

January 4, 2008

## Northern Neck Uncorked - Meeting Summary

Susan Vecchione with her presentation of "Traditional Sailing Wines" entertained Northern Neck Uncorked, in its first meeting as an AWS Chapter on January 4th. Her presentation detailed the evolution of wine transported over waterways ranging from ancient mariners to sailors of the recent past. Water (and wine) tended to go bad on long voyages, but fortified alcoholic beverages fared better. Her presentation focused primarily on wine but included a mead-like beverage, Midas Touch Ancient Ale, as shown below.

Ozeki Hakono Sake'

Midas Touch Ancient Ale

Phtinithe – Retsina

Haan – Viognier Ratafia

Blandy's Madeira Bual (5 year old)

Blandy's Madeira Malmsey (15 year old)

*Vitis vinifera sylvestris* is hypothesized to be the oldest wild grape from which all our modern grapes came, with archaeological evidence from 8000-3000 B.C! Susan presented wines such as the Sake', served warm. There is archaeological evidence that Sake' was produced from rice and wild grapes as early as 7000 BC.

Her second offering was an ale, Midas Touch, with known ingredients of barley, white Muscat grapes, honey & saffron which were found in the drinking vessels in King Midas' tomb. This ale is actually the oldest-known fermented beverage in the world! It was an interesting drink, but more "beer like" than "wine like."

Pliny the Elder, the famous 1st century A.D. Roman encyclopedic, devoted a good part of one of his books to the problem of preventing wine from turning to vinegar. Tree resins--pine, cedar, and often terebinth (which Pliny described as the "best and most elegant" resin)--were added to Roman wines for just this purpose. Susan presented Phtinithe, a Greek Retsina, which was an example of resinated wines, made by seeping tea bags of resin into the must. It had a singularly unique taste, but not unpleasant; more milder in taste than commercially available Retsina.

A ratafia is a fruit liqueur made by steeping fruit in alcohol for a couple of months to produce a deliciously scented sweet drink. This particular ratifia was produced from the Viognier grape from both free run and pressings juices and neutral spirits enhanced by maturation in French oak for 18 months. It makes a very nice dessert wine or standalone aperitif.

The last two offerings were Madeira, differing by maturity and grape type. Madeira's popularity increased after the surprising discovery that the flavors improved during long tropical voyages. Malvasia (also known as Malmsey or Malvazia), Bual(or Boal), Verdelho, and Sercial are the major grape types. Susan's selections included the Blandys 5 year old, which was produced from the Bual grape. The last was the Madeira Malmsey, produced from the Malvasia grape, both tasty Madeiras!

The evening's wines were accompanied with Sushi, English cheese, goat cheese and Baklava. It was truly an interesting presentation!