

Winter 2007

# Grapestalk

The magazine of the Association of Small Direct Wine Merchants

## Small is beautiful

The virtues of buying wine from small producers

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Judging Wine

### Spotlight

Pinotage

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# Trusty tastings

**ON SATURDAY 11TH** November, ASDW members visited the historic Canons Ashby House in Northamptonshire. This was the third tasting event organised by the ASDW but the first at a National Trust property – a format which is set to be repeated after the success of this first venture.

Over 200 visitors came to visit the inaugural Canons Ashby Wine Fair, attracted by the combination of a beautiful historic setting and an array of fantastic wines from around the world.

For a minimal entry fee of just £1, visitors were able to taste some unusual wines of real quality from France, Italy, Spain, Australia, Germany and Austria. Many took the opportunity to stock up on



*'This popular and successful event helped us to attract an additional 250 visitors to the property on the day'*

Paul Hatfield, Property Manager

these special wines for Christmas.

Canons Ashby House dates from Elizabethan times and took its name from a 13th century Augustinian priory nearby, of which only St. Marys Church remains. Noted for

its Elizabethan wall paintings and rare Jacobean plasterwork, Canons Ashby also boasts beautiful formal gardens and an orchard dating back to the 16th century. Though now owned by the National Trust, the Dryden family have lived in the house for centuries, most famous amongst their number the poet John Dryden (1631-1700).

The house and gardens are open from 17th March to 30th September 2007. Check the Trust's website [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk) for details or call Canons Ashby on 01327 861900.

The ASDW will return to Canons Ashby for a summer tasting event on Saturday 2nd June. Check [www.asdw.co.uk/events.htm](http://www.asdw.co.uk/events.htm) for details.



## From the editor

**OUR THIRD ISSUE** in some ways answers the question of what we are all about. Paul Howard gives his frank reasons on page nine for seeking out merchants like those of us who are members of the ASDW and tells you why you should consider buying wines made at vineyards like the Domaine des Anges (p8) or from regions such as the rather unknown Jura (p6).

Once you get to know your wines and your grape varieties such as Pinotage (p4), you too may be asked to travel the other side of the world to judge a wine competition (p11) or if you simply haven't the time, you may prefer to indulge in a spot of grape picking at harvest time (p19).

I must take this opportunity to thank Warren Edwardes, our first Chairman, for his energetic and successful stewardship of the ASDW in its first year and know that Nick Dobson and his committee will continue to make this association such a happy and successful one.

As before, we are very keen to hear from our readers and welcome contributions, articles and suggestions on features for future issues. Please email us at [grapestalk@asdw.org.uk](mailto:grapestalk@asdw.org.uk).

Stefan Reynolds

# French drinkers to lose out to the US

**FRANCE, THE WORLD'S** biggest consumer of wine, will lose its crown to the US by 2010, according to a survey by the London-based International Wine and Spirit Record. French consumption is expected to drop 9.3 percent between 2005 and 2010 to 24.9 million hectolitres, having already fallen by 11.1% to four billion bottles between 2001 and 2005. It is also predicted that Italians will be out-drinking their neighbours within three years.

'France is obviously the country with the most significant decline in wine consumption,' Jean-Marie Chadronnier, a Bordeaux wine maker and the president of Vinexpo, said

at a press conference in Paris. 'Consumption has halved in the past 50 years. We hope the declining trend is close to its end.'

U.S. consumption is set to rise 19 percent to 27.3 million hectolitres and will also become the biggest in terms of the value of sales by 2010, expected to be worth \$22.75 billion which is also a 19 percent increase.

The study was commissioned by the Bordeaux VinExpo trade fair, and surveys

114 wine consuming countries and 28 producing countries. Worldwide consumption is expected to grow between now and 2010 by 4.8 percent to 238.8 million hectolitres, the survey showed. Sales worldwide have grown nearly 10% since 2001 and sales are

expected to rise a further 9.6% by 2010 to £59 billion.

VinExpo Secretary General Robert Beynat said that more discerning palates were fuelling the wine business.

'The world is drinking more and better, more expensive wines,' he said. He also added that the UK market is the 'trendsetter' and 'the most powerful in terms of distribution and sales'.

China and Russia are emerging as growth areas for top-end French wines, with wine sales to China expected to grow by 36% by 2010. Growth in the US and the UK is however being fuelled by new world wines.



# Our first birthday: the Chairman reports...

**AS MY TERM** of office of Chairman comes to a close I am delighted to report that The ASDW – The Association of Small Direct Wine Merchants – is now a year old as a formally constituted organisation. Our first AGM was held on 27th January 2006 at the National Trust's Waddeson Manor in Buckinghamshire.

The ASDW was formed, as the name implies, by a group of British independent small Wine Merchants directly selling to the general public via mail order and the internet.

Our Association was founded on an informal basis in mid-2005 with the original purpose of lobbying against the iniquities of the Licensing Act 2003, and the damage it still does to small businesses such as ours. This included television appearances on BBC Working Lunch for incoming Secretary, Leon Stolarski of Leon Stolarski Fine Wines, Secretary and incoming Chairman, Nick Dobson of Nick Dobson Wines on BBC South

and myself, Warren Edwardes of Wine for Spice on Channel 4 News, Radio 4's You and Yours and interviewed for the Sunday Telegraph. And of course the meeting Nick and I had with then Licensing Minister James Purnell. Now that we have Katrina Balmforth of Cathar Wines on board as ASDW's press officer we should be even more in the news. Katrina is an experienced radio and television journalist (see below).

Soon after forming as a lobby group, however, it became apparent that there was much to be gained through mutual co-operation amongst such businesses, and the ASDW moved on from its lobbying roots. There is now an active membership of about 20 who are engaged in planning tasting events and member support.

Special thanks to Treasurer Kate Young, who continues for another in that position, and to Webmaster John Dickinson both of French

Regional Wines, the latter taking over from my initial efforts. And thanks to Henry Speer of Changers and James Bercovici of The Big Red Wine Company for legal input.

ASDW joined the WSTA (Wine and Spirit Trade Association) a year ago and benefits from the legislative and practical support and lobbying power of the WSTA.

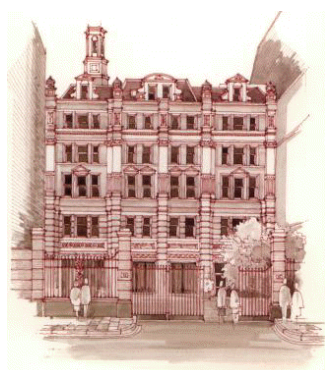
Our first press and public tasting (special thanks to Leon and Nick) was at the Atlas Pub near Earl's Court in London in June 2006 followed by a second one there in November 2006. Soon afterwards we held a public tasting at the National Trust's Canons Ashby and The Cresset, Peterborough. Regular tastings are being arranged at The Atlas, Canons Ashby (2 June and 10 Nov 2007) and at other locations.

And of course many thanks indeed to Stefan Reynolds of Field & Vine who has done a splendid job as the Editor of Grapestalk, on behalf of ASDW. This is the third edi-

tion of Grapestalk launched at the first Atlas tasting in June 2006 and it is being almost universally hailed as a very professional magazine – with the exception of Tim Atkin who referred to it as 'an appealingly amateurish newsletter'. Reading this, I am sure you will beg to differ. Thanks to Stefan also for coming up with ASDW's new logo.

I am now stepping back after my year as titular head of ASDW but not to the back benches. The ASDW does not have any as all of us help out. I shall be managing ASDW's Intellectual Property Rights – we have commenced Trademark registration processes with the Patent Office and have a number of internet domains registered. I'm also helping to organise wine tastings across the country. Over to you, Nick Dobson, to lead ASDW onward and upward.

*Warren Edwardes is founding Chairman of the ASDW and CEO Wine for Spice Limited.*



## Notes on a wine tasting

**AS THE WIND** whistles down a forgotten cavern of Whitehall, our chairman Warren Edwardes prepares to woe the *Central London Wine Society* with ten 'winter warmers' contributed by five members of the ASDW. This wine

society meets in the charming if time-warped Civil Service Club, which can't have changed much since its foundation in 1953.

But the wine-tasters are far from being caught up in the cobwebs; it is a thriving club with two meetings a month and opinions as strong as some of the wines they sampled. They were:

*2004 Cote Est, Domaine Lafage, France, Languedoc Roussillon, VDP des Cotes Catalanes*  
**Cathar Wines**

*2003 Cuvee Leá, Domaine Lafage, Languedoc Roussillon, Cotes de Roussillon, Les Apres, France*  
**Cathar Wines**

*2004 Uva Mira Cellar Selection, South Africa, Western Cape, Stellenbosch*  
**South Africa Wines**

*2004 Zweigelt Kräftn Heidi Schröck, Austria, Burgenland, Rust*  
**Nick Dobson Wines**

*1999 Cerro Bercial Reserva, Bodegas Virasa Vinacola, Spain, Utiel-Requena*  
**Decanter Wines**

*2001 Dom. Du Crampilh L'Original, France, Madiran*  
**French Regional Wines**

*2001 Cerro Bercial 'El Perdio' Bodegas Virasa Vinacola, Spain, Utiel-Requena*  
**Decanter Wines**

*2004 Le Diable Rouge, Roger Burgdorfer Domaine du Paradis, Switzerland, Geneva, Satigny*  
**Nick Dobson Wines**

*2004 Uva Mira Vineyard Selection Uva Mira Estate blend, South Africa, Western Cape, Stellenbosch*  
**South Africa Wines**

*2003 Banyuls-Cornet-and-Cie-Rimage, France, Languedoc Roussillon, Cotes de Roussillon*  
**French Regional Wines**

The group not only marks each wine (maximum is 7) but members also speak about

each wine in turn. Some of the language is flowery, to say the least. But they obviously know their wines. The highest mark, a 5, went to John's Banyuls – this group is quite keen on the 'sweeties' but there was high praise for Decanter's 'El Perdio' with a 4.9 and the Heidi Schröck Zweigelt from Nick Dobson.

There wasn't much spitting going on and by the end quite a few rosy cheeks testified to the 'winter warmers' title. Warren was given a healthy round of applause for introducing our product!

Paul Mapplebeck (020 8866 9314) organizes the Central London Wine Society on a non-profit basis at the Civil Service Club, 13 - 15 Great Scotland Yard, London SW1A 2HJ. Meetings are held on most Wednesdays and start at 18:00.

*Katrina Balmforth of Cathar Wines is an experienced radio and television journalist and has stepped straight into the position of ASDW Press Officer.*

# Pinotage

## The Marmite Grape



Peter F May

**A COUPLE OF** months ago I spent a back-breaking morning harvesting Pinotage grapes. Pinotage is an early ripener; we were picking more than a week before the Pinot Noir in neighbouring rows would be ready. And these were superb grapes, perfect bunches evenly ripened, with no insect damage, minimal botrytis and 23 degrees brix. The berries were really tight together and where bunches had grown around trellising wires it was impossible to remove them without damage. Fieldmouse Vineyards owner Peter Laidlaw later told me 'based on the grape quality and early ripening I'm purchasing 2000 more vines.' I'd like to return next year to taste that wine, which will be Ontario's first commercial Pinotage. Sorry, did you think I was in South Africa?

The chances are that you only know South African Pinotage and thus your opinion

*If you have not tasted Pinotage from countries like New Zealand and California and new specialist South African producers, then you can't claim to know the variety*



of the variety is inextricably linked with the winemaking practices of that country. And a lot of badly made Pinotage flooded out of the Cape at the ending of sanctions. Pinotage is a marmite wine – it is a variety that generates a lot of reaction with those that dislike it being particularly voluble. But if you have not tasted Pinotage from countries like New Zealand and California and new specialist South African producers, then you can't claim to know the variety.

Pinotage is easy to grow, but to turn it into good wine a farmer needs to restrict grape production. The South Africans frequently grow Pinotage as a bush which stresses the vine

and reduces output. Trellised vines need green harvesting – removing excess bunches to concentrate flavour. But the challenges start in the winery, for if Pinotage is easy to grow, it is hard to make well. Bruce Jack of Flagstone Winery says 'Pinotage is the unpredictable, dangerous ride of your life's work as a winemaker. It can smell fear on a winemaker at 20 paces. But if wine pushes your button, making a good wine from a difficult grape is like pushing ten. It's an awesome sense of achievement! I am biased, however. I have tasted and drunk wonderful, emotionally rallying small-scale, hand-made Pinotage. For those moments of beauty, it's

more than worth the wild ride.'

And that is the crux. Supermarket brands and shipper labelled wines that rely on over producing Pinotage to make wine to an accountants budget will not give you a great Pinotage.

But what sort of animal is a great Pinotage? The very thing that makes Pinotage so exciting for some is what repels others. For there is no one style that you can define and say – that is Pinotage. Since Pinotage is a fairly recent variety, and because there is no old world model to measure it against, wine makers have been interpreting the variety in several styles.

My take is that Pinotage's



taste profile should be found within the oenological region bounded by the southern Rhone, northern Italian red and Californian Zinfandel. There should be the rich spiciness of Zin and warm depth of Syrah with a twist of the gamey kick of Italian reds. Plus, a lush sweet mouthfeel that is uniquely Pinotage.

Indeed, this sweetness is increasingly being used in blends to provide a lift to other varieties, especially Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. The 2004 International Wine and Spirit Competition Trophy for world's best red blend was awarded to Steytler Vision 2001, a South African 'Cape Blend' of 40% Pinotage, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Merlot. And Pinotage had been very successfully made as a rose wine, both still and sparkling.

In the past few years research funded by the producers Pinotage Association has been paying dividends. For example, it is now understood that the fermentation temperature is important in avoiding

*But what sort of animal is a great Pinotage? The very thing that makes Pinotage so exciting for some is what repels others*

odd nail-varnish flavours that sometimes appeared in Pinotage.

But it takes a long time for a wine to lose a bad reputation. Anthony Hamilton Russell, owner of the winery reputed as making South Africa's best Burgundian style Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, created a stir a couple of years ago when he presented his new wine at tastings to the public and media. He refused to give any information about the wine, serving it from decanters. Everyone who tasted it raved about the wine. That wine was eventually released under the name Ashbourne without any mention of varieties on the label, and immediately sold



out. In the UK it was priced at around £22. As you've no doubt guessed, it is 100% Pinotage. He wanted people to judge the wine on its merits, not on perceptions about the variety. Anthony told me 'I believe so much in the potential of this variety.'

It wasn't only bottles of Pinotage that became available after the end of apartheid, but also the vines themselves. And wine farmers around the world are now planting the variety, with particularly successful wines being made in California, and production in three other US states. New Zealand has been growing Pinotage since the 1960's and Nobile's 1970 Pinotage won the best wine Gold Cup at New Zealand's 1973 Trade and Industry Exhibition. New Zealand wine expert Sue Courtney writes 'since the late 1990's Pinotage has been undergoing a revival with new clones, developed in South Africa, becoming available. The grape is grown in most regions, from the most northerly to the most southern vineyards.'

So if you think you know Pinotage because you tasted it a few years ago, then it is time to try the new Pinotages coming from South Africa, and don't miss an opportunity to see what other countries are doing with the variety.

*Peter F May founded the Pinotage Club, is an Honorary Member of the Pinotage Association, judged the Pinotage Top 10 Competitions of 2004 and 2005 and is the author of 'Marilyn Merlot and the Naked Grape', published by Quirk Books.*

## Recommended wines

### South Africa:

*L'Avenir*

*Wamakersvallei 'La Cave'*

*Diemersfontein* (their standard wine has a cult following for its distinctive coffee and chocolate flavours, but look for their wonderful premium 'Carpe Diem' label)

*Hamilton Russell Ashbourne*

*Warwick Estate*

*Lammershoek*

*Straight*

*Cloof*

*Kaapzicht*

*Steytler*

### Blends with Pinotage:

*Warwick Three Cape Ladies*

*Kaapzicht Steytler Vision*

### New Zealand:

*Babich Winemakers Reserve* from Gimblett Gravels is stunning

*Okahu Estate*

*Muddy Water*

*Te Awa Farm*

### California:

*Sutter Ridge* in Amador County

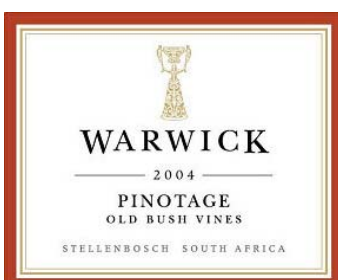
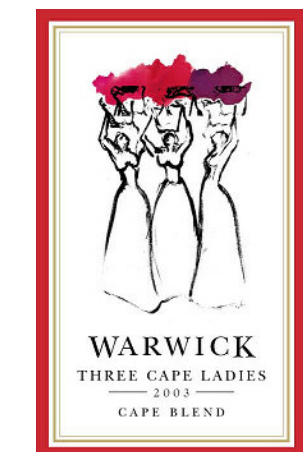
*Phoenix* in Napa

*Vino Con Brio* in Lodi

## Stockists

One of the members of the ASDW is *South African Wines* who stock a number of Pinotage wines.

For more information, please visit their website at [www.southafricanwines.co.uk](http://www.southafricanwines.co.uk) or contact Susan Weerts on 01753 862111.



# The Wines of the Jura

**FIRST THINGS FIRST.** Who knows anything about the Jura? Yes, the word 'Jurassic' is derived from here. It was coined in the 19th century for the limestone rocks of the mountains here.

Where is it? To those who said 'S.W. France', you are thinking of Jurançon. To those of you who said 'Switzerland', almost right! We are talking, here, about the French Jura on the other side of the mountains. If you don't know anything about the Jura or its wines, it's nothing be ashamed of, you are in good company! We have often mentioned the wines of the Jura to people in France and, whilst most may know where the Jura is, few have ever tasted its wines.

You may well have seen old and fading advertisements along the sides of roadside houses throughout France, extolling the virtues of 'Vin Fou Henri Maire' (a catchy name for Crémant fizz). You may also have heard of Vin Jaune and Vin de Paille without ever having tasted them or knowing what they are.

However, head for Dijon, take the autoroute towards Geneva and, after about 80km, get off and go to the round-

*There have been vines here for at least 5000 years.*

*The first written evidence comes from Pliny the younger (62-144 A.D.)*

about on the N83. You are now in the foothills (le Revermont) of the 'Monts du Jura' with the vineyards of the Jura extending 20km away past Arbois to your left and 60km down to l'Etoile, Château Chalon, Lons le Saunier and St Amour to your right.

There have been vines here for at least 5000 years. The first written evidence comes from Pliny the younger (62-144 A.D.). A favourite of many kings (Henri IV even wrote a poem about his first taste of 'vin d'Arbois'), these wines are still little known outside of the département.

Louis Pasteur (the 'father' of oenology, a native of Dole and inhabitant of Arbois), using his own vines as subjects, did some

## Mike Robertson



of his earliest work here. He proved that fermentation, previously believed to be a spontaneous event, actually stemmed from the action of yeasts.

### The Appellation

Within the area of the appellation of 'Cotes du Jura', there are three smaller more specific appellations: Arbois, l'Etoile & Château Chalon.

The 700 hectares of the Côtes du Jura are dotted along the 80 kilometre slope of the Revermont, mixed in with dairy and cereal farming together with forestry. Arbois is easily the biggest of the three specific appellations (800 hectares), producing the complete range of over 10 different wines that this area boasts. It is undoubtedly in Arbois that the best reds are made with Montigny-les-Arsures claiming to be the best area for Trousseau and Pupillin claiming the best Poulsard.

l'Etoile has only 80 hectares and about 16 producers and specialises in white wines. Château Chalon, with only 50 hectares, is even smaller and lays claim to being the home of Vin Jaune, which is the only wine it produces. In fact, the wines of Château Chalon do not have the words 'Vin Jaune' on the label. If it's Château Chalon, it's vin jaune.

### The Cépages

There are five main grape varieties grown here:

### Red

- Trousseau
- Poulsard or Ploussard (known as Mesclé in the Bugey)
- Pinot Noir

### White

- Savagnin
- Chardonnay (also known as Melon d'Arbois!)

These five varieties go to produce an enormous range of over a dozen different wines, as you will see.

### The Wines

#### Red

Trousseau wines are quite tannic (though, even when young, tannins are very soft) with a taste of dark fruits with a long rather earthy and spicy finish. Will keep for 20-30 years.

Poulsard is made like red wine but is often referred to as a rosé as its skin gives out little colour. It is lighter than the trousseau with a taste of cherry and raspberry but, as with most of Jura wines, it is slightly earthy and peppery (a bit like Fitou but not as much). Keeps about 10 years.

Pinot Noir is used on its own but often in an assemblage with Trousseau. On its own it produces a wine similar to neighbouring Bourgogne but with the distinctive slightly earthy spiciness.

#### White

Savagnin is used to make more than one wine. Firstly, there is the famous Vin Jaune. The grapes are late picked (as late as November!) and after fermentation, the wine is stored in oak casks for a minimum of six years and three months. Evaporation (13cl - known as the angels' share - are lost from every 75cl, giving the odd 62cl bottle size of the Clavelin) allows air into the cask and a layer of yeast forms on top of the golden coloured wine. In taste, its nearest familiar relation would be a fine old fino sherry with a slightly nutty and spicy nose and like sherry it is often drunk as an aperitif but also with nuts or foie gras or with Coq au Vin



Jaune. Will keep 50 years plus!

Alternatively, Blanc Savagnin is made in the same way as Vin Jaune but is only allowed three years in the barrel before bottling. An assemblage of Chardonnay and Savagnin is also common. Finally, evaporation of the Savagnin wine can be avoided in the normal way to produce a clean, crisp and fruity dry white wine known as Naturé (an old name for savagnin).

Chardonnay is vinified in the normal way to produce a full-bodied wine.

Vin de Paille (straw wine) is produced from hand picking the ripest grapes (Savagnin, Chardonnay or Poulsard), then sorting and drying (traditionally on straw) for six weeks, to concentrate the sugars. 100kg of grapes are needed to produce 18 litres of wine. Then slow fermentation and ageing in oak for at least three years gives a sweet, mellow wine of 15.5°, full of jammy fruitiness. Will keep and improve forever. Drink as aperitif or with foie gras, dessert or even chocolate.

### Crémant du Jura

Both white and rosé crémants have been produced in the Jura since the 18th century using the Méthode Champenoise (Traditionnelle). All five grape varieties can be used, giving an excellent alternative to more expensive bubbles. Again, these wines will keep well and develop for up to 10 years.

*If you come to these wines with an open mind and no preconceptions and prejudices, we suspect that you will not be disappointed*

### Marc du Jura

This is also produced, as in many other wine areas, from the fermentation lees and, with this, Macvin is made. This is made in the same way as Pineau des Charentes and Flocc de Gascogne. Marc is added to unfermented grape juice. This stops any fermentation and gives a semi sweet aperitif of about 18°. There are both white and rosé versions available.

**IF THE WINE** on its own doesn't tempt you, we can recommend the Jura for its countryside and of course for its food. All along the Revermont there are pretty villages often built in the short, sheer-sided valleys called 'reculées'. These were formed when huge underground rivers, cutting through the soft limestone, caused a massive collapse of the ground above. This left short steep sided valleys offering shelter and good farmland.

Go further up into the mountains and you will find forests and lakes offering great possibilities for skiing, walking, climbing and sailing. Of course, it is always worth coming for the various wine 'fêtes'. In February, there is the 'Percée du Vin Jaune'. This hugely popular event, attended by tens of thousands of people,



*If the wine on its own doesn't tempt you, we can recommend the Jura for its countryside and of course for its food*

celebrates the 'piercing' of the most recently completed vintage. Vin Jaune and most other wines are available for tasting.

The Fête des Vins d'Arbois on the third Sunday of July is followed in the third week of August by the Fête du Trousseau in Montigny les Arsures and the Fête du Poulsard in Pupillin. September brings the Fête des Vendanges and the Fête du Biou, a more religious thanksgiving festival and procession.

Gastronomic specialities of the Jura include Saucisse de Morteau, a smoked pork sausage which is particularly delicious with boiled potatoes and 'cancoillote' – a mild 'cheese' made from curdled skimmed milk. For a main course, try trout or chicken cooked in Vin Jaune with morel mushrooms.

Milk from the local cattle breed, the Montbéliarde, is used in the production of a range of cheeses: the well known Comté, or Bleu de Gex (mild for a blue cheese), Mont d'Or (only made in the autumn and winter), Raclette (for fondu) and Morbier with its line of soot running through the middle.

**WE ADMIT TO** being quite keenly partisan about the wines of the Jura. We would also admit, however, that they were not all to our taste at first. The modern trend for big, fruity red wines runs contrary to what goes on here. Likewise Vin Jaune is unlike any wine you will have tasted.

As far as more traditional tasting wines are concerned, the Naturé of Frederic Lornet is our personal favourite white wine. (It used to be Pouilly Fumé, so you see what our tastes are.) Likewise, the crémants from here rival any from Bourgogne and are certainly better value than a Champagne of the same price. Chardonnays from the Jura regularly win medals at the Chardonnay du Monde competition, six in 2006.

If you come to these wines with an open mind and no preconceptions and prejudices, we suspect that you will not be disappointed.

Mike Robertson runs Devigne Wines and Confit Direct. For full details on all their wines and imported food specialities, please visit [www.devignewines.co.uk](http://www.devignewines.co.uk).

# Domaine des Anges



**James Bercovici**

**PETER MAYLE IS** not the only English former advertising executive in Provence. In 1973, Malcolm Swan (he spearheaded the campaign for the bleach which kills 'all known germs') gave up his London lifestyle and went off to Bordeaux with the idea that he would buy a vineyard and make wine. It didn't happen there; instead, he crossed to the other side of France and found high on a hilltop dwarfed by the great windy mountain, Mont Ventoux, a perfectly sited 250 acre estate, six of which had been planted to Grenache and Syrah in the forties, complete with farmhouse, winery and gîtes.

Surrounded by some of the most outstanding views in Provence, *Domaine de Notre Dame des Anges* sits abreast Roman and Saracen ruins and, of course, the old chapel after which the estate was named. The name was first to go. It may seem obvious now but in the 1970s it took someone with marketing experience to realize that *Domaine de Notre Dame des Anges* was mouthful enough in France and virtually impossible in non-French speaking countries. So, *Domaine des Anges* was born.

Next, Malcolm realised he needed to know more about winemaking. He struck friendships with two of the region's most unforthcoming characters. There was nothing

Jacques Reynaud, of *Châteauneuf-du-Pape's* *Château Rayas*, didn't know about Grenache. For advice about Syrah, Malcolm turned to Hermitage's Gerard Chave.

Over time, the vineyard grew to 48 acres including some Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon in response to the growing demand for varietally labeled wines. From 1986 there was a prestige cuvée called *Clos de la Tour* and from time to time there would be mono-varietal Grenache and Syrah cuvées which commanded prestige prices despite necessarily being designated *vins de pays* (mono-varietals are not allowed in the Ventoux appellation). In 1997 Robert Parker described them as 'the best wines now being made in the region'.

By the early nineties the UK recession, some less than perfect vintages and looming retirement persuaded Malcolm to sell. After a few years of uncertainty, by 1998 the estate was entirely owned by Kilkenny man Gay McGuinness who, in that year, appointed Dublin-born Ciarán Rooney as estate manager and winemaker.

Having studied oenology (by accident, he says) at Stellenbosch, Ciarán went on to work at several leading estates around the world. His CV includes stints at top Bordeaux châteaux such as Lafite-Rothschild, Rieussec (Sauternes) and *Château du Seuil* (Graves) as well as leading New World estates such as Tim Knappstein Wines and

*Surrounded by some of the most outstanding views in Provence, Domaine des Anges sits abreast Roman and Saracen ruins*



Tyrells in Australia, Kumeu River (New Zealand), Argyle Wines and Cakebread Cellars (USA) and Thelema and Neil Ellis Wines in South Africa. This international background is very much evident in Ciarán's wines, particularly his top red, *Clos de l'Archange*, renamed *L'Archange* (there is no *clos*) from 2000.

Ciarán was one of the first people I met professionally when I started importing in 1999. He struck me as a quiet and intensely serious man (he still is where wine is concerned) but he was still new to the job and with both Malcolm and Gay (neither of whom could be said to be introverts) present, it was difficult for him

to do much more than talk about the wines. Over the years, however, he seems to have warmed to me despite my being English and we regularly get together to outdo each other in both wine and cuisine. Ciarán has a finely-tuned palate which is evident in his wines and he is reassuringly unafraid to embrace modern ideas.

The focus of the estate is now on the indigenous styles. The red, white and rosé wines are all superb value examples offering everything you could possibly want from the region for £5.99. Matthew Nugent in Ireland's *Evening Herald* wrote 'all these wines are wrongly priced – but in the consumer's favour'.

However, it is the *L'Archange* range that turns heads. The inaugural ASDW tasting in Fulham last June was followed by several glowing reviews for the pure Roussanne (somehow slipped past the appellation's tasting panel) 2004 Blanc which has been surpassed by the 2005.

The real star is the red *L'Archange*, a wine whose composition changes according to the vintage and the mood of its maker. There is a theme running across vintages though, and it should appeal to both Francophiles and New World wine drinkers alike with its vibrant red and black fruit, toasty, caramel oak and sheer drinkability.

With Ventoux wines generally sniffed at by trophy hunters, these wines – all under a tenner – represent fantastic value for anyone who is more interested in what they put into their mouths than what they take out of their wallets.

*James Bercovici runs The Big Red Wine Company which is at [www.bigredwine.co.uk](http://www.bigredwine.co.uk).*

# Small is Beautiful

## Small wine producers should be encouraged and supported by all of us



Paul Howard

**BACK IN THE** early 1970's the economist E.F Schumacher wrote a book called *Small is Beautiful, a study of economics as if people mattered*. This coincided with the emergence of a number of global trends that today have become major concerns – globalisation, social and environmental sustainability, industrial scale, consumerism and the quality of human life. 'Man is small, and, therefore, small is beautiful.'

The very phrase *Small is Beautiful*, once considered radical, has become embedded in our culture and language. It echoes parallel writings such as James Lovelock's *Gaia* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. More recently it has influenced Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, Joanna Blythman's *Shopped* and even the *Slow Food* movement.

*Small is Beautiful* is clearly a theme explored in the controversial wine film *Mondovino*, made by Jonathan Rossiter. The film contrasts the impact of globalisation and multinational producers that make branded wines on an industrial scale with the struggle of small independent producers that make a diversity of individualistic local wines with what the French might term *terroir* (a sense of place).

But what does this mean for us as wine drinkers in the

UK? Well, even drinking wine can be a philosophical and political act these days. Some of the differences between the multinational volume wine

brands versus the small volume wines made by individual estates are shown in the table below. These differences fundamentally affect the availability

and the taste of the wines we drink.

Of course in the real world this table can only be a generalisation and there are excep-

Industrial Volume Brands	Local Individual Estates
<b>The Vineyard</b>	
Industrial crop management and focus on maximising yields with a full chemical armoury and mechanisation	Sense of preserving the estate for the next generation, may/may not use chemicals and mechanisation
International grape varieties - monocultures	International grape varieties used if this is traditional, but local varieties too – biodiversity and experimental
Typically use bought-in grapes from a wide range of sources based on current market price and consumer fashion	Grapes grown in one (or several neighbouring) vineyards, usually owned by the winemaker, or supplied by growers with long-term contracts
Production is limited only by the availability of purchased grapes - quantity	Production is limited by vintage variation, size of holdings and a focus lower yields - quality
<b>The Winery</b>	
Wine style defined by the winemaker, often 'international', lacking a sense of place, aim for global taste and fashion trends	Diverse wine styles according to grape, tradition and desire to communicate a sense of place. May not be fashionable
Branding: reduce variation and diversity to increase "consistency" – wines all taste the same	Typically display a 'sense of place' (terroir) or regional differences. Lack of branding (unless the region itself is the brand)
Quality defined by technical manipulations to a pre-defined specification using laboratory analysis and high technology, very "hands on."	Quality defined by the quality of the grapes, allowing "hands off" winemaking with frequently traditional methods and low/intermediate scale technology
Production is scaleable and seeks to minimise costs (e.g. the use of oak chips)	Production not scaleable and can be relatively expensive (e.g. new oak barrels)
Volume throughput – industrial process	Limited production- hand crafted agriculture
Need for Profit and Shareholder satisfaction	Typically a family-based way of life
<b>Distribution</b>	
Bulk distribution possible, e.g. tanker	Small supply, may be on allocation basis
Wine made to a retailers price point, heavy marketing spend and large budgets	Marketing minimal
Big volumes can be distributed with wide availability through Supermarkets, with aggressive discounting and cross-subsidy	Small scale production means limited volumes available, can be harder to find, need specialist outlets
The illusion of choice	Choice and diversity, can be confusing
Self-selection needs customer recognition	Needs hand selling and customers willing to experiment

tions to every rule... I could cite some very large producers that defy their vast scale by making exceptional and exciting wines, and equally I can think of many small producers making, at best, mediocre wine. Nevertheless, making such distinctions about the way wine is produced has big consequences for where and how we buy wine.

These days the UK is officially a nation of wine drinkers. If you want a particular wine, then regardless of provenance it can probably be found on sale if you know where to look. In this sense we are currently living in a kind of vinous heaven. To paraphrase Macmillan, 'we've never had it so good'. Wine's diversity makes it such an exciting and rewarding subject, and yet this diversity – based on small (human) scale production – is under threat.

Wine consumption and production is increasingly driven by the supermarkets, which are now responsible for over 70% of UK retail wine sales. Their huge market power is exerted all the way back to the vineyards themselves. While they have done much to bring wine to UK customers, their requirement is increasingly for inoffensive 'commercial quality', branded or 'own label' wines that are easily recognised yet bland. While none plumb the depths, and some are good, the majority are simply dull.

These wines can be produced in the huge volumes required to stock hundreds of outlets at tightly defined price points and participate in loss-leading deals. Look down the aisles and there appears to be huge choice. But this is just an illusion that really disguises a loss of true diversity, quality and flavour. 26% of the wine sold covers just 11 brands!

Schumacher wrote 'Ever bigger machines, entailing ever bigger concentrations of economic power and exerting ever greater violence against the environment, do not represent progress: they are a denial of wisdom. Wisdom demands a

*Most online merchants are genuine lovers of wine who want to share their passion with their customers*

new orientation of science and technology towards the organic, the gentle, the non-violent, the elegant and beautiful.'

Consequently, *Small is Beautiful* is a notion that has garnered considerable appeal. In wine-buying terms small specialist merchants make a compelling alternative. These can stock smaller quantities of more individualistic, high quality wines. They will more often be wines made on a human scale that offer a sense of place, a story, perhaps even emotion. But perhaps there isn't a specialist near you or making a special trip is inconvenient.

Now the Internet (surely this is Schumacher's new orientation of science and technology) has enabled a new generation of online specialist wine merchants to flourish. Over the past few years, online shopping has become normalised. It's no longer seen as dangerous, difficult or unreliable and accessed by fast cheap broadband rather than slow expensive dial-up.

Most of these online merchants know their suppliers personally and import their wines directly. Crucially, this doesn't mean that their wines are more expensive than those found in supermarkets because their cost-bases are lower. Most importantly, the wine they offer has to taste great, regardless of who made it or where it came from! They are genuine lovers of wine who want to share their passion with their customers.

For me, these internet merchants mean I can more easily buy wine that has substance over style, shows terroir over chemicals, and champions the individual over the industrial. To put it another way, there's passion, diversity, authenticity and a healthy regard for the customers intelligence.

As wine drinkers we still have a choice, so why not explore the world of the small? In the panel right are six wines selected from the wine lists of ASDW members. Some have become personal favourites that have brought me pleasure and insight over many years.

*Paul Howard is a member of the Circle of Wine Writers and is the publisher of [www.winealchemy.com](http://www.winealchemy.com).*

**Franciacorta DOCG. Azienda Agricola Villa, Brut. Lombardy, Italy, 2002**

Villa is located in Monticelli Brusati, beautifully situated at the foot of the Madonna della Rosa hills. They have 35 hectares of vineyard. This Franciacorta is made by the classic method and is a blend of 80% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Blanc and 10% Pinot Noir, given 30 months maturation on the lees. It has an excellent mousse and a full, rounded body. Good fresh acidity, toasted brioche flavours with apricot and savoury tones and nice persistence. Smashing value, it really does put many a Champagne to shame. Rated two glasses by Gambero Rosso.

**£14.99, Amordivino**  
[www.amordivino.co.uk](http://www.amordivino.co.uk)

**Vin de Pays des Côtes du Brian. Domaine La Combe Blanche "Four A Chaux", Languedoc, France. 2005**

This white blend comes from la Livinière, the best rated area of the Minervois in the Languedoc. It's mainly a blend of Rousanne and Viognier, plus a little splash of Chardonnay, which means that it is classed as a Vin de Pays. Domaine la Combe Blanche has been run since 1981 by Guy Vanlancker, a Belgian ex-schoolteacher. He has 20 hectares, making various whites and reds from low yielding vines. This is a very stylish dry white wine packed with individuality. A pale medium-yellow colour, the interest starts with the bold perfumed nose. There's real complexity here, I found marzipan, peach and even custard, which opens up in the glass to give a honeyed quality too. The palate is full-bodied, plenty of soft creamy acidity to balance ripe full tropical-fruit flavours, very rich but a nice clean long finish. Some seamless oak imparts smoke and caramel at the end. Worth decanting to really bring the flavours out. Drinking well now and anytime over the next five years.

**£6.50, Leon Stolarski Fine Wines**  
[www.lsfinewines.co.uk](http://www.lsfinewines.co.uk)

**Côte de Brouilly, Chateau Thivin, Beaujolais Cru, Burgundy, France, 2004**

Château Thivin is built into the hillside of Beaujolais' Mont-Brouilly (an extinct volcano) and is where I fell in love with wine many years ago. Evelyn and Claude-Vincent Geoffray make the Beaujolais Cru's Brouilly and Côte de Brouilly, including some special bottlings. The Côte de Brouilly is my long-term favourite, well structured and firm when young and made to take some bottle age too. Vibrant red-purple, superb strawberry and violets perfume. The Silken textured fruit is mouth-wateringly fresh in any vintage. Truly, the apogee of the Gamay grape is from their eight hectares. Drinking deliciously now, older bottles develop Pinot-like character in 7-10 years. I've yet to find any Beaujolais better than those made here.

**£9.75, Nick Dobson Wines**  
[www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk](http://www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk)

**Irancy, Domaine A et J-P Colinot, "Les Mazelots", Burgundy, France, 2002**

Jean-Pierre Colinot was a major force behind the establishment of the red Bourgogne Irancy appellation in 1976, and is probably the best producer. The village of Irancy is found far to the north in Burgundy, near Chablis. Situated in its amphitheatre of vines and cherry trees, it is perhaps Burgundy's most beautiful spot. This red burgundy is from two hectares of Mazelot vineyard and includes 5% of the rare César grape added to the Pinot Noir. César brings more body, colour and structure, a particularly useful trait this far north in lean vintages. The 2002 has richness, delicious cherry fruit and represents fine value, for drinking now and over the next five years. The 2003 is less typical, from an extremely hot vintage, and swaps a little finesse for more power.

**£10.95, H C Wines**  
[www.hcwines.co.uk](http://www.hcwines.co.uk)

**Vacqueyras. Montirius, "Clos Montirius", Rhône, France, 2001**

Some of the very best Vacqueyras is made by Christine and Eric Saurel at Montirius. They are based at Sarriens, just outside the town of Vacqueyras and have been fully biodynamic since 1999. Les Clos is the special cuvée of 50% Grenache and 50% Syrah, from a small 8 hectare vineyard. A good firm dark red-purple colour, on the nose there are lovely red fruits, a hint of vanilla and an appealing slight stoniness or earthiness. Lovely balance, very ripe fruit from a very good warm vintage, showing good depth and purity with finesse and power. This really opens up after about 20 minutes in the glass; the nose develops an attractive ashtray-smoky note. Just coming in to it's drinking window, but ideally hold another year then fine drinking over the next 5-6 years. Watch out for sediment if you keep it.

**£12.10, French Regional Wines**  
[www.french-regional-wines.co.uk](http://www.french-regional-wines.co.uk)

**Jurançon Moelleux. Domaine Cauhapé, "Ballet d'Octobre", South-West France, 2004**

Henri Ramonteau of Domaine Cauhapé makes a range of Jurançon wines from 40 hectares of the local Petit and Gros Manseng grapes in both dry and sweet styles. Ballet d'October is just one of his late harvest sweet wines, this one made entirely from Gros Manseng. There's a lovely light botrytis nose showing citrus fruits. The palate is all unctuous honey, apricots and peaches held in perfect balance by fresh acidity. Very elegant and complete, in fact exceptional in every way. Try it as an aperitif, with foie gras or fruit tarts at any time over the next five years.

**£7.75, (37.5cl), Devigne Wines**  
[www.devignewines.co.uk](http://www.devignewines.co.uk)

*For details of all ASDW members, please see the directory on page 21. There are also a mixed case offer from a number of ASDW members shown on page 13.*

# Here comes the Judge

**Tom Cannavan on his experiences at the McLaren Vale Wine Show**



Tom Cannavan

**I SPENT PART** of last October as International Judge at the McLaren Vale Wine show in Oz. This was the second time I'd been to Australia as international judge, a great honour for me. I've also recently judged shows (competitions) in Chile, Georgia, a couple of times in France and several times in the UK, so I guess I have become a relatively widely-travelled international judge.

But the Aus show system is absolutely the daddy of them all, and I thought readers might like a few words on the experience from my point of view.

Wine shows are the cornerstone of the Aus industry. Many people credit the show system with Australia's rapid rise to a world force, and the rapid quality improvement in its wines over the past 30 years or so. It also becomes much easier to sell your wine - particularly in the domestic market - if they have some gold medals and trophies on the label. Every region has its show, and there are various national shows. The power of the shows remains undiminished, even though many of the icon wines eschew them,



just as Lafite, Latour or Margaux do in European competitions.

All shows have an identical format (more or less) in terms of how judging is done (blind of course, using a 20-point scoring system), how decisions are made, and how medals and trophies are awarded. For example, all shows tend to have a handful of 'judges' (more on the huge shows) - highly experienced and respected winemakers, jour-

*It also becomes much easier to sell your wine - particularly in the domestic market - if they have some gold medals and trophies on the label*

nalists, merchants and the International judge - and 'associates', still highly experienced professionals in these trades, whose scores are not counted, but whose opinion is listened to and can help sway the judges if they are in stalemate over a wine. The Show chair has the casting vote on all split decisions, and tastes all gold medal wines to approve them.

Wines are split into classes, typically something like '2005 Shiraz dominant blends', and all the wines in the class are poured; up to 100 wines in some of the classes in McLaren Vale. Each judge tastes separately and in silence from the huge array of glasses in front of him or her, recording their scores. At the end of the class the judges gather round a

table and read out their scores as the panel chair records them, a different judge starts each time in rotation.

Any wine that is awarded 'gold' by one or more judges (18.5 or over) is brought back to the table for all judges to retaste, before the panel unanimously decides to award gold or not. All golds will eventually go up against all others in their 'class' to decide the overall trophy wine for that class. All other wines get nothing, bronze or silver, decided by simply totting up the judges' scores. Sometimes a wine getting a very high silver from all judges will be retasted along with the potential golds.

The system is rigorous and judging ferociously technical - do not go if you do not have faith in your tasting skills and

ability to spot not just brett, VA, sulphide problems, cork, dirty barrels, etc, but to judge a wine for fruit quality, acid and tannin structure and length, etc. The Australian judges (and indeed winemakers in general) are amongst the most technical and hyper-critical I've met, so speaking up to disagree or argue the case on a wine is daunting, but absolutely has to be done - that's what they'd do, and that's what you are there for. As International Judge you are normally given a couple of 'silver bullets' i.e. you can put one or two wines through for gold, even without the unanimous support of your fellows. Of course, when it comes to re-judging all the golds to decide trophies (totally blind for everyone again), your silver bullet is spent and if the wine is not chosen for the trophy, that's the end of it.

There were 20 trophies to be awarded at the McLaren Vale show, and I have to say that - as in previous shows I've judged - this was an extraordinary validation of the consistency of judging, if not the process: the number of gold medal wines in each class, competing against each other for the trophy, ranged from three to eight. In all the classes with three to five wines the judges were unanimous in picking the winner - absolutely every judge, every time. Only in the largest classes of seven or eight wines was there sometimes a split decision, and then almost always it was a close vote between two wines, very occasionally three, because really they were wines



with very similar merits.

By the Friday night, when it came to the awards dinner, I had spent five days touring the region and had visited and tasted through the ranges of perhaps 20 producers. So it was fascinating to see the results of the show's blind tastings and compare the wines that got a gold or nothing (the two extremes) with the notes I had made on the same wines tasted out of the show context.

I have to say there was a lot of close correlation, with wines I'd really liked in 'ordinary tasting' scoring highly in the show, and wines that had done little for me scoring no

*In all the classes with three to five wines the judges were unanimous in picking the winner - absolutely every judge, every time*

award.

Where there was a real discrepancy, I retasted the wine on the night of the awards (all the trophy wines were available for tasting) and sometimes I did change my opinion on the wine, which showed differently when tasted in a social situation, with food, and not under the rather ruthless glare of the judging spotlight.

Does that invalidate the show system? Not in the slightest in my opinion, but it does show the stupidity of relying only on shows. Obviously such shows are not the only way to judge the quality of a wine - but a tendency to think it does points to a weakness in the Australian winemaking psyche.

*Tom Cannavan is publisher of [www.wine-pages.com](http://www.wine-pages.com) (see panel right), a freelance wine writer as well as the author of the *Good Web Guide to Wine*.*

## Wine Pages

**TOM CANNAVAN** started his excellent wine site in 1995 and it is one of the world's most popular and longest running wine sites available on the web.

With over 5,000 tasting notes, a wine course and quiz, dining guides, information on restaurants where you can Bring Your Own Bottles, wine tastings, wine offers, book reviews and much much more, it really is a tremendously good resource for all wine lovers.

It also has a wonderfully interesting, energetic and engaging wine forum where you can join hundreds of others in discussing the wonderful world that is wine.

It is free to join and available to all, so if you have never visited this wonderful online community, I recommend you check it out immediately. Beware, it is dangerously addictive!

[www.wine-pages.com](http://www.wine-pages.com)

*Stefan Reynolds*



# Eating & Drinking

## Seasonal food

**CONTINUING ON FROM** the last issue, listed below are the vegetables and fruits that will be in season for the duration of this issue of Grapestalk.

There are so many good reasons to eat food seasonally, not least the fact that they taste much better and keep

down the all important food miles.

The chances are that you will also be supporting local or at least British producers, which is the least that we should all be doing. We produce some fabulous food in this country and most of it never sees the inside of a supermarket.

So if you want the best, and I assure you it is there, make the effort to shop at the butcher, the grocer and the farm shop and you'll be rewarded.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL
APPLES - Cox's, Bramley				
ARTICHOKES - jerusalem				
ASPARAGUS				
BEETROOT				
BROCCOLI - purple sprouting				
BRUSSELS SPROUTS				
BRUSSELS TOPS				
CABBAGES - red				
CABBAGES - green varieties				
CABBAGES - white				
CARROTS				
CAULIFLOWER				
CELERIAC				
CELERY				
CHARD				
CHICORY				
ENDIVE				
GREENS				
KALE				
KOHLRABI				
LEEKS				
LETTUCE				
PAK CHOI				
PARSNIPS				
PEARS (Comice, Conference)				
POTATOES				
RADISHES				
RHUBARB (forced)				
RHUBARB (outdoor)				
ROCKET				
SALSIFY				
SEA KALE				
SORREL				
SWEDE				
TURNIPS				
WATERCRESS				

Food in season is highlighted in yellow and food at its best in highlighted in green

## ASDW Case Offers

**ASDW MEMBERS HAVE** come together to offer you a small range of mixed taster cases offering you an insight into our various lists. There's a white case, a red case, and a premium case containing reds, whites, a sweet wine, and a Champagne. Each case has one bottle of the wines listed below:

### ASDW Whites Case

Viceroy White NV Spain  
 2005 Domaine des Anges  
 Côtes du Ventoux 'L'Archange'  
 Blanc France  
 Bovin Muscat 2004 Macedonia  
 Grüner Veltliner Kabinett 2005  
 Loibner Schütt Dinstlgut Loiben  
 Austria  
 Bohigas Blanc de Blancs 2005  
 (Catalunya) Spain  
 Legend Chardonnay Australia  
 Domaine de Montesquiou  
 Jurançon Sec 2005 - Jurançon  
 France  
 Riflessi Circeo Bianco DOC  
 2005, Cantina Sant'Andrea,  
 Lazio Italy  
 Muscadet Sur Lie France  
 CARM 2005 Castello D'Alba  
 Branco, Douro Portugal  
 Neffies Sauvignon Blanc 2005 -  
 Vin de Pays d'Oc France  
 Wayne Thomas Riesling,  
 McLaren Vale Australia

**£85.00**

### ASDW Reds Case

Bohigas Reserva 2000  
 (Catalunya) Spain  
 2003 Domaine du Seuil,  
 Premières Côtes de Bordeaux  
 France  
 Rabassiere Cotes Du Rhone  
 France

Bovin Vranec 2000 Macedonia  
 Blauer Zweigelt 2005  
 Qualitätswein, Kremstal  
 Dinstlgut Loiben Austria  
 Gran Colegiata Crianza 1999  
 (Toro) Spain  
 Legend Shiraz 2004 Australia  
 Domaine Mas de Lavail -  
 Cuvee Tradition 2003 - Côtes  
 du Roussillon Villages France  
 Negroamaro Puglia IGT 2003,  
 Casa Catelli, Puglia Italy  
 Il Molino di Grace, IGT Toscana  
 2003 "Volano" Italy  
 Lavradores de Feitoria 2005  
 Feitoria Tinto, Douro Portugal  
 ACW Pinot Noir, Yarra Valley  
 Australian

**£85.00**

### ASDW Premium Mixed Case

Champagne du Mont Hauban  
 rosé France  
 'Rovereto' Gavi di Gavi DOCG  
 2005, Castellari Bergaglio,  
 Piedmont Italy  
 Grüner Veltliner 2003 Loibner  
 Loibenberg "L" Dinstlgut Loiben  
 St Arnaud 2005 Gravitas  
 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough  
 New Zealand  
 1999 Domaine de Gachon St  
 Joseph Rouge France  
 Madiran vieilles vignes France  
 Cerro Bercial Reserva 1999  
 (Utiel-Requena) Spain  
 La Selva Morellino di Scansano  
 Colli dell'Uccellina 2003 Italy  
 2001 Clos des Brusquieres  
 Châteauneuf-du-Pape France  
 Wayne Thomas 2004 Shiraz,  
 McLaren Vale Australia  
 Ch Peyredouille Blaye -  
 Bordeaux France  
 Domaine de Montesquiou  
 Jurançon Grappe d'Or 2004 -  
 Jurançon France

**£135.00**

For further details and to place an order, please visit the ASDW Cases section of the Nick Dobson Wines website at [www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk](http://www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk).

# Reviews



## El Bulli

**FIRSTLY SOME CONTEXT;** I am not a Michelin star collector. This was my first experience of a three star restaurant so please take my thoughts and comments for what they're worth - there is not a lot of equivalent level dining amongst my gastronomic experiences! I've eaten in a number of decent restaurants around the world (e.g. Gidleigh Park in Devon, Sooke Harbour House on Vancouver Island, Harvest Vine in Seattle) but this was my first taste of the premier league.

Anyway, we got lucky. I've read a lot about El Bulli, wished to dine there but being unable to plan eight months ahead thought I would never get to go. However, while planning a recent trip to France and Spain I was reminded that El Bulli was only about a 25 minute drive from where we'd arranged to stay on the Costa Brava. Out of curiosity, I looked at their website and while checking the booking procedures (for future reference) I saw that they confirmed their reservations the preceding week and they were happy to receive details of people who they could put on standby should someone cancel. I figured it wouldn't hurt to send them the dates we'd be near Roses and my mobile number but really thought nothing would come of it. To be honest, I forgot all about it after I'd fired off the email.

After a few days in Roussillon, in the far South of France, we got to the Costa Brava and when I saw the sign for Roses it jogged my memory. I mentioned to my wife that I'd emailed El Bulli but as I hadn't received an acknowl-

edgement we decided that it wasn't going to happen. Thinking that the supposed best restaurant in the world would ring up an English mobile number to trawl for diners was perhaps a touch naive!

A couple of days later (our third day in Spain) it was pouring with rain and we were lying in our tent wondering if we should get up and go to the Salvador Dali museum in Figueres when my mobile rang. Rare for me to have it with me and rarer still for it to be switched on! I saw that the number was Spanish and we both racked our brains to think who on earth it could be - we weren't expecting a call from anyone in Spain and nobody in Spain had our number to my knowledge (we'd completely forgotten about my El Bulli email). Having answered, I couldn't work out who the chap was saying he was and after asking him to repeat himself twice more (and apologising for not understanding him) it clicked. 'Yes tonight's fine...8.30? No problems... dietary requirements? Well my wife is pregnant and so won't eat shellfish or unpasteurised cheese...I'll eat anything...great, see you later...thank you...bye-bye'. My immediate thought was who else knew that I'd emailed El Bulli and was now trying to get me on a wind-up? I hadn't told anyone so it must be for real. Yipppeeeeeeee!! Ecstasy and excitement spread throughout the tent as it sunk in that we were off to El Bulli that very evening, having woken up with no plans for dinner.

So we spent the rest of the day looking forward and waiting. We tried to go to the Dali museum but the queue was horrendous. Drove back, went for a run, showered, changed. My wife got chatting to another Brit in the campsite and we ended up leaving about 15-20 minutes later than I'd intended. On the way out of the campsite we stopped at reception and asked for directions. The chap looked at us and laughed - 'you won't get a table at El Bulli (idiot British tourist)!' 'We've got one tonight, now how do I get there?' He looked at us in utter

shock, as if I'd just told him I was from Venus, before trying to explain that we needed to find a mountain lane out the back of Roses - stop in Roses and ask someone and they will know - everybody knows how to get to El Bulli apparently. So off we drove in heavy traffic not really knowing where we were heading. We stopped at the tourist office in Roses and asked them for directions. They gave us a map and we were now in business, although the traffic through Roses got steadily worse and we missed the turn-off into the mountains. After turning round we ended up following a speeding Belgian down this winding mountain road for five miles (guessing correctly that he was also running late for his date with Adria). We arrived 15 minutes late having had nothing else to do all day except get there from a campsite 30 minutes away!

The welcome was friendly and professional. We were given an immediate tour around the two main rooms of the kitchen...amazingly calm and quiet. I asked how many people worked there and was told between 30-40 chefs and 18 in the dining room; all for a grand total of 50 guests a night.

We sat down and our host (who'd met us at the entrance and showed us the kitchen) came and discussed our dietary requirements. They had planned for my wife's pregnancy foibles and also assumed correctly that she wouldn't be drinking alcohol. They checked that she would be ok with a few other things and then asked if we wanted to see the tasting menu or have everything as a surprise. We opted for surprises and then the gastro fireworks began; straight into an alcoholic cocktail, with a different, non-alcoholic drink for my wife. The

*Ecstasy and excitement spread throughout the tent as it sunk in that we were off to El Bulli that very evening, having woken up with no plans for dinner*

Sommelier then came over and asked me what I wanted to do about wine. I explained that my wife was off the booze and said I was happy to follow his recommendations for wines by the glass. He confirmed that they didn't try and match wines to each course and asked if I was happy to start with something sparkling, followed by something white and then a red to finish. That seemed perfect; I trusted him and didn't even bother looking at the wine list. I had absolutely no idea how much this was going to cost me!

The Cava arrived and the courses flowed. The Cava was Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2002 from Agusti Torello and was excellent. The bottle was opened at the table and the wine was bone dry, minerally and delightfully fresh and elegant. It was a lovely aperitif but possibly a touch dry for some of the early courses if you're being fussy about perfect matches. After about 10-12 courses (and approximately half a bottle of Cava), the Sommelier came and asked if I was ready for some white. He suggested something Spanish and I said that I'm a big Albarino fan. He came back with an unopened bottle of Terras Gauda O Rosal 2005 - an Albarino blend (70% Albarino) that I'd heard about but never tried. What a wine; pure, fresh, elegant, complex and balanced like a ballerina; none of the slight clumsiness that you find in many Albarinos. This was the best Albarino I've had since the Martin Codax Gallaecia 1996 (a special bottling produced in great vintages that I bought in Galicia in 1999). I drank this for the next 8-10 courses or so. It went beautifully with the food - a nice subtle accompaniment with enough fruit to stand up to the stronger flavours but nothing obtrusive. The final wine was an Olivares Monastrell Dulce 2003 from Jumilla. It was described to me as a fortified old vine Monastrell. It was like a good, young vintage Port and it had a delightful peppery complexity, a touch of tannin and an elegant acidity. It was, in a word, a joy to drink and went

well with the sweeter courses towards the end of the meal, without overpowering them. We were presented with our bespoke menu at the end, which had been drawn up by our dedicated chef and used to cross off what had been served. It's in Spanish and I haven't had it translated. However, here's my version of what we had - not a translation but a description of what was put in front of us, based on our assessment and what we were told by the waiter/waitress as they brought each course. There are probably inconsistencies between the Spanish version and this explanation of the food, however, here it is:

1. Strawberry, mandarin and campari cocktail with foam macarons and glazed strawberries. [Pineapple and coconut non-alcoholic cocktail for my wife].
2. Marinated, bursting green olives. [These burst in your mouth and almost disappeared - remarkable]
3. Crispy mango leaf with a flower (from another plant)
4. Oriental style crisps in seafood shapes
5. Seaweed waffles
6. Banana and nitrogen crispy clusters
7. Nutty flour disks
8. Popcorn candyfloss
9. Passion fruit and campari mini-tartlets (heavenly)
10. Brioche doughnut filled with Thai spice ice-cream and peanut caramel
11. Bursting, ham-infused croquette
12. Parmesan wonton served in warm broth with basil foam accompaniment
13. Frozen parmesan froth with freeze dried raspberry and nut pieces (labelled El Bulli snacks!)
14. Pig Foie Gras(?) with honey foam and mixed flowers [an absolute delight]
15. Anchovy fillet with PX and muscat bursting 'raisons' and mixed sauce 'buttons' (gorgeous)
16. Essence of clear tomato soup with virtual ham and olive oil emulsion and basil seed crouton
17. Seed salad [15 different types of seed in individual piles]
18. Artichoke hearts with blackcurrant sauce
19. Aragon flour balls with coriander seedling salad and lamb stock reduction
20. Curried courgette seed

- risotto with peanut 'caviar'
21. Ackees with oil-glazed cucumber pieces and milk skin in a meat stock reduction (a highlight)
22. Mackerel belly with chicken foam
23. Chicken crispy fritters wrapped in seaweed with sesame
24. Banana stuffed roasted red pepper on a crispy wafer with Tarragon yoghurt [sublime - we both could have eaten these all night]
25. White nitrogen bonbon with a separate tablespoon of red, alcoholic, fruit essence. [Passion fruit 'caviar' for my wife]
26. Pistachio, violet and mango(?) mousse with crispy flower leaves. With Coffee:
27. Mango sorbet with chilli wafers
28. Bursting chocolate and liqueur(?) petit four
29. Golden nuggets
30. Painted chocolate leaves

I adored all the courses except the frozen parmesan foam (which was pleasant but not exciting the way the others were) - not a bad success rate. However, in every case the sheer artistry, attention to detail and execution was mind-blowingly perfect. Each course was served on a weird and wonderful variety of serving paraphernalia with a verbal description in English of what it was and how to eat it - quite helpful in some cases - and a recommendation for the sequence (when more than one course is brought at once) and how many bites to take. Some of the dishes need to be eaten in one bite and/or quickly to get the full bursting or nitrogen sensation.

The service was remarkable. No matter how slowly or quickly we ate courses, the meal remained beautifully paced. The members of staff were all attentive, faultless when serving tables and glided around the room as if they were programmed robots executing a complex pattern. We were left to get on with enjoying our meal and never fussed over (I despise intrusive service). Overall, it was all surprisingly informal and friendly.

We finished at about quarter past one in the morning - four and a half hours after we'd arrived. We were then treated to another tour of the kitchen, which had been 'put to bed' and was spotless with

all the chefs vacated, and our final questions were answered.

The final bill? Well, before it arrived we guessed 500Euro+ and were very pleasantly surprised when it came in substantially lower, at just under 400. Both of us remarked what amazing value the whole experience had been. Three bottles of very good (if not vastly expensive) wine were opened for us from which I probably drunk seven to eight glasses and we were charged a measly 35 Euros - scintillating value in a three star restaurant.

Overall, we both thought it was sensational. We really believed that it was going to struggle to live up to expectations and that we'd leave with a heavily damaged Visa card and a feeling of disappointment. We were utterly wrong and I will do anything to get back there.

My wife best summed up the El Bulli experience, when she described it as a sort of Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory for adults. However, that's not to damn the food as wacky or frivolous. Granted, it's adventurous but it's still real food and the thirty pieces of gastronomic artistry combine beautifully as a proper meal; albeit a remarkably memorable and idiosyncratic one.

Reviewed by Jon Bubb

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T: +34 972 150 457  
E: [bulli@elbulli.com](mailto:bulli@elbulli.com)



## Hinds Head Hotel

**THE HINDS HEAD** Hotel is an 'gastropub' owned by Heston Blumenthal, owner of the

Michelin starred *Fat Duck* restaurant which is almost next door. The Hinds Head dates from the 15th century and has been a tavern for more than 400 years. It played host to the Queen in celebration of the engagement of Princess Margaret to Lord Snowdon in 1963, and a young Prince Philip spent his stag night there in 1947. It is an attractively beamed old building which is surprisingly light inside. We were given a lovely large square table in a raised alcove (to accommodate a pram) and immediately offered drinks.

The menu is pleasingly short, with a choice of seven starters and main courses, plus two specials for each. Our choices were Pickled Lemon Salad from the specials, an exceptionally meaty Rabbit and Bacon Terrine, Potted Shrimps and Steamed Mussels with garlic, parsley and lemon, the lemon in the latter giving it a wonderfully fresh kick.

Mains were Skate Wing with Capers, Roast Cod (a bit small) with a bright green parsley sauce and excellent champ, the beautifully presented Lancashire Hotpot (complete with oyster) and a perfectly cooked rump steak with an intense bone marrow sauce. The Hotpot is served in an individual mini casserole dish that I guarantee you'll want to take home.

The thrice cooked chips were superb, almost living up to Michael Winner's accolade of 'best chips in the world' whilst the broccoli with almonds and anchovies was rather bland. Puds were as good as everything so far, Eton Mess with fresh, non-polytunnelled strawberries, Apple Crumble and a fabulous Chocolate Tart.

Just one bottle of wine, a very pleasant and fresh Muscat Sec, Vins de Pays d'Oc, Chartreuse de Mougères 2004. Service was good, pretty quick and very polite.

With a couple of pints of beer and two spritzers, water and two double espressos, total cost was £46 per head for 4. Good value and well recommended.

Reviewed by Stefan Reynolds

*The Hinds Head Hotel, The High Street, Bray, Berkshire SL6 2AB*  
T: 01628 626151

# Recipes

**THE FOLLOWING TWO** recipes have been kindly submitted by Clare Crosbie, a professional caterer from Northchapel, West Sussex. Clare can be contacted on 01428 707218 or 07977 478369.

## Chicken, Leek and Gruyère Filo Parcels

### INGREDIENTS

4 chicken breasts  
2 medium leeks  
4oz gruyère  
pack of filo pastry  
butter

Serves 4

**THINLY SLICE THE** leeks and wash them in a colander. Melt 1oz of butter in a saucepan and throw in the leeks, you want them to cook through but not colour – so cook them slowly until they are soft, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Grate the gruyère and stir into the leeks, season with pepper and go easy on salt as the cheese is already quite salty.

Trim the chicken and melt a little butter and a splash of olive oil in a pan until it is hot enough to seal and brown the meat. Seal the

chicken and set aside.

You will need to cut 12 8" squares of filo pastry, using three squares for each chicken breast (the size of the squares will depend on the size of your chicken breasts). Take your first layer of pastry and brush it very lightly with melted butter, put the next layer on top of the first and repeat the process with each layer. If you have some semolina in your cupboard it is a good idea to sprinkle a little on the middle of your square, this soaks up any excess juice keeping your pastry crisp.

Put the chicken in the middle and spread over some of the leek mixture on the top. Seal the pastry by making gathering the corners of the pastry and twisting it like a purse on top of the chicken. This will take 25–30 minutes to cook at 200c.

Great served with new potatoes and a salad or green vegetables.

## Seared Salmon with a Spiced Tomato Salsa

### INGREDIENTS

4 salmon fillets @ 6oz each  
1 1/2lb new potatoes  
bunch spring onions

*For the sauce*  
2 tbsps olive oil  
250ml Chianti  
2 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes  
2 tsps caster sugar  
a large handful of chopped basil

Serves 4

Preheat oven to 220c/425F/Gas 7.

**TO MAKE THE** meatballs, all you need to do is mix everything together really well (this is much easier using your hands). Now, using wet hands, divide the mixture into about 12 large or 20 small balls (giving three large or five small meatballs per portion).

Lightly toss the meatballs in the olive oil in an ovenproof saute pan or a roasting tray. Choose one that is big enough to fit all the meatballs, but not so small that they are squashed together or so big so that the liquid evaporates too quickly, leaving less sauce.

Bake the meatballs for 10 minutes, and then pour over the Chianti, turning the meatballs so they are coated in the red wine.

8oz sunblushed tomatoes  
handful of parsley  
packet of rocket  
olive oil  
balsamic vinegar  
1lb good cherry tomatoes  
garlic  
fresh coriander or basil  
lime  
sugar

Serves 4

**RUB THE SALMON** on both sides with some olive oil and season with black pepper. Set aside as this will only take about six minutes to cook.

Put the potatoes on to boil. Prepare the spring onions by slicing thinly and chop the parsley finely. You can leave the sunblushed tomatoes whole or chop roughly. Make a simple vinaigrette with two tablespoons of oil to one of balsamic and adjust to taste, season. Add the spring onions, sunblushed tomatoes and parsley to the vinaigrette.

To make the salsa, slice the cherry tomatoes in half. Rub the inside of a small bowl with a cut clove of garlic (if you like a lot of garlic – crush one clove into the bowl). Add one tablespoon of olive oil, half a teaspoon of sugar and the juice of a lime, black pepper and salt to taste. Add the halved tomatoes and handful of chopped

fresh coriander (if you don't like coriander use basil instead and replace the lime juice with balsamic vinegar. Give it a stir and leave to steep at room temperature.

When the potatoes are half way cooked, after about ten minutes of simmering, put a frying pan on to get hot. Put the salmon skin side down into the pan and leave for a good two minutes so the skin gets nice and crisp without burning. Flip the salmon over and cook for a further two minutes, times may vary according to the thickness of the salmon and how well done you like it cooked!

Drain the potatoes and toss them into the vinaigrette with the rocket. Place a pile of the potatoes onto a plate and put the salmon skin side up on the top.

Serve a really good spoonful of the salsa over the top.

## Recipe Contributions

We welcome recipe submissions from all readers and if you would like to have your favourite original recipes featured in the next issue of Grapestalk, please send full details by email to [editor@grapestalk.co.uk](mailto:editor@grapestalk.co.uk)

## From the cookbooks

*In the Mood for Food by Jo Pratt (9780718148584) is published by Penguin and these recipes are reproduced by kind permission of the publisher.*

## Chianti Baked Meatballs

### INGREDIENTS

*For the meatballs*  
500g minced beef  
1 onion, very finely chopped  
2 cloves of garlic, crushed  
50g stoned black olives, chopped  
50g breadcrumbs  
25g Parmesan, grated  
1 lightly beaten egg  
1 tsp paprika  
1 long red chilli, finely chopped  
2-3 tbsps chopped parsley  
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

There may be some residue in the pan from the meat. This is fine, just stir it into the wine and it will all cook together to give a lovely flavour.

Return to the oven for 10 minutes, and then stir in the chopped tomatoes, sugar and basil. Cook for a further 20 to 25 minutes until the sauce is bubbling and thickened.

Serve straight away with some pasta or rosemary potatoes.

## Exotic Chocolate Pots

### INGREDIENTS

75ml single cream  
zest of one small orange  
1 tsp caster sugar  
a small pinch of allspice  
50g 70% dark chocolate, chopped  
1 large egg yolk  
1 tsp dark rum  
10g unsalted butter, softened

Serves 2

**HEAT THE CREAM**, orange zest,

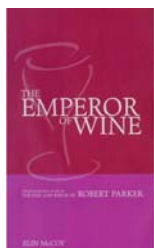
sugar and allspice in a small pan until the cream is just bubbling, but not quite boiling. Remove from the heat and drop in the chocolate, stirring until it is melted. Beat in the egg yolk, rum and butter until smooth.

Pour into two espresso cups and leave to set in the fridge for two hours. The cups can be eaten straight from the fridge or, for a softer consistency, left at room temperature for about an hour first.

Serve with a teaspoon or little crispy biscuits on the side to scoop up the rich chocolate.



# Winter books



## The Emperor of Wine

By Elin McCoy  
April 2006  
£20.00  
ISBN: 9781904943426

**ROBERT PARKER IS** one of the best known wine journalists and critics on the planet. He is also one of the most influential, if not the most influential, and opinion is prob-

ably fairly evenly divided between those who admire him and those who don't.

In this very fair and well written book, McCoy tells of the meteoric rise of the man who invented the 100-point wine scoring system, from the depths of Maryland to the world's finest wine estates. His comments on wine often influence the price set by the vineyard and frequently cause sales to soar or plummet depending upon his view.

It's a very interesting tale and McCoy has meticulously researched her subject. The sources listed at the back of the book run to 13 pages! Like him or loathe him, Parker managed to change the world of wine and this tells you how the middle class boy from America did just that.



## Apples for Jam

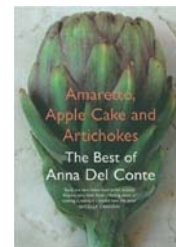
By Tessa Kiros  
April 2006  
£25.00  
ISBN: 9781740457484

**IT SEEMS A** very strange idea to group together recipes in a cookbook by colour, but this one does so and it does add novelty value to what really is a beautifully produced book. It does make you look through all the chapters and the recipes in them as you don't want to miss out any gems.

Tessa Kiros has put together a lovely collection of interesting and imaginative recipes that aren't too fussy and sound pretty delicious, such as Steak Pie (gold), Vanilla Cake (white), Chicken Croquettes (monochrome) and Chocolate Toffee Nut Squares (stripes). There is plenty for everyone in this book and it's nicely written.

Saturday Cooks. Jo Pratt has been mentioned as a new Nigella and this book certainly offers the sort of food that the Domestic Goddess would enjoy cooking herself.

The chapters are more conventional than the previous book, and include healthy options, comfort foods, 'Naughty but Nice' as well as some more extravagant recipes for dinner parties or when you want to impress. That said, none of the recipes look terribly difficult or time consuming, and many of them sound quite enticing, such as Pimms Trifle, Prawn and Coconut Satay Broth and Chianti Baked Meatballs (see p16). An attractive new cookbook from a promising new talent.

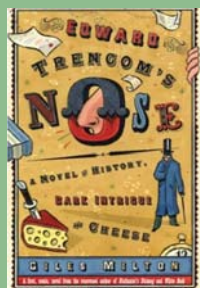


## Amaretto, Apple Cake and Artichokes

By Anna Del Conte  
August 2006  
£12.00  
ISBN: 9780099494164

**THIS IS SUBTITLED** the 'Best of Anna Del Conte' and is packed full of fabulous Italian recipes from one of our best cookery writers. She is both Delia and Nigella's favourite Italian food writer and has put together here a wonderfully comprehensive cookbook.

It isn't hardback, it isn't illustrated and is in fact rather plainly designed, but at just £12 it really is great value for money and will be a lovely addition to any home cookery library for anyone who likes to cook authentic Italian food.



## 5 Books to be won

The perfect accompaniment to any wine is *Edward Trencom's Nose* – a cheese-themed comic novel from the renowned author of *Nathaniel's Nutmeg*, Giles Milton.

As an exclusive offer to Grapestalk readers, we have five copies of the book to give away courtesy of publishers Pan Macmillan.

Click **HERE** to read more about the book, including an extract.

For your chance to win the book, simply answer the following question, and email your answer to:

[grapestalk@asdw.org.uk](mailto:grapestalk@asdw.org.uk). The winners will be the first names out of the Champagne bucket. Please ensure that you include your name and full postal address.

*Q. What is the nature of Edward Trencom's family business?*

- Owners of a cheese shop*
- Owners of a French restaurant*
- Owners of a cheese website*

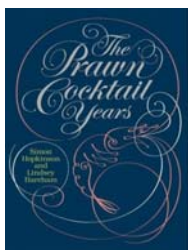
A review of *Edward Trencom's Nose* will appear in the next issue of *Grapestalk*.



## In the Mood for Food

By Jo Pratt  
January 2007  
£20.00  
ISBN: 9780718148584

**ANOTHER ATTRACTIVE BOOK** from a young cookery writer who is a regular on ITV's



## The Prawn Cocktail Years

By Simon Hopkinson & Lindsey Bareham  
November 2006  
£25.00  
ISBN: 9780718149802

**I HAVE BEEN** after this book for a very long time. It was originally published in 1997 and has been out of print for quite a while. Second hand dealers were asking over £50 for this book, so when I found out that Penguin were to republish a new edition I was delighted.

Last year, Simon Hopkinson and Lyndsey Bareham's *Roast Chicken and Other Stories* was judged by other cookery writers as the most useful cookbook of all time and made a remarkably successful comeback to the shelves. And so has this marvellous tome!

The recipes in this book are, in the words of the authors, '*dishes we had loved and lost... those we had grown up with*'. As a child of the seventies, it has many I also grew up with and yet still cook today. Just what is wrong with a prawn cocktail anyway? Made well with the right ingredients, it can be fabulous!

So how about such stalwarts as Sole Veronique, Crepes Suzette, Oeufs en Cocotte and Lobster Bisque. They all deserve their day again and I predict that it won't be long before they all become wonderfully fashionable again.

And why not? If you are one of those cooks who couldn't care less about fusion food (you probably don't even know what it is), then this book is most enthusiastically recommended. And if you're not, buy it anyway. It's so beautifully written that I guarantee you'll be seduced before long.

All reviews by Stefan Reynolds who has spent 16 years in publishing and is Editor and Publisher of Grapestalk.

## Events

**HERE WE HAVE** a list of food and drink events from ukfoodonline which will be taking place in the UK over the next 3 months. You are advised to check first before setting off in case any of the details have changed or to make sure that tickets are still available where applicable.

### FEBRUARY

#### 1st - 3rd

3rd Pendle Beer Festival - Municipal Hall, Colne, Lancashire

#### 1st - 3rd

Chelmsford Winter Beer Festival 2007 - Essex County Council Social Club, Duke Street, Chelmsford

#### 2nd - 3rd

White Cliffs Festival of Winter Ales - Masion Dieu (Town Hall), Dover

#### 2nd - 3rd

12th Tewkesbury Winter Ales Festival - Watson Hall, Barton Street, Tewkesbury

#### 2nd - 3rd

Chesterfield Beer Festival - The Winding Wheel, Holywell Street, Chesterfield

#### 7th - 9th

17th Battersea Beer Festival - Grand Hall, Town Hall Road, Lavender Hill SW11

#### 12th - 18th

National Honey Week, The Honey Association - Nationwide

#### 14th - 17th

Liverpool Beer Festival - Metropolitan Cathedral Crypt, Brownlow Hill

#### 15th - 17th

Stockton Ale & Arty Beer Festival 2007 - Arc, Dovecot Street, Stockton-on-Tees

#### 15th - 17th

25th Fleetwood Beer Festival - The Marine Hall, The Esplanade, Fleetwood

#### 16th - 17th

Hedge End Beer Festival - Hedge End Social Club, nr Southampton

#### 16th - 25th

Rye Bay Scallop Festival - Rye, East Sussex

#### 17th

Alton Winter Beer Festival 2007 - Alton Maltings Centre, Alton, Hampshire

#### 17th - 24th

Community Pubs Week - Nationwide

#### 23rd - 24th

Winterfest XV - Thorngate Halls, Gostport, Hants

#### 23rd - 25th

2nd 'Febfest' Beer Festival - East Lancashire Railway, Bolton St, Bury

### MARCH

#### 1st - 3rd

Booze on the Ouse Beer Festival - Priory Centre, St Neots

#### 2nd - 3rd

5th Elysian Beer Festival - Larkfield Resource Centre, High Barns, Ely

#### 2nd - 3rd

9th Bristol Beer Festival - Brunel Passenger Shed, Temple Meads, Bristol

#### 8th - 10th

17th Sussex Beer Festival - Hove Town Hall, Hove, Sussex

#### 8th - 10th

Feast East 2007, Tastes of Anglia - Chilford Hall Vineyard, Linton, Cambs

#### 14th - 17th

Leicester Beer Festival 2007 - The Charotar Patidar Samaj, Leicester

#### 15th - 17th

Leeds Beer, Cider and Perry Festival 2007 - Pudsey Civic Hall, Pudsey

#### 17th - 18th

Westcountry Game Fair '07 - Bath & West Show Grounds, Shepton Mallet

#### 22nd - 24th

7th Banbury Beer Festival - The TA Centre, Oxford Road, Banbury

#### 28th - 30th

The London Drinker Beer and Cider Festival - Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, London

#### 29th - 1st April

16th Mansfield Beer & Cider Festival - The Mansfield Leisure Centre, Quarry Lane

#### 30th - 1st April

Exeter Festival of South West England Food & Drink - Northernhay Gardens, Exeter

#### 31st - 1st April

Kent Game Fair 07 - Kent County Showground, Detling

### APRIL

#### 6th - 9th

Selby Gamefair 2007 - Carlton Towers, Carlton, Nr Selby, Yorkshire

#### 7th - 9th

Chester Food and Drink Festival 2007 - Car Park, Chester

#### 12th - 14th

The Maltings Beer Festival 2007 - Tuckers Maltings, Teign Road, Newton Abbot

#### 11th - 14th

Maldon Beer Festival - Town Hall, Maldon, Essex

#### 18th - 21st

31st Newcastle Beer Festival - Students Union, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne

#### 21st - 22nd

10th Lancashire Food Festival - Accrington Town Hall, Accrington

# A harvest of bubbles

**A Champagne importer goes off to France to see the *vendage* for himself**



Henry Speer

**AS A CHAMPAGNE** importer there are times when I have to speak French when talking to producers and suppliers in the Champagne region. Despite a good grounding at school and weekly French evening classes, you can't beat a spell with real French people.

So for the third year running, mid September saw me leaving wife and dog and heading off from Suffolk to the Champagne region of France, 90 miles north east of Paris, to play my part in the annual Champagne grape harvest, *les vendanges*.

In rural England these days, farms are so mechanised that there is no longer the spirit of community at harvest time that there was 60 years ago, simply because so few people are involved. Of course we still have harvest suppers in some of our villages and harvest festivals in our country churches, but these are no longer central to our rural community life as they were.

Grape harvesting in Champagne is not mechanised; each bunch of grapes has to be picked by hand. As this is so labour intensive a huge number of people are needed to do the picking, and each grape farmer will bring in his team of



grape harvesters, or *vendangeurs*.

I was one of the first to arrive at the house just south of Epernay where we were to stay. I was joined by Marc, a retired lorry driver from eastern France, Michel, a retired railway official and his accountant brother, two housewives having a working holiday from husbands and children, 3 students, two local security guards from Reims and Serge from Amiens in northern France. All stalwarts of previous years except new boy Serge – Michel (pictured above) was on his 29th year.

We were welcomed by le Patron, André Pienne and his wife Martine. André is from an old champagne family. There are Piennes all over the surrounding villages, mostly cousins – just as we have the same names cropping up in farming circles in regions of rural England.

André owns his own vines split into a dozen or so parcels

in various parishes round about: a small acreage by UK farm standards, but reasonable enough in a country where everything is divided between all the children when father dies. He is also the Director of the Champagne Cooperative at Monthelon, a substantial pressing and champagne producing organisation, with 30 members who between them own 240 acres of vines.

We all got settled into our rooms in the house, which at other times of the year is let out for holidays to families and school groups, and met up downstairs in the cave, the rock-lined cellar under the house, for our first few glasses of champagne. This comes from André's private stock and has no labels. Commercial champagne production is restricted within the *appellation contrôlée* to maintain quality, but *vignerons* are allowed to produce extra for their own use, and so the unlabelled bubbly nectar was never in

short supply – over 8 days we got through 55 bottles.

Then we had the first of many 'farmhouse' meals round the 20 seater table in the spacious living area. These were provided twice a day by Martine, her old mum (82) and Claudette from the village. In France meals like this are more of an occasion than they are in England. Not more formal, but food is more important and time is taken in enjoying it. Everyone has just one plate which is used throughout the meal, wiping it clean with French bread between each course. And the courses are not the same as ours either – a meal usually starts with salad, which comes in a big dish and may be lettuce, or sliced tomatoes or cucumber served separately, but always steeped in a vinaigrette which gives it an extra dimension. A main course will generally not have vegetables, except potatoes, usually boiled, and will be a dish from a much wider

range than we are now used to in England. There is still a great variety of country cooking and Martine showed me her menus for the week - a couple are shown here. One day we had hot tongue of beef, thickly cut, in a ratafia sauce; I'm not sure how this would go down with most English people, but in the right atmosphere, fresh from 4 hours labouring in the vineyards, it was delicious.

We started the next day, and every other day, at 8am, which meant getting up at around 6.30am for a fairly typical French breakfast of fresh bread and hot coffee. Not such a hardship you may say, but remember that for me, 6.30am was 5.30am at home!

White vans do not have the same connotations in rural France as they do in England; each of the 7000 or so small winegrowers in the Champagne region has one as an essential part of his year-round fetching and carrying, and for 10 or 11 of us this was our transport to the first rows of vines. Grape picking for 8 hours a day is not difficult, although there is some technique; 'always cut to the stem of the bunch' (*coupez au coeur du raisin*) which is likely to be hidden behind leaves or behind the bunch itself - and don't overlook the grapes low down close to the ground. However it is hard work, especially if done at a reasonable speed, and it is tough on the back. I had a problem in my first year when I cut my left hand over 20 times in the first two days. So now I always wear a heavy duty rubber washing up glove on my left hand, the cause of much Gallic ribaldry.

The vines are mostly planted on hillsides to get better drainage and more sunshine, and you always work up the hill as this involves less bending. Each picker has his own route between two rows of vines, and with his neighbours is responsible for all the grapes on both sides, so in theory the line of pickers should be level all the way up the hill. Every picker carries a plastic basket; when it is full he shouts 'pannier' and one of the two people whose job it is takes his basket and gives him another one. The full basket is emptied into a big *caisse*, and several of these will be moved up the hill, between two rows of vines behind the pickers, in a motorised hand-driven



tracked vehicle, known as 'the tank' and incongruously bearing the 'Honda' insignia.

At two minutes past eight, clipping away among the dew-damp leaves, 5.30pm seems a long way off, but there's a break at 10am and then lunch to look forward to. After a two hour lunch with a couple of glasses of *le patron's* champagne, and a few more of his own red wine - light, reminiscent of a slightly acidic Beaujolais but made with pinot meunier grapes - it's again a bit difficult to get started, especially as the sun can be quite hot; progress is noticeably slower for an hour. But soon it's 3pm and there's a hot shower, more champagne and a convivial meal not too far ahead. And because we're always moving on from one row of vines to another, often in the back of the van blanc, there are other little interludes to break up the day.

André, *le patron* spends much of his time grandly driving round in his tractor taking trailer loads of grapes in piled-up *caisses* to the *pressoir* at the Cooperative. It's not a tractor an English farmer would recognise - the axles are about 1½ metres above ground level and the front wheels are on spindly stalks. This means that it can be driven up three rows of vines with a row between the wheels

when he is spraying or defoliating.

The grapes we were picking were pinot meunier, a red grape, even though it makes a white wine, and chardonnay. These and pinot noir are the three classic grapes of champagne, and the only significant ones allowed in champagne making. This year they were in excellent condition and it should be a top year for champagne.

The rules allow 5500 kilos to be picked for each acre, and each kilo produces 1.2 bottles of champagne - we were picking about 7000 kilos a day. So the Cooperative was handling well over a million kilos over the harvest. About half of this goes as newly pressed grape juice to the big 'Houses' - Moët, Laurent Perrier, Hiedseick, Pommery etc - and the other half is processed by the Cooperative. Some of the champagne goes to the *vignerons* themselves who sell it under their own labels, but most of it is sold under the cooperative's own brand, Mont Hauban, which is my main import.

The harvest provides a great spirit of camaraderie that comes from working together, both in the vineyard and at meals and leisure time, with lots of good hearted banter, some of it, which I don't always understand, at my expense! We end up, after eight days hard at it, with a very special Harvest Supper, the *Cochelet*, followed by ribald Gallic entertainment. And next morning we all go back to our normal diverse lives - until next year!

The week is very reminiscent of the sort of harvest you read about in the novels of Thomas Hardy or see in old English farming photos of yesterday. But because Champagne grape production continues to thrive whilst still being so labour intensive, I have been able, in the 21st century, to enjoy a week's rare insight into a time honoured French traditional way of life that remains as important today as it has ever been. And I can't wait for next year's dose of *mal au dos!*

*Henry Speer runs Champers Ltd, which is a Champagne importer and also sells Champagne with branded labels.*

## French Farmhouse menus

All with *le patron's* champagne to start, and his own red wine and French bread

### Saturday lunch

Finely cut cucumber, sliced tomatoes, served separately. Both steeped for some time beforehand in a vinaigrette sauce

Boeuf à la mode aux carottes  
Pommes de terre à la vapeur  
(Forequarter of beef stewed for three hours with carrots, steamed potatoes with butter)

Cheese

Fruit salad with *gateau quatre quarts* - so called because made with 4 ingredients, eggs, sugar butter and flour (and yeast, making it five!) This cake, to a non cake specialist, is very like a maderia cake

### Tuesday lunch

Green salad  
(Salad leaves cut thick, tossed in a vinaigrette sauce)

### Choucroute

(A speciality of Eastern France with Sauerkraut cabbage, grated and fermented, with frankfurter sausage, ham, bacon and sliced sausage rounds and another type of lighter smaller sausage, cooked with white wine - served with boiled potatoes)

Cheese

Fruit

### Recipe for Madame Pienne's Salade Lorraine

Served in a large salad bowl in successive layers (except for the parsley)

Batavia Lettuce (a crisp firm variety) cut into thin strips

Sliced raw onions

Garden peas (boiled and cooled), about twice as much by weight as the bacon below.

Sweetcorn with mayonnaise

Grated raw carrot - 3 times as much by weight as the bacon below

Gruyère cheese - grated, not too thin. Same by weight as the bacon

Fried bacon cut into matchstick strips

Leave in the fridge for 24 hours before serving

# Current members

**ASDW members as at the 1st February 2007**

## Amordivino

Geoff Ponter & Annalisa Baj  
[www.amordivino.co.uk](http://www.amordivino.co.uk)

Amordivino wines present to you the best wines that Italy has to offer. An enormous range of interesting and exciting Italian wines, many of which are not normally available outside top London restaurants.

## Cathar Wines

Katrina Balmforth  
[www.catharwines.com](http://www.catharwines.com)

Cathar Wines sells special wines from small producers in the Languedoc-Roussillon area of France. Our aim is to supply interesting, quality wines which you wouldn't find in the supermarket but without charging an arm and a leg!

## Champers

Henry Speer  
[www.champers.net](http://www.champers.net)

Champers specialise in champagne, particularly personalised label champagne for corporate brands and social events. They also supply the range of Champagne du Mont Hauban, and a range of half bottles.

## Decanter Wines

Krystyna & Jim Monks  
[www.decanterwines.co.uk](http://www.decanterwines.co.uk)

Independent specialist importers of Rioja and other quality wines from Spain, including Cava and Spanish brandies.

## Devigne Wines

Mike & Pat Robertson  
[www.devignewines.co.uk](http://www.devignewines.co.uk)

Devigne Wines are specialists in Rosé, Méthode Traditionnelle (Champenoise) & wines from Gaillac, the Jura and the Languedoc.

## F & F B Wines

David Riach

F&FB Wines specialises in internationally recognised red wines from Tuscany, holding stocks of mature vintages from the 80s onwards. Sales are by mail order or collection by arrangement.

## Field & Vine

Stefan Reynolds  
[www.fieldandvine.co.uk](http://www.fieldandvine.co.uk)

Field & Vine specialises in selling a range of hand-picked quality wines to organisations, businesses and corporate clients as well as providing wines to private individuals for every type of social occasion.

## French Regional Wines

John Dickinson  
[www.french-regional-wines.co.uk](http://www.french-regional-wines.co.uk)

An ever expanding range of French wines with familiar names and exclusive imports. Quality and affordable wines for every occasion.

## Harlequin Wines

Martin Bayne  
[www.harlequinwines.co.uk](http://www.harlequinwines.co.uk)

Harlequin Wines, established in 2000 by Martin Bayne, is a company dedicated to quality. We started selling wines of the Franken region of Germany. This region remains our speciality.

## H C Wines

John Hattam & Andy Clarke  
[www.hcwines.co.uk](http://www.hcwines.co.uk)

H C Wines imports a range of interesting, individual and affordable wines with a special emphasis on south-west France. We also conduct tailored tastings for a wide variety of clients.

## Hopscotch

Stuart Colmer

Hopscotch will soon be launching their new website.

## Individual Wines

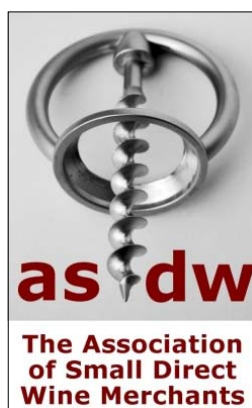
Richard Loadman  
[www.individualwines.com](http://www.individualwines.com)

The aim of Individual Wines is to bring you fine wine at low prices. Most of my wines are about 20% lower than the next cheapest retailer I can find, with some significantly cheaper.

## Italy Abroad

Andrea D'Ercole  
[www.italyabroad.com](http://www.italyabroad.com)

Italyabroad.com imports some of the finest Italian wines. We are passionate about wines and our team travels the whole Italy looking for hidden gems that we then make available to the English public.



# Current members

## Leon Stolarski Fine Wines

Leon Stolarski

[www.lsfnewines.co.uk](http://www.lsfnewines.co.uk)

New classics from Languedoc, Roussillon and southern Rhone. An impressive range of red, white, sparkling, dessert and fortified wines from some of the best producers these regions have to offer.

## Marta's Vinyard

Malcolm Falconer

[www.martasvinyard.com](http://www.martasvinyard.com)

Marta's Vinyard deliver the very best quality wines from our estates in Argentina – directly to your home.

## Nick Dobson Wines

Nick Dobson

[www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk](http://www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk)

Mail-order specialist offering wines mainly from smaller estates in Southern Burgundy (Beaujolais, Mâconnais, Côte Chalonnaise) and Germany (mainly Mosel). Also the UK's widest selections of Swiss and Austrian wines.

## South African Wines

Susan Weerts

[www.southafricawines.co.uk](http://www.southafricawines.co.uk)

We specialize in selling quality South African wine from some of the best Cape estates. We offer our customers award-winning wine, friendly & efficient service, delivering throughout the UK.

## Step Up Wines

Nick Willcocks

[www.stepupwines.co.uk](http://www.stepupwines.co.uk)

Step Up Wines Limited are specialists in offering wines hand crafted by small, dynamic producers. By setting up exclusive partnerships with the Vineyards we aim to bring you wines that you will not find elsewhere.

## The Big Red Wine Company

James Bercovici

[www.bigredwine.co.uk](http://www.bigredwine.co.uk)

BRW imports wines from leading estates throughout France with a special focus on the Southern Rhône Valley. Quality, value and helpful, friendly service are its aims.

## Vinpromo

Bill Laverick

[www.vinpromo.co.uk](http://www.vinpromo.co.uk)

Vinpromo has a range of some 80 wines. Sourcing wines principally from international companies who do not generally deal with the multiples, the list has a strong Latin focus.

## Wine for Spice

Warren Edwardes

[www.wineforspice.com](http://www.wineforspice.com)

Wine for Spice's naturally semi-sparkling wines Very Dry Viceroy White, Quite Dry Raja Rosé and Off Dry Rani Gold, are cool refreshingly sparkling, fresh & fruity wines to accompany curries and spicy food.

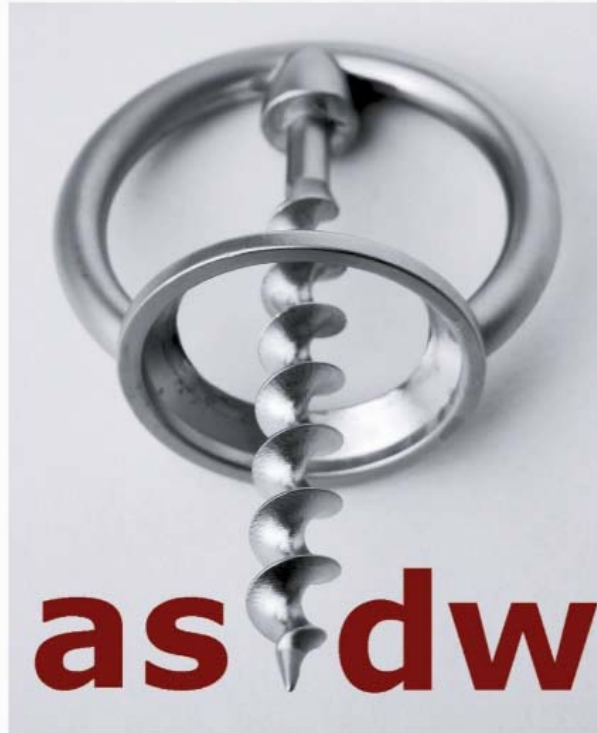
## And finally...

*Thanks as ever go to all those who have written for this issue, with a special mention to Tom Cannavan, Paul Howard and Peter May, who are not even members of the ASDW and still willingly contributed!*

*Thanks also to Clare Crosbie for her lovely recipes, to Pan Macmillan for the competition prizes and once more to Mina Partia for proof reading. Any errors that remain are mine alone.*



*we open up a  
world of fine wine*



**The Association  
of Small Direct  
Wine Merchants**

**asdw.org.uk**

