

One of the things that makes wine interesting is the sheer breadth of its scope and variety.

And for those people who think they already know it all, that's impossible; even the most learned wine writers are always learning more. That's why tastings such as the one I attended at Hanging Ditch in Manchester recently are so valuable. It was hosted by local wine writer Simon Woods as a vehicle for exploring his latest book 101 Wine FAQs.

Exploring wine inevitably throws up some questions as the title of his book suggests.

Answering them through a selection of wines handpicked by Simon himself made for a very entertaining evening.

How does a novice choose from 100s of bottles on the shelves? Ferggettina Franciacorta Miledi 2013, Italy (£30 Hanging Ditch)

A great example of wine that comes as a package: a lovely sparkler in a fabulous looking bottle.

Despite the old adage that you can't judge a book (bottle) by its cover (label) wine-makers across the world know that bottles and labels sell wines and make them stand out from the crowd. The crowd here may be prosecco, the tank fermented fizz that's currently the in-vogue sparkler. This beauty, however, is a Franciacorta from Lombardy in Northern Italy and is made according to Methode Champenoise from Chardonnay much like a blanc de blancs from Champagne. It's floral



and richly textured with some biscuity bite to the palate.

Can wine be made anywhere in the world? Changyu Moser XV White Cabernet Sauvignon 2016, China (£18.50 HD)

I've mentioned this estate in a remote part of China before, with dry, high-altitude conditions similar to parts of south America. It's an incredibly difficult location to get to,

but the Chinese have diverted considerable resources to making it a success. Strangely this is a white wine made from Cabernet, showing that if you remove the skins immediately you'll get white wine whichever grapes you use. I found this a little similar to a southern French white from the Rhone with slightly more zesty.



Domaine Jones Fitou

Do women make better tasters than men? Domaine Jones Fitou 2015, France (£17.50 HD)

Simon recalled a tasting some time ago when it was suggested to a wine professional that a wine was 'feminine'. "What?" he replied, "you

mean, hard, bitter and mean."

In truth, the idea you can taste a wine and decide whether it was made by a woman or a man relies on some stereotypes that need to be debunked. Katie Jones, originally from Leicestershire, has overcome some vindictive and jealous opposition in France to make this delicious Fitou. Made from very old vines it's savoury and herbal on the nose while the palate is packed with concentrated,

sweetish fruit. Over its first few vintages, it has single-handedly resurrected my interest in Fitou.

■ **Simon Woods' 101 Wine FAQs is available at his website and Amazon for £9.**