Among other things, it was said about the last bottles that 2017 was the first time ever, that the harvest was started and the grapes picked, already in August and that Gricha 2019 is Ricardo Pinto's favourite.

Thus we came to the participants' vote and evaluation of the wines. Of the 31 participating members and guests, 26 chose to submit scores, which ended up like this:

Plads	Vin	Point
1	Churchill's 2011	92,5
2	Quinta da Gricha 2005	91,9
3	Churchill's 2000	91,7
4	Quinta da Gricha 2004	91,7
5	Churchill's 1982	91,5
6	Churchill's 2017	91,4
7	Churchill's 1994	91,3
8	Churchill's 2016	91,1
9	Quinta da Gricha 1999	90,8
10	Quinta da Gricha 2020	90,7
11	Churchill's 2020	90,6
12	Quinta da Gricha 2019	90,5
13	Quinta da Gricha 2015	90,4
14	Churchill's 1997	90,4
15	Churchill's 2007	90,0
16	Quinta da Gricha 2003	89,6
17	Churchill's 2003	89,4
18	Quinta da Agua Alta 1992	89,3
19	Churchill's 1985	89,0
20	Quinta da Gricha 2007	89,0
21	Churchill's 1991	89,0

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20	Quinta da Gricha 2007	89,0

- The following bottles were in magnum: Churchill's 1985, Gricha 1999, Churchill's 2000 and Churchill's 2003. All other bottles came in normal size.
- As previously stated, Churchill's 2011 ended up at the very top, with Gricha 2005 on second place, and Churchill's 2000 and Gricha 2004 in the following places.
- I notice that no wines scores below 89.0 points.
- The young wines score relatively high, and higher than the old ones; The wines in the first flight score 90.3 points and those in the second flight score 90.8 points.



- Churchill's wines score 90.7 points, while Gricha's wines score only 0.1 point lower, with 90.6 points.
- The magnum bottles score 90.2 points and the normal bottles score 90.6 points.
- There are only two wines from before they bought Gricha in 1999 that reach the top 10 (1982 and 1994).
- Agua Alta 1992 scores 89.3 points. Several questioned whether it was representative in smell and taste, which Johnny could confirm it was. Wine/grapes from Agua Alta are an essential component of Churchill's in many of the other years.
- There were three vintages with both Churchill's and Gricha; In two of them, Gricha scored the highest (2003 and 2020), Churchill's in 2007.
- Everyone's score on all wines added together gave a score of 90.6 points.



After this, the tasting was over for most of the participants, who thus left for approx. 150 meters over to the Alfred & Kamillas restaurant itself, where the table was set for dinner. Those who didn't have a ticket to the dinner, enjoyed the last drops of their favorite glass from the tasting.

It had now started to rain a little bit, but this did not seem to affect the participants mood to a considerable degree. After a regrettably too warm dry white, we found our seats and got ready for an exciting dinner consisting of four courses from Brian Matzen and his team, accompanied by five wines from Johnny Graham and his team.

For starters, a fresh creamy mussel soup was served with Grafite Branco 2021. There were two main courses, partly a pork rilette, cornotto with mushrooms and green herbs, plus a Grafite Touriga National 2014.



Then duck breast with variations of onion and celery cooked in cream, with Grafite Grande Reserva 2014. For dessert we had caramel, pineapple, thyme , figs and ice cream with nutmeg, to which both a 20 and a 30 year tawny were served.

A very good evening, with great wines, which ended in the same way as it started. The president thanked Henrik Gorm for his great effort in ensuring that both the tasting and the dinner came together. Then, of course, both Caroline and especially Johnny for the history and personal stories he has shared with us. On behalf of the club, Robert therefore gave a pair of turtle doves from Kaj Bojesen, as a symbol of partly the love that exists between spouses and partly the love they have put into the wine they make and we have been allowed to enjoy.

From the board, a big thank you must go to all participants for contributing to make such a beautiful evening.

