

Food & Wine



International Wine & Food Society Europe & Africa Committee - issue 99

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Cape Town Festival Issue

The Plight of the Honeybee



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Dear Members

This will be my last message to you in my capacity as Chairman of the European & African Committee as I stood down at the May ABRM, though I shall continue to serve as Chairman of the EAC until 1 October 2009 when Ron Barker, a former editor of this magazine and most recently our Awards Officer will take over once his remaining work and other commitments have been completed. I shall, however, continue as Chairman of The International Wine & Food Society until my two year term as Chairman of its International Council ends in the autumn of 2010.

I have thoroughly enjoyed what will be, by this October, a term of three and a half years as Chairman of the EAC. Whilst I have not (unsurprisingly) been able to visit all branches I set out to visit I have visited many and I have had the privilege of presiding over two excellent Great Weekends, being Manchester 2006 and Tallinn in 2007.

During the past three years our membership has stabilized and indeed increased a little. It is disappointing that we have not been able to gain any new branches in the UK, though I am absolutely delighted to report that we have a new branch in Dubai. Over the last few years we have been able to introduce the concept of Great Away Days and we had two successful events at Grims Dyke in November 2007 and Lindeth Howe in March 2008. We have also introduced an EAC organised event, which will take place on 24 June 2009, being Sherry and Tapas on the Thames. As I write places are still available so please contact our Treasurer, John Legg, if would like to attend (details page 4). The EAC was also responsible for organising the Society's principal 75th Anniversary celebrations in November 2008, being the very successful dinner and lunch at Claridge's and the Mandarin Oriental, Hyde Park respectively.

When I became Chairman in 2006 I said I considered my main objective was to maintain and grow membership in our Zone. At the end of 2005 we had 1,338 members. Membership then increased in 2006 quite significantly to 1,425 but then dropped back in 2007 to 1,381 before growing again in 2008 to 1,397. Alas, we are predicting a further drop to 1,335 in 2009 so while there has been some growth during my tenure, at best our membership is stable today when compared to 2005. I do feel, however, that we have made some progress in the past few years and I hope the position will improve not just in our zone but elsewhere once Council has introduced the strategic plan and implemented it with the assistance of a redesigned website. It is intended these initiatives will take place within the next six or so months, as despite what many members may see as a lack of progress, I can assure you both Council and the EAC have been working very hard to make the Society a relevant wine and food organisation offering significant benefits to its members.

In closing I should like to pay public tribute to those EAC members who have now stepped down, namely our Emeritus Chairman, Nils Sternby, our former Chairman John Valentine, our former Membership Secretary and Commercial Manager, Helen Mills and our former African representative Shirley Kilian. Without their immense help and the assistance given to me by all my colleagues on the EAC it would not have been possible for me to function as your Chairman, however imperfectly I may have done. With these brief but humble remarks I now welcome Ron Barker as my successor and commend him and his team to you.

Thank you and good luck.

Chris Bonsall

CONTRIBUTORS



Vaughan Johnson, owns a wine shop in Cape Town's Waterfront. He studied Accountancy, made wine in Stellenbosch and ran several divisions of the largest supermarket in South Africa, opening his first wine shop in Johannesburg in 1985. The Cape Town shop opened in 1992. He judges and lectures on wine.



Alan Harrison is a retired University Dean, a former Head of the Edinburgh Hotel School at Telford College, and a former Lecturer in Gastronomy. His books include "Gastronomy" and one on why we eat what we eat.



A beekeeper for 9 years Brian Ripley is Chairman of the Publicity and Promotions Committee of the British Beekeepers Association. Vice-Chairman of Alnwick and District Beekeepers Association (ADBKA). In 2006 he won a grant of £19000 for his association to create a training apiary of 20 hives plus equipment.



Hugh Edwards has been a member of the Society for 22 years. Before retirement he was Operations Director for Manley Ratcliffe Ltd's honey factory, responsible for the entire plant. At that time it was larger than Rowse their main competitor. Two years later the company was taken over by Nestle, Rowse climbed to pre-eminence.



Food & Wine

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Editorial

In this issue we have details of the superb gastronomic experiences enjoyed by over 100 members at the Cape Town International Festival, a four day extravaganza of wonderful food and wine. Congratulations to all the organisers.

To continue the theme we have a fascinating article on the wines of South Africa by a leading Cape Town wine merchant and a report of the post festival dinner in Johannesburg organised by Shirley Killian. Shirley, who is retiring from the EAC this year, is to be congratulated on receiving an André Simon Silver Medal for her unstinting work in Africa, coordinating branches and recruiting new members. Our main restaurant review comes from one of the worlds top restaurants in South Africa. Also in testament to the great popularity of South Africa as a travel destination we have an advertisement from one of our Cape Town members whose travel company offers tours of the Winelands, visits to top restaurants and much, much more.

We have a rather 'tongue in cheek' article looking at Molecular Gastronomy by a new member of the Society and, with the economic climate in mind, I have reports on three pub meals. I have heard that some members do not like restaurants being criticised when the food fails to come up to standard. My restaurant reviewers are told to 'tell it as it is', hopefully the comments will be helpful to the establishments concerned in the interests of our founders aims to, 'raise the standards of selection, preparation and service of good food and wine'. A reviewed restaurant rang me the other day requesting more copies of the magazine, this is the way the Society spreads the word.

There is a sequence of articles on one of today's major environmental issues - bees. Since I decided on this theme there has been much in the press about the perilous state of the honeybee population, the situation is dire, there are nearly one hundred food crops that require pollination and bees are the main pollinators.

Thank you to all those that have submitted branch reports, unfortunately we still have many branches that don't bother to send details of their activities, especially those outside the UK. Please nominate someone in your branch to write reports and take photos, we would all like to know what is happening around the area.

The André Simon book awards have recently been presented with independent publishing houses winning both categories. Peter Brear's *Cooking and Dining in Medieval Britain*, published by Prospect Books, was named the winner of the food section and *Ciderland* by James Crowden, published by Britannia Books took the £2,000 award in the drink category, more on these in the September issue.

The Festival was presided over by the Society's new Chairman Chris Bonsall and this year marks the end of his three year term of office as Chairman of the EAC. He will be sorely missed by EAC members. I would like to extend to him a big 'thank you' for all the support committee members have received in their particular areas of expertise. He will be a hard act to follow but I have every confidence that Ron Barker, the man who transformed this quarterly from a newsletter to a journal, suitable for a worldwide Society, will keep us in line. I look forward to seeing many of you on the river trip in June, if you still haven't booked details are on page 4.

A very enjoyable summer to you all,

Pam Brunning

ROUNDUP OF ACTIVITIES

Vintage Card 2009- Now in my second year at the International Secretariat I have become more involved in one of the major aspects of the work of the office – producing the Vintage Card. This year's card is now being worked on and will be your 2010 Membership Card.

I thought I would give you a brief insight into who and what is involved in the production of this valuable resource.

As the IWFS relies on the assistance of some 20 plus consultants around the world and also the Wines Committee whose members are also internationally based – timing is the key – and therefore we need to get started in January each year. The IWFS is very fortunate to have a team of willing consultants who are acknowledged specialists in a particular wine producing country or region and some are also Masters of Wine as too are a number of the Wines Committee Members.

Our consultants this year are: Sarah Ahmed, *Tony Aspler*, *Nicolas Belfrage MW*, Peter Bell, Bob Campbell MW, David Furer, James Halliday, Julia Harding MW, Samuel Harrop MW, Ben Howkins, Dave Hughes, John Livingstone-Learmonth, Jane Masters MW, Richard Mayson, Greg Melick, Angela Muir MW, *Andy Perdue*, *John Radford*, Michael Schmidt, John Schreiner, Lisa Shara Hall and David Swinger.

Some consultants are not able to provide meaningful assessments until the beginning of May – just before the Wines Committee meeting is held – so timing does get a bit tight to get summaries to the Committee members in advance. The timing of the vintage itself plays a key part in this in the “new world” and also some regions in Europe do not hold their first vintage tastings until April. At this meeting the final ratings for the new and past vintages are agreed – based on the submissions and recommendations from the consultants. An improvement to the Vintage Card this year is to indicate wines that should be “drunk up”, shown by an upturned triangle.

The Wines Committee comprises both members and non-members of the IWFS which brings a balance of expert views and opinions from different sectors of the wine world and they are members: Sid Cross OMA, Chairman with in-depth knowledge of North American wines; Prof Nils-H Sternby, Vice-Chairman; John Avery MW whose particular areas of expertise are Burgundy and Champagne; Chris Bonsall, Secretary; and Gregory Bowden whose specialist area is Alsace. Non-members include Liz Robertson MW who is a much valued, longstanding, member of the Committee and also a highly respected member of the UK wine trade with many years as wine buyer for a major supermarket chain and more latterly as a consultant for several prestigious on-trade accounts; *Beverley Blanning MW* is UK based and a member of the Circle of Wine Writers, independent journalist and author; and *Harriet Lembeck* who is an eminent wine and spirits educator based in New York.

After much discussion the agreed assessments for new and previous vintages form the new Card which is then sent off for printing and final delivery to the IS and branches around the world - in time for Christmas orders, and ready for the membership in the new year.

People listed in italics kindly joined the team this year.

IWFS Website - André Simon Memorial Lectures

The Muttie Mogase lecture held in February 2009 at the Cape Town Festival entitled "The South African Wine and Culinary Journey, Some Reflections" has recently been added to the website. Please contact me if you would like to receive a printed copy of this, or John Avery MW's recent AS lecture, by post.

Please note for access to the Members Only section of the website e mail andrew@brodie.cc for password

Hotel Accommodation

I recently visited the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London - which offers members special rates when visiting the capital (details are on the members only page of the IWFS website or available direct from me at the IS). If you are looking for top service and facilities as well as a prime central location (opposite Harvey Nichols) then you will not be disappointed. This hotel also offers the unique and appealing qualities of an impressive Victorian building which, combined with classic English interiors, provides the quintessential London experience. When booking please quote the IWFS and you will receive the following: Welcome drink on arrival; Welcome amenity in room; Morning newspaper; Complimentary access to the gym, the steam room and relaxing pool at their award winning Mandarin Spa 7-9 am; Express check out; Complimentary access to the business centre plus the new installed DEUROMEDIA-System offers guests a choice of 600 TV and radio channels (by country).

Best wishes

Andrea Warren, International Secretariat (IS)

DON'T MISS THE BOAT Sherry and Tapas on the Thames

Wednesday 24th June 2009

11:30am to 3:30pm.

Members £55 per person Guests £58

There are still a few places left on this river trip.

For more details & booking please contact:

John Legg Tel 0161 928 0466

johnlegg@talktalk.net



Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London

KARELIAN HOT-POT – MEAT AT ITS BEST by Jaakko Rahola

Ask any Finn if there is a national dish in Finland, and most probably the answer will be “Karelian hot-pot”. In 2007, this hearty stew was selected as the national dish by readers of a Finnish evening paper. By definition, a “national dish” is something that is eaten frequently, and real Karelian hot-pot has certainly not been a common everyday dish, as meat was considered luxury in the old days.

Karelia is the area between the lakes Ladoga and Onega, up to the White Sea in the northeast. The area is now split between Finland and Russia, with only a small part of it being today on the Finnish side of the border. A large part of the population of Karelia migrated west into Finland due to the Finno-Russian Wars 1939-44, and that is why everything Karelian is seen through a veil of nostalgia in Finland today.

The origin of this dish can be sought in the method of house heating centuries ago. In the area around the Baltic Sea, clockwise from eastern Finland and westernmost Russia, right down to southernmost Sweden, houses were usually built around a relatively massive, heat-accumulating hearth, the so-called “East European central oven”. It was fired every morning and offered a convenient baking oven for the rest of the day. Much of the cooking was done in this slow oven.

The original population of Karelia did not use the name “Karelian hot-pot” of this dish, very much like Frankfurters are not known as Frankfurters in Frankfurt. The dish had different names in different areas of Karelia, such as “oven roast”, “meat stew”, and “crock meat”.

What kind of meat?

Today, practically any supermarket in Finland offers “meat for Karelian hot-pot” a blend of two kinds of meat, pork and beef, boneless, and cut into one-inch or smaller cubes. However, the traditionalist does not approve such simplification. Most cooks know that quality meat does not necessarily have the best taste. Traditional Finnish recipes always recommend cheaper cuts, with some marrowbones, fat, and gristle. “Meat for Karelian hot-pot without bones is like a ladle without a shaft”, says a well-known Finnish cook who has spent years studying traditional recipes in the countryside.

Although purists say that at least two, sometimes three kinds of meat should be used, often only pork is used for everyday purposes while veal, beef or mutton are only used on special occasions.

Should offal be used?

In some recipes a pig’s kidney is recommended and sometimes even liver. However, it is said that liver easily makes the broth cloudy, which is considered bad. Sometimes the pot contains some heart, and many say that pork rind must be included.

Size of the pieces

The size of the meat cubes is a matter of individual taste. Traditionally, the meat was cooked in egg-sized or even larger pieces, but modern demands of convenience in serving tend to cut the meat into about one inch cubes. Bones and lumps of gristle are cooked with the stew, and are taken out before serving.

Browning of the meat

Even with the browning, the recommendations vary. In some recipes, all the meat is seared separately on a frying pan before cooking. While in many recipes the meat is not browned, the cubes are placed in the pot with the fatty pork and rind pieces on top. Then the pot, after adding water nearly to cover, is placed in a hot oven so that the topmost meat gets a light-brown crust. Also, if pork rind is included, it will convert to delicious crackling. According to some recipes, when the meat has browned the oven is turned down, a lid put on the pot and the stew baked in a low oven.

Oven temperature

Basically, the stew should be cooked in a low oven as the ovens in the old houses were never very hot. One traditional recipe even recommends baking the stew overnight at 80 to 90 degrees C only, to avoid boiling of the broth, which then will stay clear. However today for hygienic reasons a higher, sterilizing temperature is used so most modern recipes call for a couple of hours at 150 to 170 degrees C. Even that temperature is too low for successful browning of the surface meat hence the pre browning.

Additional ingredients

Fresh vegetables are a rather late addition in Finnish cookery, so in most published recipes, only onions are used in the stew. Some writers remind us, however, that broad beans were a staple in Finland, and some root vegetables, such as turnips were eaten in the early days. The Karelian hot-pot has been extended with both, as well as sometimes with barley, but for festive occasions, only meat was used, usually with some onion as spice.

When allspice, also known as Jamaica pepper or pimento, became available in Finland, it rapidly became very popular. In fact, according to trade statistics in the year 1977, Finland imported 45 grams allspice per inhabitant, while the corresponding number in England was only 5 grams. It is an important spice in the Karelian hot-pot, used as whole or crushed peppercorns, not ground. Another spice, traditional in Finland, is bay leaves. One or two leaves can be added to the pot at an early stage.

Serving

When the meat is done, the bones are usually taken out and the meat cut into smaller pieces. Today, it is usually served with mashed potatoes, and garnished with pickled beet-root and cucumber. The gravy is delicious as sauce, and leftovers can easily be enriched with new vegetables, cream, pasta, or just anything. Thus, a large pot will make several good meals for a family. ♦



Cape Town Festival

February 24th - 28th

2009



One hundred and twenty members from thirty five branches in twelve countries met in Cape Town to enjoy what was probably the best ever festival organised by the Society. They were helped by superb weather, excellent wineries and world class restaurants but the majority of the credit goes to the organising committee under the chairmanship of Graham Blackshaw. This committee comprising 3 legal eagles, 2 doctors, a dentist, an accountant, an interior designer and a university administrator had been working (and enjoying themselves) for three years to achieve this success. We were fortunate to enjoy the company of Society President John Avery and his wife Sarah at every event in the festival.

The opening function was held at Buitenverwachting in Constantia and took the form of a garden party where 14 different courses were introduced demonstrating the history of South African food served to members as canapés whilst 8 local wineries served 11 of their wines enabling members to try and match the food with the wines. The event was overseen by Lannice Snyman, an expert on the subject who has written many books on the cuisine of Africa.

The following morning three coaches carried members from the Festival Hotel, The Table Bay on the waterfront, to a wine tasting at Vergelegen in Somerset West. Their superb wines were further enhanced by the pithy comments (many at the expense of our American members) of their star winemaker André van Rensburg. We then went on to Rustenberg in Stellenbosch for an open air luncheon accompanied by further fine wines before returning to Cape Town, in the afternoon, to prepare for our first black tie dinner. This was held at La Columbe, a world class restaurant in the grounds of the Constantia Uitsig winery. The restaurant normally can only cater for 60 but had been persuaded to expand their covers especially for this event. Any concerns that the increased numbers would cause a problem with quality were unfounded and the restaurant produced what was probably the best meal of the festival.



The Festival Committee



Fricassee of quail, langoustine and baby corn, Misto - corn butter and smoked olive oil served with Black Oystercatcher White Pearl 2007



Duo of veal; Fillet and sweetbread, morels, sugar snap and Pancetta, pea and mint cream served with both Vila-fonte Series M 2004 (Merlot/Malbec) and De Trafford Shiraz



Vanilla Crème with caramel foam, apple tarte tatin, walnut and prune purée served with Paul Cluver Weissner Riesling Noble Late Harvest 2007



The next day we were allowed to rest in the morning although the more active booked excursions to some of Cape Town's top attractions. In the late afternoon we were taken to the Nedbank Tower to taste some of South Africa's top red wines selected by the Cape Winemakers Guild. The tasting was on the top floor which gave full views over Cape Town and beyond towards many of the vineyards. Unfortunately there are only two lifts that service this sixth floor. Possibly as a result of the combined weight of 120 wine tasting members, both lifts were soon out of action and members had to be led through the bank into lifts that serviced the 5th and lower floors and had to climb the final set of stairs to reach their goal. We were fortunate that some of the winemakers attended to introduce their own wines. Although there will always be debate about which wine is the finest there were no 'lemons' but some of the wines were being tasted before they had reached their full potential.

After the tasting we were divided into smaller groups to 'dine around' in the homes and businesses of members of the Cape Town Branch. On Friday morning we were up early to travel to the gourmet capital of the winelands; Franschhoek. The temperatures were noticeably warmer away from the coast. We were first taken to the Môreson winery where we were able to see and taste demonstrations of South African charcuterie, bread-making and chocolate production all as local artisan products. Following that we journeyed into the hills to Haut Cabrière which is one of Franschhoek's finest restaurants.



charcuterie



bread-making



chocolate production



Sabrage

There we saw a demonstration of Sabrage; the technique for the removal of the closure from a bottle of sparkling wine (Méthode cap classique in South Africa) with a sword. We then enjoyed luncheon, each of the four courses was prepared by a different chef from the village. Although Margot Janse from Le Quartier Français has the highest profile I particularly enjoyed the starter, a chilled apple soup with a camembert flavoured ice cream and a dolmades filled with walnuts and potato made by Neil Jewell from Bread & Wine. During the meal we listened to the 2009 Andre Simon lecture given by Murtle Mogase on the subject of ***"The South African Wine and Culinary Journey, Some Reflections"*** (copies are available on the Society's web site). Although very interesting I feel we need to find an alternative way of delivering these lectures other than in the middle of an excellent meal.



Chilled apple soup with potato and walnut dolmades and camembert ice cream by Neil Jewell served with Môreson Chenin Blanc



Franschhoek salmon trout trio, Malay-spiced fishcake, beetroot and citrus marinaded terrine with pepadew and fennel mayonnaise by Matthew Gordon with Landau du Val Semillon 2007



Ballotine of sugar-cured springbok and biltong, buchu gnocchi and parsnip foam by Margot Janse paired with Boekenhoutskloof Cabinet Sauvignon 2004



Rooibos tea chocolate Crème brûlée, Amarula-scented cherry, almond financier and Hanepoot sorbet by Reuben Riffel accompanied by Pierre Jourdan Ratafia



Passion fruit and lemongrass sorbet



Pan-fried ostrich with peach tarte tartin, buttered broccolini & rosemary jus served with both Hamilton Russell Pinot Noir 2005 and Bouchard Finlayson "Hannibal" 2004



Fresh fruit and berry pavlova served with Chantilly cream.



Chef Christophe Dehosse

We were allowed the evening off but some members found room to sample the Cape Town harbour front seafood restaurants. The next and final day started with a trip to the Granger Bay Hotel School, a local catering college set in a superb location by the side of the sea. When we eventually left the gardens and the view we were introduced to a selection of South Africa's finest white wines by the Festival wine Director Dr Dave Swingler and Alan Mullins, a well respected wine judge and wine buyer. We tasted all styles and my only disappointment was one wine, Iona, which had won the "White Wine Trophy at the International Wine Challenge in London. As one of the judges I did not feel that it showed quite as well on its home pitch. After a light luncheon served by the students we returned to our hotel to rest and prepare for our final black tie dinner.

The festival committee had located this dinner at the Groote Schuur Estate which was built for Cecil Rhodes and is the historical home of past South African Presidents, including Nelson Mandela. As the Presidential Estate is still the home of some Government Ministers security was very strict and we could not enter without showing our passport. After touring the historic building we supped canapés of Oyster au gratin, olive and thyme tartlettes & Yellowtail tartare with a Graham Beck Blanc de Blanc 2002 sparkling wine in the extensive grounds. We then enjoyed a 5 course gourmet meal prepared by Christophe Dehosse served with some of the best wines of the festival. After the meal Society Chairman Chris Bonsall thanked the whole of the festival committee and presented Graham Blackshaw with the Society's Andre Simon Silver Medal his wife, Chelle, with the Society's Bronze Medal and the entire committee with diplomas.

The next morning members went their own way with 50 going on a post festival safari, and others either going home or moving on to enjoy other parts of the country. I am left with two thoughts; Cape Town has set the bar so high that it will be difficult for anyone to match but one note of criticism. The wines had been purchased in advance so that we got the best, the various chefs cooked their signature dishes and gave us the best food but the combination of the best wine and the best food do not always make for the best match.

Ron Barker



FESTIVAL MEMBERS 'LINGER LONGER' IN JOHANNESBURG.



On an evening pregnant with the threat of thunder and storms that had ravaged Johannesburg, and fresh from a successful and indulgent few days in the Cape of Storms, members of the Johannesburg Branch welcomed participants of the Cape Town Festival to Johannesburg. This was part of their trip, a way-station, prior to a wildlife experience in Phinda game reserve in Kwa Zulu Natal.

A thin moon hung in the sky above Sandton sky scrapers as members and delegates mingled sipping wine and tasting pre dinner nibbles. New acquaintances' and a meeting of friends all tinged with the anticipation of wild things to come. Last minute instructions regarding baggage, transport and small airplanes presaged a celebration of wines and culinary excellence as put together by Shirley Guy and Walter Ulz who is owner and manager of one of the longest running restaurants in the City of Gold.

Cape Town had clearly been a fabulous success, but the team swung into action with transport and slick organisation that left no imponderables unaddressed. The delegates were about to savour the expertise of the top restaurant in Johannesburg, and to share in hospitality "Johannesburg" style. It was a pleasure to be there.

Accompanied by Paul Cluver's Weisser Riesling 2008 a selection of finger amuse bouches included Figs with Foie Gras, Crocodile with Mango served in a light curry sauce and Springbok Carpaccio with Melon.

Instructions, formalities and welcomes past, the delegates and their Johannesburg hosts proceeded to tables inside the restaurant.

The meal proceeded with choices for the starters. Grilled Scallops on Fresh Porcini Mushrooms with a light tarragon sauce, or a Spring Roll stuffed with a traditional Cape Malay dish called Bobotie which is lightly curried and spiced minced beef with a baked egg topping, served on Risotto with Beetroot Sauce. Or Tuna Carpaccio served with Salmon and Shrimp Cerviche and an African Oyster. Delectable decisions served with Joubert- Tradauw Chardonnay 2006.

Conversations blossomed, tastes shared and wine savoured, until a small cup of Avocado Soup with a hint of feta basil and rocket salsa refreshed our palates for the next offering. A further choice of Duck Leg Confit and Crispy Roasted Duck Breast with red cabbage and a "slightly Asian sauce" tempted many a participant. However a dish entitled Ocean Bounty, included grilled langoustine, Cape Crayfish, prawn and rock cod, tempted others who resisted Impala fillet, and Karoo lamb combo, served on Basil mash with butternut and snow peas. To accompany this selection Herolds Bay Pinot Noir 2006; a light and fruity pinot from the Garden Route town of George and I am reliably informed the very last of a successful vintage.

Discussions of dishes, experiences, wines and what was yet to come in the game reserve punctuated every table with evident appreciation visible all around.

To end, a decadent Trio of Desserts accompanied by a Rhona Muscadel 2004. Burnt Lemon Cream, Chocolate Ganache in a Brandy Snap Basket or a Wild Berry Mousse completed an evening that we in the Johannesburg branch will long remember as a production of the combined efforts of Shirley, who had just been presented with the Andre Simon silver medallion as recognition for her many and diverse services to the Society over many years, and Walter Ulz and his esteemed restaurant team at Linger Longer.

Fine wines, wonderful company, and atmospheric food made for a Johannesburg memory that even those of us who live here savour as a special moment in time.

Then on to the wilds of our part of Africa.....as if Johannesburg is not wild enough! Wonderful, and thank you to all who were there to share and enjoy as I did!

*Tony Harrison,
Chairman Johannesburg Branch*



**Shirley Kilian receiving her
Silver Medal from Chris Bonsall**



Vaughan Johnson in his Wine Shop in Cape Town's Waterfront.



© Roger Davies

WHITHER SOUTH

By Vaughan Johnson

It is remarkable that South Africa has a vibrant wine industry when you consider that the Cape was settled by the Dutch in 1652 and by the British in 1800, neither of whom had any wine credentials at that time. Nevertheless, the sweet wine from Constantia in Cape Town became world famous in the early 19th century, whereas a wine culture only developed after 1960.

During the 1980s Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Bordeaux red blends became all the rage but the most dramatic improvement in quality has happened in the decade and a half since the end of apartheid in 1994.

The most established wine growing areas have always been Constantia, Stellenbosch, Paarl and Robertson which are planted in the main with the noble grapes of France. Global warming is already having an effect which reinforces the fact that our vineyards are not as cool as those in Europe. Warm harvests have produced high sugar and alcohol levels which distort the shape and texture of the wine. This has prompted adverse comments from some sectors of the burgeoning export market.

As a result wine farmers are looking for cooler climate vineyards. Gyles Webb, owner of Thelema in Stellenbosch, has long promoted the high altitude of his vineyards which allows the flavour development in the berries to take place over a longer ripening period, improving complexity and balance. His Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon are among my favourites. He has recently planted vines in the even cooler Elgin valley, south of Cape Town on the road to Hermanus. Elgin was formerly an apple growing district but apples are no longer profitable and many orchards have been replanted with vines. Gyles' Sutherland vineyards in Elgin have been a great success. The Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay are especially crisp and tasty.

Another newcomer to Elgin is Andrew Gunn, who has re-invested the profits from the sale of his medical business in Johannesburg in his Iona vineyard project. These are probably the highest plantings in the Cape and, together with the southerly latitude of Elgin, make this Sauvignon Blanc my current favourite. It has a refined minerality with no hint of the tropical fruit salad aromas found in warmer areas.

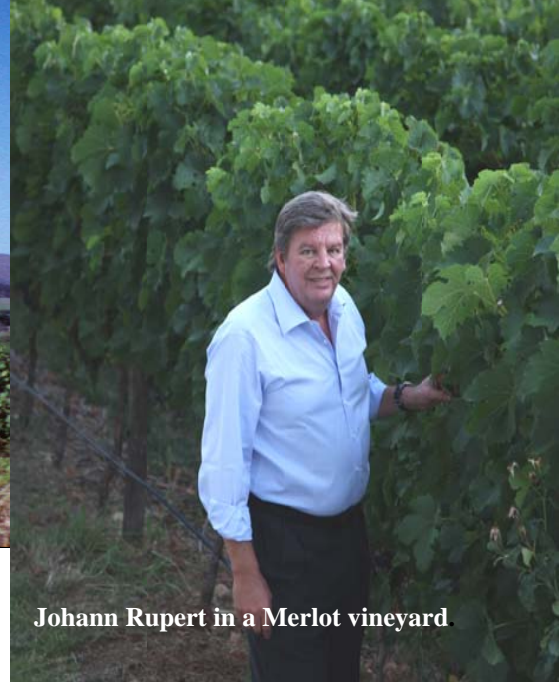
The Stellenbosch district has always had the greatest concentration of high quality red wines which are best grown on the numerous mountain slopes, facing the cool sea breezes of False Bay. Rustenberg has been producing excellent Cabernet-based wines since the early 1960s and their flagship Peter Barlow is one of our finest. It is firm and concentrated, needing a minimum of five years bottle ageing to reveal its fruity core. Owner Simon Barlow is also proud of his two chardonnays and notes a renewed interest in the variety. Cape Sauvignon Blanc has enjoyed ten years of popularity and is admired for its taut fruit but Cape winemakers are now having success with taming the richness of Chardonnay by judicious oakaging, Rustenberg Five Soldiers Chardonnay leans towards Burgundy yet retains a New World lime freshness. This is something that John Avery has been advocating for years. White Burgundy is the style we should be emulating and not California or Australia.

David Trafford qualified as an architect before pursuing his first love, wine, and in 1992 he established the De Trafford farm high up on the Helderberg mountain in Stellenbosch. His wines are extremely difficult to find as production is limited but they are in the same league as Eben Sadie's (see later). He excels at Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot which are intense yet elegant.

Personally I prefer the great wines of Bordeaux to those of Burgundy and I am therefore very excited by the estate of Emil Den Dulk, successful Johannesburg businessman turned wine farmer. His De Toren farm in Stellenbosch has been planted with the five Bordeaux varieties and the maiden 1999 vintage of Fusion V sets a new benchmark for this category. The current 2006 vintage (55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Merlot, 14% Cabernet Franc, 13% Merlot, 10% Malbec and 7% Petit Verdot) is even better. It is a gutsy wine and has been highly rated by Parker as well as being awarded five stars in the Platter's South African Wine Guide.



AFRICAN WINES?



Johann Rupert in a Merlot vineyard.

There is still a demand for the traditional style of Cape red which is robust and firm, epitomized at Kanonkop. This is the home of the Cape's best Pinotage, a variety often maligned when not vinified properly. This crossing of Pinot Noir and Cinsault (Hermitage) can be coarse and hard but a well made Pinotage will be rich and rounded with deep flavours of mulberries. Their flagship wine is Paul Sauer (70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% each of Cabernet Franc and Merlot) which is consistently rated in South Africa's top ten wines.

The greatest star to appear on the Cape wine scene in recent years however, is Eben Sadie who believes we are on the wrong track. The Cape does not have a continental climate like Bordeaux and we should not be trying to make wines in that style. Our climate, he says, is Mediterranean and is better suited to varieties such as Shiraz, Mouvedre and Grenache. Years of travelling and investigation convinced him to buy a vineyard in a part of the Swartland area, near the town of Malmesbury, known as Voor Paardeberg. In this stable climate he has meticulously nurtured his vines, restricting yields to 25 hectoliters per hectare. This intimate knowledge of the terroir is essential to making great wines. It is not enough, he believes, for winemakers to be merely proficient in the technical procedures. To excel they must think on a higher spiritual level to "liberate the wine". The fullest expression of this theory is revealed in his Columella wine. The grapes are fermented in open top vessels, taking care to maximize potential without any loss of quality. The wine (80% Shiraz, and 20% Mouvedre) is blended either after the malolactic fermentation or after eight months in barriques, followed by a total of 20 – 24 months in barrel. The Columella 2006 is opulent and brooding with an impressive array of black fruit flavours. It is tightly packed but with a remarkably supple mouthfeel even at this tender age.

Eben has also rejected the local preference for a single varietal for his white wine Palladius. It is a well structured wine with a spicy complexity and is made up of 45% Chenin Blanc, 20% Grenache Blanc, 15% Clairette Blanche and 10% each of Viognier and Chardonnay. The unusual flavour profile is a welcome change from some of the one dimensional Sauvignons and Chardonnays.

Even Johann Rupert calls Eben a genius and consults him on various aspects of the redevelopment of his L'Ormarins farm in Franschhoek. The first releases under the Anthonij Rupert label are marketed as single varietal wines – Shiraz, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon – and have been very well received, especially in America. In time a flagship red will be introduced. It is still early days for this project but great things are expected as grapes are sourced from the best of the extensive Rupert vineyards. Johann has the resources and commitment to produce the best wine possible and totally rejects the notion of it being a vanity purchase but rather a continuation of his later brother's bold plans.

South Africa does not have a long tradition in wine as in Europe. Indeed no farm can boast more than two generations of fine wine production. This means that we are not bound by age old rules and practices and are open to new ideas and especially new capital, previously made in other spheres. The future is most promising providing we are able to communicate our message to the marketplace. ♦

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An Introduction to the Three 'M's'

Molecular Gastronomy, Molecular Cuisine and Molecular Cooking

By Alan Harrison

Meals at "The Molecule"

Welcome to our *small* restaurant. Here is the menu for today. There's Snail Porridge, Fake Caviar made from sodium alginate and calcium, Roast Foie Gras Benzaldehyde or Egg-and-Bacon Ice Cream. After that there's Jello Pasta or Sardine-flavoured sorbet.

Our main courses today include Monkfish Liver with tomato seeds and citrus and Barnacles with tea foam and spaghetti made from vegetables. You could then have Burning Sherbets, Puree of Mango and Douglas Fir, Instant Seaweed Ice Cream [fast-frozen using liquid nitrogen], Egg-and-Bacon ice cream if you missed it as a first course, or plain, ordinary Parmesan Cheese Ice Cream. All are served with Goose-liver whipped cream.

This article introduces readers of *Food & Wine* to Molecular Gastronomy, Molecular Cuisine and Molecular Cooking. They seem to be combined in the public mind. Separately or in that entity, it is a controversial field. When I refer to all three I will refer to them as *the three Ms*. "Molecular", it seems, is the buzz word for "scientific". If any or all three Ms have been widely accepted and understood, there would be no call for this article. Molecular Gastronomy, however, gains more attention than the others and so it receives more attention here.

Two definitions of Molecular Gastronomy

"The scientific study of deliciousness." This is from Harold McGee who disassociated himself from the technique. ??

"Molecular Gastronomy is science, i.e. producing new knowledge using the hypothetico-deductive method, and calculations. This cannot be done in kitchens, and chefs cannot generally make it; it is not forbidden, but indeed it has nothing to do with food preparation. Indeed, to make it clearer, Molecular Gastronomy is making scientific experiments, including making Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy, or solving differential equations." A quote from Herve This.



Harold McGee

A definition of Molecular Cuisine

"Liquid nitrogen ice cream, sodium alginate pearls, goose liver, whipped cream, these are the results of molecular cuisine, which also teaches how to produce 6.34 gallons of mayonnaise with only one egg yolk. Indeed, the term molecular cuisine is meaningless except to a small elite who are familiar with the chemistry, synthetic products and latest technology necessary to create this avant-garde cuisine." Molecular Cooking *

"It is now the newest fashion for chefs to offer their customers fake caviar made from sodium alginate and calcium, burning sherbets, spaghetti made from vegetables, and instant ice cream, fast-frozen using liquid nitrogen," says Herve This, the co-originator of Molecular Gastronomy in part of his plea to ensure that it is not confused with Molecular Cooking

A practical example of Molecular Gastronomy?

In Philadelphia, "... chef Jonathan McDonald uses tweezers to carefully arrange peppery nasturtium leaves over a cucumber and blood orange salad. A puffy marshmallow adorns one end of the rectangular plate. But this is no ordinary marshmallow. It's a lime caramel coconut marshmallow McDonald created using two hydrocolloids — xanthan gum and Versawhip, a whipping agent invented by Kerry Bio-Science — he measured to the tenth of a gram on a digital scale." No ordinary dish once you go beyond the salad. Make room for tweezers in your kitchen drawer. Put hydrocolloids on your shopping list. Take marshmallows to two decimal places.



Heston Blumenthal and Molecular Gastronomy

Heston Blumenthal is prominent within the same small arena occupied by the three Ms. In the public mind, again, it is all the same. It is tedious to refer to what he does as his version of the three Ms. I have coined the term *Blumenthalis*. That is easier to do than find a concise definition of it or what he does.

"Heston Blumenthal, 38, is presently at the forefront of this radical style of cooking (molecular gastronomy). His triple Michelin starred restaurant The Fat Duck serves dishes like sardine-flavoured sorbet, pasta made out of Jello, snail porridge, or a puree of mango and Douglas fir."



EGG & TRUFFLE FLOWER



FROG POND



Nicholas Kurti

To quote Blumenthal in 2006, "The fashionable term 'molecular gastronomy' was introduced in 1992, the term 'molecular gastronomy' does not describe our cooking, or indeed any style of cooking." In his 'Frog Pond' the white concoction is frog blancmange. The solid items are fried frog legs. The pond is a hollowed log lined with water lily. 'Roast foie gras benzaldehyde' may be attractive to scientists but the frog blancmange is one of many examples which lead me to conclude that Blumenthalism is best defined as crude gimmickry.

The egg and truffle flower is a more acceptable alternative. "At restaurant Arzak in San Sebastian, Juan Mari Arzak and his daughter Elena experiment on a daily basis. Here is an "Egg and Truffle Flower in Goose Fat with Choriza of Dates". The flower has been made with pH meters, liquid nitrogen gas etc. As long as you are not asked to wield the equipment and the flower is a reasonable price, like me, probably you would agree to taste it.

Nicholas Kurti and Hervé This

We have looked at various views of Molecular Gastronomy without a solid definition from anyone directly connected with it.

To quote Hervé This, "... in 1988, Kurti and I decided that we should create a new scientific discipline to investigate culinary transformations. When Kurti died in 1998, I shortened 'molecular and physical gastronomy' to 'molecular gastronomy' - as it should have been from the beginning."

Hervé This was in at the start and has more recently made statements on Molecular Gastronomy. He wrote an article which was reproduced on the internet. I read it in February 2009 looking for a clear definition of Molecular Gastronomy. It was difficult to determine and I started an online discussion of various aspects of his article. I then bought his book. There is a lot of very interesting reading in it but as to a definition, all I could find is that, "Molecular Gastronomy deals with culinary transformations and the sensory phenomena associated with eating." He concluded his article with, "And what does molecular gastronomy hold for chefs? For them, the scientific exploration of cooking is even more important. Science is the basis for technology and this field will help them to create exciting new dishes and inventions. However, for chefs, and hopefully for non-chefs as well, the main aim is to surprise and delight their guests or their family with exciting, tasty and healthy food."

Chefs have enough experience to look after themselves even though Molecular Gastronomy at one point steers clear of food preparation and at another, helps chefs create exciting new dishes and inventions. Most chefs, however, would react adversely to being told that,

"Molecular Gastronomy is science, i.e. producing new knowledge using the hypothetico-deductive method, and calculations. This cannot be done in kitchens, and chefs cannot generally make it." After all, they create more new dishes than Molecular Gastronomy. Chefs have been informed by Herve that they "produce food not knowledge". I presented him with plenty of argument to the contrary.

The non-chefs who will surprise and delight their family with exciting, tasty and healthy food need to be wary and scientifically educated. Food writers and TV ensure that sonic this, differential that and dangerously-produced clouds of gas are all perceived as part of Molecular Gastronomy. No matter as Hervé has said, "indeed it has nothing to do with food preparation".

A Family Name?

These pages intend reasonable coverage of Molecular Gastronomy and its relatives as they need to be seen together to understand the dysfunctional family. As they are much of a molecular muchness, you might wonder why there is no family name for these offerings and methods. There have been too many of them and *cousins* include: "Nouvelle Cuisine", "Progressive Cuisine", "Culinary Constructivism", "Modern Cuisine", "Avant-Garde Cuisine", "Experimental Cuisine" and "Techno-Emotional Cuisine". I can go no further than "Gastronomic Molecularism". Whatever it is called, it is more than adding tweezers to your kitchen drawer. Whatever it is called, how long will it last? Is it an expensive tasting in a test-tube? When asked what he understood about Molecular Gastronomy, a restaurant owner's ten-minute tirade reduces to the notion that it is Nouvelle Cuisine with scientific knobs on. The association of ideas might stem from customers at the time who thought that the portions were tiny [or molecular] and that Nouvelle Cuisine was "not as much on the plate as it was all on the bill".

More information can be found at www.gastronomy-on-line.com

Go to "Gastronomy for All" and then "Molecular Gastronomy". The discussion between Hervé This and this author can be found on the "Molecular Gastronomy 2" page in the navigation panel of the main website.

* <http://www.thefoodpaper.com/features/texturas.html##>



Alan Harrison is a retired University Dean, a former Head of the Edinburgh Hotel School at Telford College, and a former Lecturer in Gastronomy. His books include "Gastronomy" and one on why we eat what we eat. His latest book on the gastronomic history of Scotland is on his website with the other two. As a Tourism specialist, he has worked in fifteen countries advising Governments and Tourism companies as well as universities offering Tourism and Hotel Management courses.

A Trio of Pubs

The Nobody Inn

*Doddiscombsleigh,
Exeter, Devon,
EX6 7PS*



To quote the website “Today The Nobody Inn is one of the country's leading inns - renowned for its imaginative wine and whisky list, comprehensive selection of local cheeses and creative cooking based on fresh local produce.”

Well, I had heard of it. Probably because it was once a favourite haunt of the Devon branch. “Low ceilings, blackened beams, inglenook fireplace, antique furniture and timeless atmosphere retain The Nobody's unspoilt old world charm,” continued the listing.

The cottages can be traced back to 1591 but it was not until two hundred years later that it became an inn. Called The New Inn, it was another one hundred and sixty years before it was renamed The Nobody Inn. It seems this was with reference to an unfortunate episode concerning a deceased landlord whose body was never found.

Until 2008 it had been in the same family for 38 years during which time it has been A Good Pub Guide - Pub of the Year and Good Hotel Guide - Inn of the Year winner.

It was sold for £1.6 million to Andy and Rowena Whiteman who also own the Harris Arms pub in Portgate near Okehampton in Devon. To quote the catering press at the time, “The Whitemans, who trained as wine makers in New Zealand, plan to refurbish the inn's kitchens and bring in some of their brigade from the Harris but do not plan any major changes.”

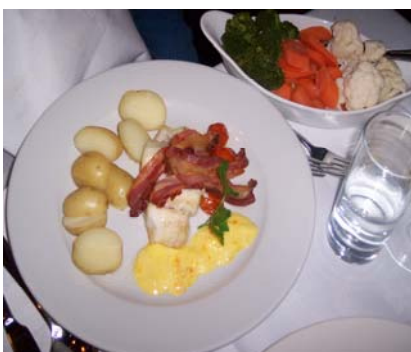
The 2009 Hardens guide remarked in October, “at last new owners with an interest in food!” As we had to spend a night in the area we thought it was worth a try. We arrived about 5pm and the only life was a lady polishing the brass. I began to get a little worried when I went back down stairs after six and there was still no one in the kitchen. By 7.30 things had started to liven up, there was one diner in the restaurant. Relaxing we perused the ‘imaginative wine list’, it was certainly a tome. The first bottle we chose was sold out, the second likewise. We were on fish for starter and one main course so we eventually chose a 2005 Pinot Blanc from Alsace at £18.50 and I ordered a glass of Yarrow Valley Pinot Noir to go with my venison.

Warm Dartmouth smoked eel was very good, the salad was lightly dressed and served with sliced pickled cucumber which was not at all vinegary. My partner made the mistake of choosing a starter from the bar menu. Two large deep fried crab cakes were designed to soak up plenty of beer. If the same amount of crab had produced one cake, a fraction of the size, he might have been able to taste the crab.

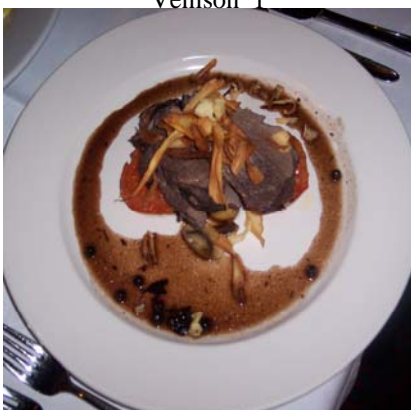
My venison, which I had ordered medium/rare, arrived sitting on a grilled tomato, topped by a few parsnip crisps and surrounded by a jus with crushed juniper berries, the venison was over cooked and dry. I hate having to complain but there are limits to a quiet life so I did something I have rarely done, I sent it back. Meanwhile my partner was tackling his baked cod. Served with a béarnaise sauce and crispy bacon it came with a navvies portion of unsalted new potatoes. The side dish of vegetables was as nature had intended - no seasoning, no slick of olive oil or butter, no sprinkle of herbs to give them a lift, just a very uninteresting dish of steamed vegetables beloved of many chefs. The main problem with sending a dish back is that everyone has finished when it eventually arrives. The second time the kitchen got it right, it was moist, juicy and of good flavour if a bit chewy. By the number of different muscles in some slices of meat they seemed to be using haunch not loin. The waitress brought me a fresh bowl of chips and asked if I would like fresh vegetables, I told her not to bother. My partner sent the first dish back untouched with the suggestion that if chef seasoned his food before he sent it to the table his waste bin would be a lot less full. Why will they never learn?

We ordered coffee and went to bed. Breakfast was of the same standard.

Bed and breakfast was £60 and dinner including wine was £76.40. ♦



Venison 1



Venison 2





The Thomas Lord

High Street

West Meon

Hampshire, GU32 1LN

We walked out the first time we called at The Thomas Lord. To be fair we discovered later that new owners had just taken over. The outside was being painted and we had to climb over a guy rehanging a door to get to the bar. After a drink we decided to move on as there was thick dust on the tables and the arrangement of summer flowers on the mantle-piece must have belonged to the previous owners, I should think the place had been on the market for quite a while.

Our return was instigated by the award of 'Hampshire Pub of the Year 2008', a good write up in the press and several second-hand recommendations from locals.

The painter must have run out of paint he had not ventured inside, the walls were still 'nicotine brown' but the tables had been dusted and the flowers removed to be replaced by some half dead pussy willow. Obviously things were looking up. The menu was fairly basic, which is more than could be said for the prices.

Leek & potato soup was served with excellent rape seed oil croutons. The soup was thick and flavoursome which was more than could be said for the slice of cotton wool and pat of butter served with it. £5.50

Beetroot marinated salmon with mustard dressing was appetizing and very attractive on the plate but spoilt by more cotton wool. £6.50

My salmon and pickled cucumber fish cake was light and tasty but the accompanying tomato sauce was bland and very ordinary. Purple broccoli and curly kale were cooked just right. £14.50.

Hyden Farm braised herb & pork sausages with red onions and lentils look as though they had been boiled and my friend confirmed that they tasted that way too. £11.95

The men chose Greenfield smoked gammon, egg and chips. The gammon, two thin slices of supermarket style ham with no hint of smoke, was accompanied by two semi hard fried eggs and some disgusting, overcooked, soggy chips, some of the worst I have ever seen served. £11.95.

Desserts of a steamed jam pudding looked a mess and a rhubarb custard brulee both at £5.50 were disappointing and 'NO' there was no custard, only cream or ice cream, to go with the steamed jam pudding!

Expensive for a very ordinary pub lunch with reasonable service but little ambiance. ♦



The Hand & Flowers

126 West Street
Marlow
Buckinghamshire SL7 2BP



At last a pub worth returning to. Not since our visit to The Sportsman the other year have I had a pub experience worth repeating. I must admit due very much to 'e gullet' - the online food and wine blog site - where they have been raving about the great £10 lunches at The Hand & Flowers in Marlow for a while.

The H&F is a Greene King, opened in 2005 by Tom and Beth Kerridge it gained a Michelin star in its first year. Divided into three eating areas which were obviously the original, public, private and snug bars it oozes old world charm with beamed ceilings and heavy oak scrubbed tables. We booked fortunately, by 1.15pm they were turning walkins away, one party of eight was most upset. It was a warm spring day so some were offered the use of the garden which they readily accepted. The only problem was that this put the kitchen under pressure to say nothing of the waiting staff who were running in and out and the service got slower and slower.

We sipped a glass of Prosecco while we scanned the wine list and enjoyed an appetizer of deliciously crisp white bait with a Tabasco dip. Food was quickly ordered as there were only two courses to choose from on the £10 menu, the wine took a little longer but as usual after going through the whole list we settled for a carafe of house red - a vin de pays. If any foodie pub can't offer a good house wine it is not worth patronising - we weren't disappointed. Bread was freshly made, a soda bread and white rolls, served with a good quality slightly salted butter which was spreadable - halleluiaah - not straight out of the fridge.

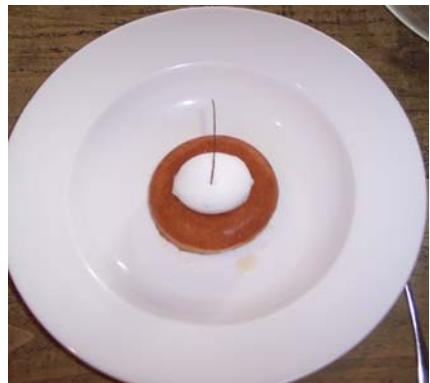
My first course of west country pork pie with piccalilli was very good. The pastry was not too thick and heavy and the filling was tender and tasty with plenty of jelly and the piccalilli was not vinegary.

My partners leek and chive velouté was lacking in salt but blossomed when some was added. Our Hand & Flowers Lasagne was different. Served in deep bowls the freshly made pasta encased a tasty mix of shredded beef, rather than mince, mixed with tomatoes, mushrooms and herbs. I must admit, when I thought of the shredded beef, a naughty thought went through my head 'mechanically recovered meat'! But no, the beef was good. The dish was finished with a béchamel sauce sprinkled with nutmeg. A gratined cheese topping would have given more life to the dish.

Puds were, a very dry chocolate tart with super thin pastry served with malted milk ice cream and a rum baba with coconut sorbet. I enjoyed them both but my partner was not impressed, not being a pud man it takes a lot to impress him. Mind you I ate half his rum baba but couldn't taste the rum.

Three courses were £13.50 - a good quality, reasonably priced pub lunch. I would love to try the à la carte but starters average £8 and mains £17 and by the time you add puds, coffee, drinks and service it becomes a special occasion venue.

I did contact them with a view to organising a branch lunch with their £13.50 menu, yes they said they would be very willing to do it but there would be a £500 room charge for 30 people using the restaurant - no Credit Crunch here then! ♦



The British Beekeeper

By Brian Ripley

Chairman of the Publicity Committee BBKA

These are difficult times for beekeepers. As well as the economic uncertainty, beekeepers are worrying about keeping their bees alive as the last two summers have been particularly cold and wet. Poor weather compounds the problems beekeepers face as it becomes increasingly difficult to replace lost colonies when day after day of rain prevents queens from mating satisfactorily.

Before 1992, when Varroa (a parasitic mite) arrived in the UK, beekeeping problems were mostly weather related but everything has changed in the past 17 years as the mite has spread northwards and has become immune to the main approved treatment. Beekeepers are now aware that they need to monitor the build up of mites in the hive and be prepared to treat or manipulate the colonies when the numbers of dead mites found daily suggest that, without treatment, there is a risk of losing the colony.

A third of the human diet depends upon effective pollination and honey bees are the most important of the pollinators. They are a crucial part the world's eco-system, pollinating wild plants upon which other species of birds and mammals depend and without which our landscape would be reduced of much colour and diversity.

The recent announcement by the UK Government that they are to invest £10 million on research into losses of pollinators, honey bees, bumble bees and butterflies must be seen as a victory for common sense. It is a vindication of the efforts put in by beekeepers and the general public, under the guidance of the BBKA (British Beekeepers Association) to petition for research funds, showing the public mood was against official inactivity. Honey bee losses were 30.1% over the winter of 2007-08, more than would normally be expected and whilst the preceding poor summer will have had an effect, the losses are extremely worrying and may have helped concentrate the minds of the decision makers.

Unlike many other parts of the world the UK is mainly made up of amateur beekeepers the majority of whom have between one and five hives. This can be seen as a weakness as many of these hobbyists could give up if the problems continue to worsen. On the other hand in countries where bees are kept by large commercial operations there are likely to be more uniformity of treatments with the possibility of mass failure which is unlikely with the UK's diverse and differing management styles.

Varroa, and the virus's it introduces into the bee colonies, has made beekeeping more difficult but it hasn't reduced its magic. What is going on in the hive, how to reduce swarming, how to match the volume of bees in the colony to coincide with a honey flow are constant and agreeable challenges, and anyone with an interest in the environment should consider the benefits of beekeeping both to themselves and to their wider community.

Beekeeping is facing challenges, government sponsored research will help but equally an increase in beekeepers willing to learn how to work successfully with these constraints will also help. More beekeepers equates to more bees, inevitably more swarms and an increasing numbers of bees returning to long abandoned sites which will further enhance pollination and, who knows, a chance that bees, through natural selection, will develop the grooming skills necessary to survive.

When I took it up as a hobby in 2000 I quickly entered a world of infinite fascination and challenge, meeting new people who also enjoyed this strange pastime. We now work together to develop our bee colonies, improving temperament and honey yield. Others are working to develop the resistance of honey bees to the effects of Varroa. They are breeding bees that have hygienic traits that make them more likely to remove mites from within the colony, similar to the way bees in Asia have evolved to do so.

Of course everyone might not have the time or inclination, or indeed live in an area where they could keep bees, (at one time there were even colonies on the roof of the Bank of England, *Ed*). Everyone can speak up for bees, they can grow bee friendly plants and lobby planners to consider planting 'wild areas' as well as play grounds. Non beekeepers can help by buying local honey when it is available and by contacting beekeepers or local authorities to collect any swarms they see. Swarms should not be a cause of concern, bees in a swarm will generally be gentle and will calm once they settle, remaining clustered until they have located a new home. The earlier a swarm is collected and re-hived the less risk the bees will face from adverse weather conditions.

Finding out about beekeeping is easy, the BBKA web site will tell you everything you need to know. It gives details of local associations where training and mentoring will normally be available. It gives information downloads useful to beekeepers and also to those who just have an interest in these enthralling creatures.

A bee suit, smoker, hive and other bits and pieces will cost around £250 and of course you will need the bees but with a 1lb of honey selling for £3 it doesn't take long to recoup the outlay. It is a relatively inexpensive hobby with great therapeutic value. Prospective beekeepers should be warned however that they need to be disciplined to prevent the number of their colonies escalating as opportunities to increase, by collecting swarms, come along.

So why not give it a go, you will be amazed, once it is known that you keep bees how much interest there will be in buying your honey, and how much better it will taste compared to the produce on the supermarket shelves.

The National Beekeeping Centre, Tel: 02476 696679 www.Britishbee.org



Starting Young



A swarm of bees
in May
Is worth a load of hay;
A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon;
A swarm of bees
in July
Is not worth a fly.



Commercial Honey Packing in the UK by Hugh Edwards



The annual consumption of honey in the UK amounts to approximately 25000 tonnes. Of this, 22000 tonnes are imported whilst 3000 tonnes are produced by British bees. World consumption is around 1 million tonnes and a bee needs to make 60 flights to fill a thimble with honey, which illustrates how hard working they are!

The main producing areas of the world are Australia, N America, S America, China, Russia, parts of Europe and Asia, and New Zealand. The main exporting countries are China, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Eastern Europe and Australia. The big importing countries are Germany (nearly three times as much as UK), France, USA, UK, Middle East and Japan.

In the UK, of the 25,000 tonnes consumed annually, 5,000 tonnes is delivered directly to food processors and pharmaceutical companies in bulk tankers or 45 gallon drums. This goes into breakfast cereals, muesli bars, cough sweets and honey drinks etc. Honey packed in jars divides up into, supermarket and other own label brands 50%, and brands such as Gales or Rowse 50%.

Of the jar honey, 80% is blended and 20% single origin honey such as English, Acacia, Clover, Mexican, Australian or Organic.

The blended honey, which is typically the supermarket own-label honey, is made to sell cheaply and consists of as much low quality honey as possible, usually around 60%. This is sweet and sticky but not particularly interesting so two other better quality honeys are added to give a little interest to the blend. This could be likened to a well-known French supermarket wine that tastes the same year in and year out and is priced very cheaply.

The remaining 20% is where the honey devotee will find some really rewarding flavours, and although more expensive, the comparison with better wines holds good.

Within single origin honeys are different blossom honeys, Australia for instance produces Yellow Box, Eucalyptus, Strawberry, Clover, Iron Bark, Vipers Bugloss and Leatherwood from Tasmania. Manuka is mainly from New Zealand.

Others include Greek - Hymetus and Wild thyme; Heather honey from Scotland and the West country; Rosemary and Lavender from Spain; Turkish Pine; and Lime from China. Clover is imported from both NZ and Canada. The main source of Acacia is China but the quality of Acacia from Hungary and Romania is far superior.

Exporting countries generally have a Honey Marketing Board who oversee the collation of thousands of small bee-keepers' honey and bulk it up into 45 gallon drums for exporting. Because honey is a seasonal crop, buyers have to buy their currency forward (as do cocoa or coffee buyers) – usually in US dollars – and because there are two hemispheres there are two seasons a year.

The packing companies receive different honeys on a continuous basis and need large outside areas to stack the drums, usually 4 high. My own company (now part of another one) kept about 30% of the annual turnover in bulk at any one time.

The commercial honey packer's job is to clean up the honey by removing hive detritus from the drums. By warming them up they liquefy the honey and this dissolves granulation that has taken place and so allows it to be pumped through the plant, filtered and finally measured into jars.

All honey, with the exception of Acacia and one or two others, has a natural tendency to granulate and the colder it gets (never put it in the fridge!) the faster the granules form. In our company we had a temperature-controlled warehouse kept permanently at 21C – a pleasant environment for both honey and workers.

The more times heat is used to melt the honey the faster the melted granules will try to reform. It is the natural capacity for granulation that has led to all honey but Acacia, being offered in either set or clear form. The proportion of clear to set honey overall is 60/40.

In a factory the creation of set honey is a carefully managed version of what would happen naturally. Some honeys, particularly Clover, have a very high capacity to granulate. Because we don't want set honey to have granules the size of granulated sugar, Clover honey is cooled down to 14C, passed through a milling machine to mill the crystals naturally present to microscopic size and then 15% of the "seed" is introduced into the honey you are trying to set. The packed jars then go into a chill room at 14C for four days during which time the honey goes solid. It is actually setting it's own matrix of minute crystals and thus when you spread it on your toast, it doesn't immediately try to flow off. There is no other difference between set and clear honey.

Honey itself is almost totally made of sugar. Approx 38% is Fructose, 35% Glucose, 5% Sucrose, between 2 – 5% other sugars, 20% water and 1% minerals, pollen and trace elements. Because it is almost entirely sugar it is a great preservative which makes a nonsense of the labelling of jars with a Best Before Date. So our children, prone to clearing our shelves of goods past their Sell By Date, should be discouraged from throwing any out of date honey away. In mediaeval times royalty was interred in honey to preserve their earthly remains as has been established by a tomb opening in the 1930s.

If you look at clear honey in supermarkets you will see that some have a slightly cloudy look whilst others are as bright as lager. The only difference will be the fineness of the filtering that has taken place. My own view is that a slightly cloudy honey has a better flavour due to the retained pollen.

One of the biggest problems the commercial packer has when filling jars at 140 – 200 per minute is the sticky "tail" of the honey going down the side of the jar. This is usually solved by use in the filler of an automated knife which cuts the "tail" off, the resultant drip then becomes the flow into the next jar. A very clever solution.

If you like honey I would urge you to try the more exotic and expensive ones – you could be pleasantly surprised!



Saving the Honey Bee

By Pam Brunning

'Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth.'

Albert Schweitzer



Varroa mites



The varroa mite seen here sucking blood from a bee pupa is the honeybee's most common pest but collapsing colonies were not found to have large infestations.



Entomologist Jeff Pettis examines a screen used to monitor varroa mites, a major pest of honey bee colonies worldwide and a possible contributing factor to colony collapse disorder.

Israeli bees have been suffering since 2004 from an Israeli Acute Paralysis Virus (IAPV) which leaves them twitching on the ground, there are at least three different strains of this virus. One was brought into America in colonies which were flown from Australia in 2005 after the US government lifted the ban on importing. Researchers found that the same virus could be found in CCD colonies but it could not be proved that the virus actually caused the death of the colonies. A vaccine for bee viruses would be one answer but unfortunately vaccines will not work on honeybees because the invertebrate immune system does not generate the kind of protection against specific agents that vaccines induce in humans and other mammals. Scientists are now working on a new technique of RNA interference which blocks a virus from reproducing inside a bee's cell. The long term aim is to produce virus-resistant honeybees.

In the meantime apiarists' are urged to prevent colony loss by keeping parasites in check, improving their bees' diets and by practising a scrupulous hygiene regime.

There seems to be many contributing factors to Colony Collapse Disorder but while the scientists are seeking ways to overcome the scourge there are many ways the beekeeper and the farmer can help the beleaguered honeybee.

As long ago as 1962 Rachel Carson, in her book, 'Silent Spring' warned us of the environmental disasters we may well face in the future, maybe her predictions are coming to pass.

In the US there are between 900 and 1,000 commercial beekeepers managing 2.4 million colonies so it is not surprising that it is America we look to for an answer to the plight of the honeybee.

Millions of beehives worldwide have emptied out as honeybees mysteriously disappear, putting at risk almost 100 crops that require pollination.

One third of the world's agricultural production depends on pollination by *Apis mellifera* the European honeybee. It was the autumn of 2006 when US beekeeper David Hackenberg first alerted Diana Cox-Foster professor of entomology at Pennsylvania State University to the mysterious disappearance of millions of bees from his hives. For 42 years Hackenberg had migrated with his family and 3,000 hives from their summer home in central Pennsylvania to their winter home in Florida. The bees were put to work to catch the last of the Spanish needle (a common ubiquitous weed found along the forest roads) nectar flow, when Hackenberg left them he said the hives were "boiling over" with bees. On his return a month later he was appalled to find more than half of the colonies were completely devoid of bees with no dead bees in sight and in the rest of the colonies only young workers and the queen remained. Hackenberg's colonies stopped dying the following spring but by that time only 800 were left alive.

A survey conducted in the spring of 2007 revealed that a quarter of US beekeepers had similar losses and that more than 30% of all colonies had died. The following winter losses continued and there were reports of similar losses from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Europe and other regions. Researchers have found many factors which could be contributing to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) but to date, despite much research, no single reason can be found.

Honeybees suffer a number of ailments one of the most recent and destructive being the varroa mite which sucks the blood of the pupa but researchers found that collapsing colonies did not have large mite infestations. Long before CCD was recognised bees had completely disappeared in some regions of China forcing orchard owners to pollinate by hand. The reason for this was put down to the Chinese excess use of pesticides.

Scientists at the Pennsylvania State University and the United States Department of Agriculture lab in Gastonia found that most pollen samples found in hives contained at least five different chemical compounds and some contained as many as thirty five but concluded that healthy colonies sometimes had higher levels of chemicals than those suffering from CCD.

No neonicotinoids were found in the samples but recently researchers into CCD in France have been pointing to the high level of neonicotinoids in their sunflower crop which is a major crop for bees. Sunflower seeds are treated with the chemical which mimics the effect of nicotine - a natural defence that tobacco plants deploy against leaf eating pests. As the sunflower grows the plants take up the chemical and it is deployed throughout the plant thus being transmitted to the pollinator. It has been demonstrated that neonicotinoids can affect the bees orientation and their ability to find their way back to the hive which could be a contributing factor to CCD. Although none were found in the initial samples it is possible that these chemicals contribute to the lowering of the bees' resistance making them susceptible to a variety of viruses.

At this stage Diana Cox-Foster and her team at Pennsylvania State University concluded that none of the known bacterial, fungal or viral diseases of bees could singularly account for the CCD losses.

Other experts have suggested that the bees' immune system is being undermined by poor nutrition. Due to monoculture and the sterilising of our environment honeybees no longer have the same variety of plants to visit. We now have vast acres of crops with no weedy, flower filled spots or hedgerows to give diversity. Enormous fields of one crop can lack the important nutrients needed to sustain healthy bees. Protein supplements have been developed to feed colonies but these on their own have not prevented CCD.

Let Them Eat Burgers!

While dining in a Michelin starred restaurant, millionaire businessman Damon Buffini the chairman of the private equity firm Permira, was so incensed when he heard his employees complaining he ordered burgers for the next night. The incident took place at the firm's annual week away at the five-star hotel Pennyhill Park in Surrey. He was so enraged that, while they ate their burgers, he berated them for failing to appreciate 'how lucky they were'.



£3 each - the cost of out of season cherries at Harrods.

£1.6bn - what game shooting is worth to the economy.

£256m - what Britons spent on Easter chocolates this year.

Beware the Food Police

First we are told that the government may force pubs to serve wine in smaller glasses and now the 'food fascists' are coming to get you.

With unemployment soaring towards three million the government has created yet, "another raft of exciting job opportunities," quotes Richard Littlejohn in the Daily Mail. "As if we're not already overrun with thousands of five-a-day coordinators, nagging us to eat our greens and legions of recycling enforcers, sifting through our dustbins for evidence of carelessly discarded potato peelings".

Plans have been unveiled for a new army of food police charged with cutting down waste. Six councils are to pay inspectors £8.50 per hour to visit homes and offer advice on what we eat and what we throw away. When the scheme covers the country we will have 8,000 of these "food fascists hammering on every one of Britain's 25 million front doors demanding to inspect the contents of our fridges and pedal bins, at a cost of tens of millions of pounds," says Littlejohn.



A government spokesman says: "By hitting people at home, rather than in supermarkets, we can get inside their lives. It's only by knocking on doors you can find out what they are having for tea and offer some healthy suggestions." As Littlejohn says, "Listen chum, we don't want you getting inside our lives." I am thinking of putting razor wire on top of our already locked gates!

A Sticky End

A beekeeper has been sentenced to life in prison for shooting dead a rival in order to steal his barrels of honey valued at £210,000. Donald Robert Alcock, 33 was convicted of killing Anthony Knight at his home in Queensland in 2007.



"He was very fond of his bees."

Courtesy Private Eye

'Peanuts' is Happy

Now we know why Peanuts is happy and everyone else is so depressed. It is the governments anti salt campaign that is getting us down. Scientists have discovered that salt puts people in a better mood. Going without salt could even make people depressed it was suggested. Tests on rats found that when deprived of salt they lost pleasure in things they normally enjoyed, so pass the peanuts.



Better Value for Money

It has already been pointed out how we can cut our bills by shopping at some of the better value supermarkets. Another tip is to search out healthy snacks such as dried fruit and nuts in the 'baking ingredients' aisle. It is often the same quality as 'healthy snacks' but less prettily wrapped and a fraction of the price.

Don't think you are shopping cheaper by doing it yourself. In the latest 'supermarket war' Ocado is slashing their prices so that you can buy Waitrose goods for less online than you can in the shop. The move is expected to start an internet grocery price war, encouraging more people to shop online.

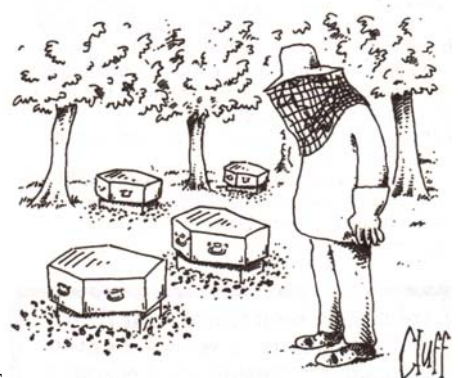
Wine Sales Fall

In the past year wine sales in the UK have fallen due not only to the recession but also to the falling value of the pound. Wine sold in pubs, clubs and restaurants was down by 1% equivalent to 12 million bottles and off licences recorded a 9% downturn.

Don't forget to make sure you all have your half a glass of wine a day. According to a 40 year study on 1,400 men, which was reported in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, men that drank half a glass of wine a day lived 2½ years longer than those that drank beer or spirits and almost 5 years longer than those that drank no alcohol. So is there yet hope for us all - - ah - - 6 x ½ a glass = 3 glasses = 30 years longer??? - - maybe not!!

Not Like 'Mama Made'

Italian chefs are horrified at the latest invention of Claudio Torghele a 56 year old businessman from Rovereto. His pizza machine which costs £22,000 can produce a 12 inch pizza from scratch in 3 minutes. It mixes the flour and water into a dough, smears on the tomato paste then gives an option of four different toppings. For £3.30 you have a freshly baked pizza. The machine is being developed by Unilever but Pino Morelli the head of the Association of Italian Pizzerias says, "Pizza that comes out of an automatic machine has nothing to do with Italian pizza!"



around the branches - SOCIETY AWARDS

THE FIRST TWO SOCIETY AWARD CERTIFICATES FOR WINE

The Berkshire Branch has set a new direction for IWFS by gaining agreement from the EAC to present IWFS Award Certificates for exceptional Wine Presentations and Tastings. When 17 members of the Berkshire Branch members went to Lake Garda (see "An Italian Experience" in the December 2008 issue), the programme included visits to four local vineyards. Two of these visits were indeed exceptional and a detailed report on the winemaking techniques employed at these vineyards was published in the March edition of Food & Wine.

When the Branch Secretary, Julie Graham and her husband Chris visited Italy's premier event for Italian



Alessandro Castellani



Fabio Zenato

wines, the Vinitaly Wine Fair in Verona in April this year, she presented the Certificates to Fabio Zenato of Valerio Zenato (Lugana) and Alessandro Castellani of Ca' La Bionda (Valpolicella). Both Fabio and Alessandro were delighted and very proud to have been recognised by the Society.

Perhaps we can hope that in this way the aims of the IWFS can become better understood in Italy and that one day we will have branches in this country where food & wine are so deeply embedded in the culture.

LITTLE BARWICK HOUSE RECEIVE SOCIETY RESTAURANT AWARD

Emma and Tim Ford of Little Barwick House, Nr Yeovil, Somerset produced an outstanding lunch for the Wessex Branch last September, (see report December F&W). The branch subsequently recommended Little Barwick House for a Society Restaurant Award. It was presented by branch Chairman David Packer at a Lunch on Sunday 1st March. There were 18 Members of the Wessex Branch at this informal gathering. Once again Emma and Tim did the branch proud from their ordinary menu.



Little Barwick House



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Open Tuesday Dinner to
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around the branches - Members Entertain at Home



AN EVENING OF JEWELLS WITH LEICESTER BRANCH

Thirty members attended a Wine Tasting at the Jewells on Wednesday February 18th. John Hind arranged for Philip Amps of Oundle, who is a specialist in New Zealand wines, to give us a presentation of some fine wines from New Zealand. Philip is a third generation independent wine merchant and won the New Zealand Wine Merchant of the year award in 2007 and 2008.

We started the evening with a glass of sparkling Cloudy Bay Pelorus from Marlborough on South Island accompanied by excellent canapés provided by Waitrose. We then tasted white wines made from four different grape varieties - Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and Chenin Blanc and Pinot Gris from Hawkes Bay on North Island.

We tasted two reds made from Pinot Noir - one from the Te Muna vineyard in Martinborough, North Island and one from the Wild Earth vineyard in Central Otago, South Island - surprisingly far South for red wine

grape cultivation. Finally we enjoyed Green Label Reserve 2004, a mixture of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Marlbec from Hawkes Bay. One is used to white wines from New Zealand but generally unfamiliar with the red wines which have apparently improved greatly in recent years.

After the tasting we had a supper of Steak and Kidney pie, scalloped potatoes, carrots and green beans. The puddings were also purchased from Waitrose. We had a selection including a Chocolate and a Miroir Cassis Gâteau, a Lemon Tarte and Crème Brûlées in individual pots. I was disappointed with the puddings as although they looked beautiful I thought them too sweet and lacking in flavour, not as successful as the canapés. We finished the evening with a plate of cheeses which proved very popular.

Mary Jewell

HEREFORDSHIRE ENJOY A TASTE OF BURGUNDY

The Herefordshire Branch recently enjoyed a Burgundy lunch at the home of one of its members at Upton Bishop. All the dishes were prepared by members themselves.

We were greeted with canapés of gougère and fois gras du canard accompanied by a fine Chablis 2006 (Domaine Jean-Marie Naulin).

In keeping with the Burgundian theme the entrees comprised coq au vin, boeuf de bourguignon and duck breast in red wine sauce with walnuts. It was hard to choose in many cases and consequently some members had seconds and even thirds! These were served with potatoes Lyonnaise, creamed potatoes, mixed sauté vegetables and green salad. The splendid wines to accompany were Bourgogne Hautes Cotes de Nuit 2002 (Domaine Michel Gros), and Santenay 1er Cru Grand Clos Rousseau 2005 (Domaine Claude Nouveau).

Typical cheeses from the area were then served being Epoisses, Chaource and Delice du Cremier, and the lunch ended with desserts of apple tart and poached pears.

We were fortunate in having several prospective new members attending, one of whom gave a very gracious 'thank you' speech quoting from Andre Simon that, 'Nutrition wins prizes at cattle shows and baby shows. Gastronomy wins smiles and double chins'. Certainly we all went home very contented!

Sue Davisson



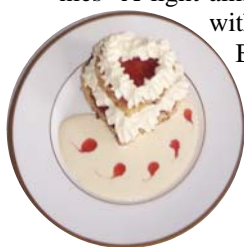
SURREY HILLS SEEK ROMANCE

Surrey Hills welcomed 18 people to a Valentine's dinner at Gable End. Sid produced some pink sparkling shiraz from Banrock Station to start the evening.

We then supped on Broccoli and Stilton soup, Boeuf en Daube, accompanied by creamed potatoes, braised leeks and beetroot and carrot braised in parcels with garlic. We finished with Pam's individual heart-shaped 'Sweetheart Symphonies' A light almond sponge layered with strawberry conserve and cream served with a crème Anglaise. The accompanying wines were a very fruity Bardolino Classico with the starter and main course and a delicious Late Harvest Tokay with dessert.

The chefs were Helen and Pam.

Helen Mills



around the branches

WESSEX BRANCH AT PEBBLE BEACH



Our luncheon visit to Pebble Beach at Barton on Sea in April proved to be so popular that we unfortunately had to turn some people away. The restaurant does not have a private room so we could only be accommodated in a section of the main restaurant, which meant that our numbers were restricted to 28.

The head chef is Pierre Chevillard, who for many years was head chef at the Chewton Glen Hotel, part of the prestigious Relais et Chateau chain. During this time he was awarded a Michelin star. In 2003 he moved to Pebble Beach, which is now well established with its own reputation for fine food. The restaurant has a wonderful location on the cliff top facing towards the Isle of Wight and the Needles, but unfortunately the weather during our visit in April was not warm enough for us to have the benefit of the splendid views from the terrace. Instead we enjoyed our aperitif of Anna de Codorniu Reserva Brut gathered around

the bar area, which was slightly cramped for our numbers but very convivial.

After we were seated Pierre himself came out to talk to us about the dishes we were about to taste and was very warmly received. To start we had a choice of sautéed scallops, terrine of artichokes and Tomme de Savoie, or twice-baked blue vinny cheese soufflé, all excellent to judge by the comments. Main courses were sea bass fillet, lamb neck confit or guinea fowl pie with mushrooms, all with appropriate, and sometimes unusual, accompaniments, all beautifully cooked and presented. Again all comments received were very complimentary. To follow we could choose from a selection of cheeses, a wonderfully creamy lemon cheesecake with raspberry sorbet or bread, butter and prune pudding. The latter was cooked in individual shallow dishes with a brûlée topping which made it rather sweet and was criticised by a few for not being a “real” bread and butter pudding. However this was a small quibble in an otherwise exceptionally good lunch.

The white wine with the meal was a very pleasant Italian Viognier Academia del Sole Calatrasi 2006 with hints of apricots and vanilla, which went well with all the starters and the fish. For the red we enjoyed a fruity Casa La Joya Reserve Merlot 2007 from Chile.

Our numbers made it sometimes difficult for the serving staff to navigate around the tables. However they rose to the occasion and were very professional and attentive. Altogether a superb lunch and much enjoyed by all present.

Joan Cardy

LEICESTER BRANCH AT THE OLD BLACK HORSE

On Wednesday evening the 29th of April John and Mary Hind arranged for us to visit the Old Black Horse in Market Bosworth, a small market town about 45 minutes west of Leicester. Market Bosworth is near to Bosworth Field where Richard the Third was killed and where there is a very good visitor's centre providing plans of the battleground.

We were welcomed with a glass of Cremant de Bourgogne before proceeding to three large tables in the restaurant which is a series of fairly small rooms. Starters were potted shrimps with salad and granary loaf or duck liver and Cointreau par-fait with plum chutney and sour dough crostinis. We drank an excellent Chablis, Ropiteau 2007.

Main courses were, fillet steak with a green pepper and brandy cream sauce or roast fillet of salmon wrapped in Parma ham with new potatoes and tomatoes. The steaks were sitting on a bed of garlic mash and so we didn't really need the tempting dauphinoise potatoes accompanied by dishes of fresh vegetables but they were much appreciated. My husband was less pleased by the Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 from South Africa but I found it very acceptable.

For dessert we chose between orange marmalade and whiskey bread and butter pudding with cream anglaise or summer berry pudding with clotted cream. We finished the meal with coffee or tea and little squares of chocolate brownie. The cooking was excellent, the service very efficient and there was a plentiful supply of the three wines - good value for £42.

Mary Jewell



around the branches - Berkshire

“CHOCOLATE” BY FRANK DE MENGEL

The Spanish brought it back from Mexico and the Italians stole the recipe from them in 1606. Since then the product has become a part of our daily lives with a focus on luxury and special occasions. Most of us are, at heart, covert chocaholics. On Friday 20th March, Frank de Mengel, head of bakery at Westminster College, assisted by Sam Laverick, one of his students, talked to 37 members of the IWFS Berkshire Branch about the history of the product, the process for creating it and demonstrated techniques for tempering and using chocolate in the kitchen.

It was not until 1880 that Randolph Lindt perfected the “conching” process for tempering the product – that is, making it shiny and break with a snap.

Frank brought along samples of the basic components: chocolate bean “nibs” (crunchy and slightly bitter): cocoa butter (fatty): chocolate powder (fine and bitter), together with 10 different types of chocolate for us to taste whilst he and Sam talked and demonstrated. The samples varied from the white “Milk” variety, which of course has no chocolate in it whatsoever, up to 100% cocoa solids which really drew one’s mouth in with its concentrated bitter flavours.

We had fun matching the wines for this event, finally settling on a Lindauer Special Cuvee sparkler from New Zealand for the aperitif which proved to be lightly rosé and showing good raspberry fruit, fresh acidity and some depth. This was followed by a Brauneberger Juffer Riesling Auslese 2003 from Wolfgang Kohl. Wolfgang has presented his wines to us in the past and this one’s fruit matched the medium strength chocolate well. We chose a Marques de Caceres Rioja Reserva 2002 which was good with the darker, stronger chocolates and one very kind member brought along some half bottles of Elysium 2007, California Black Muscat from Quady Winery. This turned out to be absolutely right with the stronger darker chocolate exhibiting cherry flavours, some acidity and enough body to cut through the chocolate -and only 15% alcohol, superb!

Frank held us enthralled showing how to heat chocolate using a microwave, painting moulds, and even a leaf, with melted chocolate to create decorations.

Charlotte Turner produced a supper worthy of the chocolate and wine, roasted corn-fed chicken breasts with garlic, new Israeli potatoes and sugar snap peas followed by a board of three English cheeses and a selection of fresh breads from The Granary in Watlington. The cheeses included a special strong cheddar made just for Oxford market, Ribblesdale smoked goats cheese and Oxford Blue. Dishes of cranberries, hazel nuts, walnuts and brazil nuts were served along with fresh fruit platters of apples, clementines, figs and grapes.

The supper wine was a bold Graham Beck, The Ridge Syrah 2002 from Robertson, South Africa which drank very well with the chicken. All the wines were sourced from Majestic with the exception of the Brauneberger Auslese (Colin Mair) and the Elysium (Ian Smith).

To conclude, Frank handed everyone a personal box of 4 chocolates, each a different shape and filling, all hand-made by his students. Another fascinating and instructive evening from a master of his subject whilst sipping good wine: what better end to a week? Frank’s handouts and cooking advice, with recipes, can be found on www.iwfsberkshire.org at Meeting 322.

Chris Graham



Frank’s top chocolate tips are:

When tasting chocolate put a small amount in the centre of your tongue and press it into the roof of your mouth to melt it. In this way you get the full effect.

Never overheat chocolate when you are working with it. The temperature depends on the type, but one degree over, and you will have to re-temper.

When tempering chocolate you can “seed” your un-tempered mix by adding 50% already tempered product, thereby speeding up the process.

When testing the temperature of melting chocolate, use the front of your lower lip. This part of your body can easily tell you if the mixture is too hot or too cold.

Never let water get anywhere near melted chocolate when you are working with it. The mixture will go soft and will then only be any good for chocolate sauce.

CHOCOLATE TRUFFLES:

Ingredients: Double Cream 250 ml, Couverture 275 grams

Unsalted Butter 40 grams, Alcohol of Choice 45 ml

Cocoa Powder For dusting (optional). Tempered Couverture 400 grams for coating (optional)

1. Pour the cream into a saucepan. Bring to the boil over a medium heat.
2. Remove from the heat and add the chocolate, all at once. Stir gently until melted.
3. Stir in the butter until melted, and then stir in the alcohol. Strain into a bowl and cool to room temperature.
4. Cover the mixture with clear film and chill for 4 hours or overnight
5. Line a large tray with silicone paper and pipe out the mixture into walnut sized pieces.
6. If dusting with cocoa powder, sift a thick layer of cocoa on to a dish or plate. Roll the truffles in the cocoa, rounding them between the palms of your hands. (Dust your hands with cocoa to prevent the truffles from sticking.)
7. Do not worry if the truffles are not perfectly round, as an irregular shape looks more authentic.
8. Alternatively, roll the truffles in very finely chopped pistachios. Chill on the paperlined tray until firm.
9. Keep in the fridge for up to 10 days or freeze for up to 2 months.
10. If coating with chocolate, do not coat the truffles in cocoa, but freeze them for 1 hour.
11. Using a dipping fork, dip the truffles, one at a time, into the tempered chocolate, tapping the fork on the bowl to shake off excess.
12. Place on a baking sheet, lined with silicone paper.
13. If the chocolate begins to thicken, reheat it gently until smooth.
14. Chill the truffles until set.



around the branches - London

NEEDLE MATCH: HOME-MADES VERSUS COMMERCIALS

This London Branch battle took place at the Naval Club on February 17th, over seven rounds. On one side were home-made wines, from amateurs at the kitchen sink, with largely non-grape wines provided by Bernard Lamb and friends; on the other side were professionally-made grape wines carefully chosen by Carole Goldberg from places like Bordeaux and Burgundy, including a German Eiswein, a port and a Madeira, with a permitted average price of £8 a bottle.

The 15 members and guests tasted the wines blind and voted on which of each pair was the better wine or liqueur, and on which was the home-made one. The commercials were expected to win all seven rounds, and surely anyone can tell home-made wines from commercial ones? In the dry white round, a well-chosen Macon Farges got all 15 votes for the better wine, but three out of 15 put Bernard's three-month-old apple, grape and peach as the commercial wine.

In the dry red round, Bernard's 2005 "second take" wine narrowly beat a very good Chateau Le Bourdieu Bordeaux Médoc 2003, with one person putting the very fruity home-made wine as commercial. It was made from the fruit used in his port-style wine, then adding water, sugar, nutrient, bottled bilberries and some blackberries for a second fermentation on the same fruit.

There was supposed to be a mead round, where Bernard had a terrific one made in 2005 by Bob Marsdon with Italian chestnut honey, but no commercial mead was easily obtainable. The mead was much enjoyed as a supper wine, and instead we had a raspberry wine round. It was Bernard's 2006 raspberry wine (3 lbs to the gallon) against Rock's Raspberry Wine, no stated vintage, from Twyford, Berkshire. Nine people thought that the 'home-made' was commercial, and the voting for quality was tied. Both wines elicited high praise, with great raspberry bouquets and flavours.

In the sweet white round, Dr John Harrison's 1992 wine - 9 gallons (22 lb crab apples, 9 lb quinces, 2 lb gooseberries, 12 lb Bramley apples, 12 lb Newton Wonder apples, 1 ½ kg apricot concentrate, 2 kg peach concentrate, 10 lb sugar; sweetened in 2006 with 1 pint peach concentrate) beat the Kendermanns Eiswein 2005 from the Nahe. Two people put the 'home-made' as commercial. The 1992 wine was almost brown, with a really complex bouquet, many layers of flavour, and a great length. The Eiswein had a honeyed nose, was smooth and luscious, but seemed too young, with too much volatile acidity.

In the port-style after-dinner red wine round, Dow's Masterblend Late Bottled Vintage Port (20% alcohol) just beat Bernard's 2005 red after-dinner wine (unfortified; 1 kg currants, 500 g sultanas, 2 l red grape juice, 1 ½ lb elderberries, 12 oz sloes, 1 lb 13 oz blackberries, ½ lb mulberries, ½ lb unstoned cherries, a few blackcurrants, 1 ½ lb sugar; later sweetened with 11 oz sugar). Of the 11 voting, six put the port as Bernard's, with only five putting it as commercial! They were two excellent wines, the home-made with a lovely fruity bouquet and flavour, good balance and length, very smooth and well-integrated, while the port was stronger, with the alcohol a bit aggressive. Bernard's shortbread, baked that afternoon, proved popular.

In the Madeira-style sweet after-dinner class, Blandy's Duke of Clarence Rich Madeira (19%) easily beat a blend of home-made wines from the Fortified Madeira class at the 2008 National Wine and Beer Show, with Bernard making the blend but not the component wines. Three out of 13 put the home-made as commercial. The home-made one was rich and satisfying, with real depth and great length; it was a credit to its various makers even though it lost to the more alcoholic commercial.

The deciding round was for a Tia Maria-style coffee/chocolate liqueur. Bernard's 2007 Tia Maria (150 ml strong Peruvian coffee, 250 ml Bacardi rum 40%, 270 ml Polish spirit 80%, 15 ml glycerine, 12 oz sugar, 5 teasp. Camp Coffee essence; no fermentation or distilling) easily beat the commercial Soirée Coffee Liqueur. The complexity of the home-made liqueur was superb, with great smoothness and a lot of alcohol (estimated 31%). The commercial one had a big coffee bouquet but seemed a bit crude and synthetic.

The overall result was therefore an honourable draw between the home-mades and the commercials, a result which will surprise those who are unfamiliar with the high standard of many home-made wines from experienced enthusiasts, especially those who compete in local, regional and national shows. The evening proved that even IWFS wine-tasters can put home-made wines as commercial and vice versa; in two rounds, the majority got that wrong. Some people did not vote on that issue in some rounds as they just could not tell which was which. The home-made wines showed how the blending of different ingredients gave complexity, and that non-grape wines can beat grape wines made by experienced, well-equipped professionals.

Carole Goldberg provided an excellent home-cooked supper. The supper wines included the mead mentioned above, Bernard's 2008 strawberry/raspberry rosé, and a Chilean red and a Chilean white. The organisers of the evening were Carole Goldberg and Bernard Lamb.

Bernard Lamb



around the branches - Capital

A COMPARATIVE TASTING OF 'READY MEALS'

A large number of pubs, gastro pubs and even some high class restaurants use 'ready meals' supplied by the large food manufacturing chains such as Brakes and '3663'.

The Sunday Telegraph reported on 19th April, "*Gordon Ramsay is serving his pub customers ready-meals prepared in a London 'food factory' - and sold with a mark-up of 586 per cent.*"

Statistics tell us that ready meals are used in 77% of households and 28% use them more than once a week.

Manufacturers spend millions on vast development kitchens trying to produce a product that is just 'like mama made'. Do they succeed? This is what we were hoping to find out. This was a whole new world to me as I have never knowingly tried them but suspect I have when wandering into an unknown pub for lunch! If the menu says, 'dishes may contain nuts,' it is a pretty good indication that they have been produced under factory conditions where cross contamination is unavoidable.

Our three course dinner was sourced from three supermarkets with comparable dishes made at home. King Prawn Linguine and Boeuf Bourguignon were both from Waitrose and Tesco. Bread & Butter Puddings came from Waitrose and Sainsbury, we used two portion size packs. All packs, except the Waitrose bread & butter pudding had the legend, 'may contain nuts'. In the home made dishes I kept as much as possible to the ingredients and comparable quantities as on the ready meals.

We served all shiraz wines starting with an aperitif of a Banrock Station Sparkling Shiraz, 14% alcohol - unusually high for a sparkling wine. It was quite good but heavy as an aperitif.



The two commercial linguine dishes were very different.

No 1, on the bottom left of the photo, was the Waitrose Low Saturated Fat, Prawn Linguine - 'king prawns in a light white wine sauce with spinach'. It was very dry and lacking in sauce with prawns supposedly 10%, spinach 4%, pasta 45%. We divided each pack for two between four people and had a job sorting out a prawn each, the pasta was also quite tough. No 2 centre right was the Tesco 'light choices' King Prawn & Roasted Garlic Linguine - 'king prawns with spinach, broccoli and linguine pasta in a creamy roasted garlic sauce'. There was much more sauce in this dish, only 31% pasta, prawns 8%, spinach 6% and broccoli 5%. The sauce was creamy and we didn't have to hunt for the prawns but the pasta was similar texture to number one.

No 3 top left, home made with a white wine and garlic sauce was stronger than the shop versions due to using a strong fish stock but the pasta was not as tough as either of the others, surprisingly, as it was Waitrose fresh linguine.

Main course:

No 1 on the left of the dish was the home made Boeuf Bourguignon. Made with shin of English beef, mushrooms, baby onions and a rich red wine sauce made with a Bonarda/ Shiraz.

No 2 in the centre of the dish was 'Waitrose 'Beef Bourguignon, tender pieces of British beef, braised in a rich Burgundy wine sauce, finished with baby onions, button mushrooms and beechwood smoked bacon'. The sauce was rich, the beef 57%, onions 11%, button mushrooms 10%. Obviously good quality beef the dish compared well with the home made version. The Burgundy content in the sauce was 46%.

No 3 to the right of the dish was 'Tesco Finest classic Beef Bourguignon - meltingly tender slow cooked marinated beef in a rich Italian Shiraz red

wine sauce, with sweet roasted shallots, juicy mushrooms, carrot wedges and smoked bacon lardons.' As you can see from the photo the sauce was much lighter - it was very poor flavour with the Shiraz only 7%. Beef - 'British or Irish' was 43%, onions/shallots 3%, mushrooms 3%. It omitted the percentage of carrot but there were a lot. It was as unappetising as it looked.

We tasted three Hardy Shiraz wines: 2005, quite good; 2004, less developed and needing more time; 2006, the best of the three, with good bouquet, flavour and length. It went well with the food.

Everyone then enjoyed the cheese with two wines, both French from the same maker. The first was black-purple, with big legs, it had a strong and very pleasant blackcurrant bouquet, typical of classy Bordeaux. Good flavour and length, it was mature, with smooth tannins. The second wine was a strong purple colour, with big legs, it had a lot of rough tannins and a moderate quality bouquet and flavour. Not fully ready it did not have the potential of the first wine. A few people initially preferred the second wine, but changed their minds once the first wine had warmed up in the glass. Everyone was astonished when Sid told us that the producer of both was Rothschild. The first was the rogue in the tasting, a 1997 Chateaux Lafite which Ian Rushton had originally very generously donated for Capital's 75th celebrations. The second wine was a 2006 Syrah Vin de Pays from the South of France costing £6. (Wine notes courtesy of Bernard Lamb)



around the branches - Northampton

LUNCH AT THE FORT KOCHI

Twelve members greatly enjoyed an excellent lunch, a far cry from the "British curry" found in so many Indian Restaurants. The food served at Fort Kochi was authentic Keralan cuisine, delicately spiced with an emphasis on fish.

Premeal snacks consisted of a selection of traditional pickles served with poppadoms, banana chips and murukku. The highlights of the meal were the perfectly spiced starters, a bowl of seafood soup served with spinach and aubergine patés and a fish flavoured tomato sorbet. This was followed by the Lamb and spinach curry, again mild but delicately spiced, and a fish curry consisting of Tilapia Fish with tamarind seasoned with mustard seeds and grated coconut and four different varieties of rice. There was a choice of excellent Indian beers, Kingfisher and Cobra were the favourites.

Indian rice pudding was enjoyed by those who tried it but the ice cream was rather disappointing. Everyone was full of praise for the food, the service was excellent and our hosts charming, all at a most modest cost. A very worthwhile visit.

DINNER AT NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD



Twenty-nine diners assembled in the cloisters of New College for a dinner in the Founder's Library. Early arrivals had the opportunity to admire the college architecture dating from 1379 and also the College Garden. The magnolias were in full bloom and set off by a riot of red tulips in addition to the well stocked and tended flowerbeds adjoining the old City Walls which were reconstructed in 1215.

The reception was planned to take place in the cloisters, however it was a cool evening and the party took refuge in the adjoining chapel to enjoy a glass of sparkling wine. The college chapel, built to the designs of William of Wykeham, dates from 1379. We learnt how the statues of the saints and apostles constituting the unique reredos had been removed for safe keeping during the reformation, and then put back in the wrong places, later to be rectified. The Reynolds window and Epstein's Lazarus were other topics for discussion.

Dinner was served in the Founder's Library at a single long oak table. We started with terrine of three salmons with pink and green peppercorns. The accompanying wine was a New Zealand Marlborough sauvignon blanc. The main course, tournedos of Angus beef on wild mushroom and potato rosti with a port wine glaze was accompanied by a 2007 Fleurie from the college cellar. Desert was a baby pineapple filled with tropical fruit salad served with rum and raisin ice cream. College port, coffee and chocolates concluded the meal.

The chairman then gave a talk, highlighting the architectural features and history of the Founder's Library dating back to the foundation of the college.

The evening was deemed a success due especially to the historic setting and good company. Some members had elected to stay in college for bed and breakfast.

John Fergus

Then it was time for three Bread & Butter puddings.

No 1 on the left of the plate was the home made one, it was too dry because I had listened to my other half. Having been brought up in the war he abhors waste and when he saw I was leaving out three slices of bread he encouraged me to put them in. He did own up that it was his fault!

No 2 in the centre of the plate was the Sainsbury's pudding. With 79% custard, bread and butter 14%, sultanas 6% and nutmeg. A very acceptable pudding with a good spicy flavour.

No 3 was Waitrose pudding, 86% egg custard, 9% bread, 3% sultanas and nutmeg. This pudding was the best of the three, it was moist and a good flavour.

On average 'homemade' was less than half the price of 'readymade'. If ready meals are produced with good quality ingredients they can come up to the same standard as 'mama made'. One member did not join us because at one time he had lived on ready meals and eating them ruined his constitution. A good reason for sticking to home made would be the amount of chemicals one would be consuming in the form of emulsifiers, stabilisers and preservatives but that is another minefield.

Pam Brunning

around the branches - AGM's

SURREY HILL'S DO IT THE ITALIAN WAY



Surrey Hill's AGM on March 18th was held at San Marco's restaurant in Hersham, Surrey. This is a family owned Italian restaurant, we were welcomed by Marco the owner. The AGM and our aperitif of a Kir Royale was followed by Tortellini Salsa Aurora, or Mozzarella alla Caprese, then Pollo alla Siciliano or Salmone alla Borromea and coffee. The two Sicilian wines were a Corvo Rosso and a Bianco.

Helen Mills, Chairman



MERSEYSIDE & MID CHESHIRE MEMBER EXPANDS!

Merseyside & Mid Cheshire AGM was held at the Chester Golf Club on 24 February 2009. Members were welcomed with Currabridge Brut that provided a crisp and lively start.

Paul Bishop cheerfully reflected on 2008 and announced that a testimonial is to be presented on the next visit to Bodysgallen Hall recognising the exceptional standard of the food and wine. Angela Britland was appointed as treasurer.

The excellent choice of wine made by Mike Saville combined with an imaginative menu proved a great success.

WINES

Aperitif

Currabridge Brut Australia

**

*Feather Drop Hill
Sauvignon Blanc NZ*

**

Chateaufneuf du Pape

MENU

*Classic chicken liver parfait with herb
scented brioche*

**

*Sea Bass fillet with a chive crust and
sat on a bed of wilted rocket and
finished with vanilla beurre blanc*

**

*Medallions of Welsh Black beef with
a porcini mushroom mille feuille stilton
glaze and a rich Ale reduction*

**

*Winter Assiette enriched with an
array of warm desserts*

**

Coffee and petit fours



The chicken liver parfait was considered very good and the Sauvignon Blanc a perfect match for the sea bass. The beef was superbly cooked and presented and the Chateau Neuf du Pape was a warm hearted yet delicate compliment.

Finally the creative winter assiette completed the meal and proved to be too much for one member's waistcoat buttons that suddenly left the member at high velocity "The Finest Meal yet" was how Gordon Suffield described the evening.

Chef Lance Kennett was congratulated by Paul Bishop after a really memorable evening.

Tim Hodges

LEICESTERSHIRE DO IT AT THE 19th HOLE

On the 25th of March we again held our AGM in the Leicestershire Golf Club. Graham Moore was elected as Chairman replacing John Hind who has had a very successful year. We were welcomed by a glass of Green Point 2004 from Australia. Stephen and Sarah Riley provided an excellent meal after the meeting. It is sad that they are leaving as we shall probably have to find a different venue for our meeting next year. It is difficult to find a quiet room for the meeting in most local restaurants.

The first course was seared scallops with pancetta perfectly accompanied by a Riesling - 2004 Rolly Gassmann from Alsace. Then we enjoyed duck breasts on crushed pepper new potatoes while drinking a Rioja Reserva 2002 from Valenciso. For pudding we chose between poached Blueberry Pears with a Champagne Syllabub or Crème Brûlée with fresh Raspberries. We lingered over coffee and chocolates enjoying good conversation at the end of a very convivial evening.

Mary Jewell

around the branches - Manchester

GOURMET BURGUNDIAN DINNER AT THIRTY NINE STEPS

Thirty six members enjoyed a gourmet Burgundian Dinner on 16th March 2009 at the “Thirty Nine Steps” restaurant in Styal, Cheshire. We were greeted with canapés and an Auxey Duresses Blanc, which was also served with the first course, Jambon Persille, the wine complimented this well. However, some people thought the ham was salty, but our resident food expert Patrick Trodden considered it acceptable.

The fish course, Fillet of Lemon Sole with a crayfish bisque, was delicious and very well presented. This was accompanied by Meursault ‘Grand Charrons’, which was a little lacking on the nose, but did improve in the glass.

A Coq au Vin was served with Pommes Boulangere and was well received. The chicken was moist and perfectly cooked, a well balanced dish. With this we drank a Beaune 1st cru “Champs Pimont”, it was lacking in fruit and short on the finish.

The Cheeses consisted of a Bleu d’Auvergne, an Epoisses de Bourgogne and a Tomme des Alpes. We drank the Beaune with these, they possibly required a bigger red wine. Coffee was served accompanied by Petit Fours.

A very good meal and a convivial evening enjoyed by everybody. **Bob Lloyd**



ISIS - A RESTAURANT WITH ROOMS

A Spring evening found 36 members of the Branch making a return visit to ISIS, a restaurant with rooms, in the suburb of Pendlebury. The original trip had proved very popular with members and a return seemed overdue.

The owner, Brett, was very pleased to receive us again so it was a “win-win” situation. Although not Italian owned, the cooking is inspired by the cuisine of Italy. After a welcoming aperitif of “La Marca” Prosecco di Conegliano Valdobbiadene N.V. One “Prosecco sceptic” expressed surprise at enjoying it so much.

The first course was a generous selection (both in quantity and range) of Antipasti Misto della Casa which was served with delicious foccaccia bread. I particularly recall the sliced porcini in olio and the slices of aubergine which had been similarly dressed, the salami and ham were both moist and tasty and the other additions were all perfect. The supporting act, Pinot Grigio “Punggl” Single Vineyard 2007 Alto Adige – Nals & Margreid, went really well with the myriad of strong flavours in the food. This was a really tasty wine - in contrast to some poor examples made in Italy using that grape variety.

Judging by the volume of chatter, members were enjoying their evening. Our main course was Agnello Primavera con Fagioli Toscana. This was neck chops of lamb cooked as a joint for a long time at a very low heat. The result was a very dark exterior which, when the chops had been severed in the kitchen, showed off a pleasingly pink interior. The bed of mixed beans had their own delicious flavours having been cooked “cassoulet style”. The accompaniment was sautéed herby potatoes. The dish demanded an Italian red wine and that chosen was The Wine Society’s Exhibition Tuscan Red 2006. This is a wine made in the style of a Rosso di Montalcino using young vines of the famous Brunello grape. The red had been decanted some 3 hours ahead of time to open it up and remove the sediment which had already begun to form. It was very well received by members.

Dessert was that classical Italian dish, Pannacotta, with fresh berries and a red fruit coulis. It was a perfect example thanks, no doubt, to the help of committee member Professor Patrick Trodden who provided his very special recipe – only a little gelatine!

We rounded off our meal with three Italian cheeses – Provolone, Dolcellate and Pecorino, all with differing textures and flavours. We enjoyed coffee to finish before heading home –except for those members taking advantage of the rooms for an overnight stay and breakfast.

David Chapman





LE QUARTIER FRANCAIS

Franschhoek, South Africa

THE TASTING ROOM



When you plan to eat at one of the world's top 50 restaurants and one that is recognised as the best in that country it is best to book well in advance. For our visit to Le Quartier Francais in Franschhoek I made the reservation 6 months in advance and had to send contact information and credit card details to confirm my booking. We telephoned the restaurant on the day to confirm the booking and the time we were expected and the specific room in which we were eating. The restaurant operates three different dining styles so you can choose to go into their bistro iCi, to the a la carte room for a normal (but excellently presented) meal but many clients choose to visit the Tasting Room. Here you choose to eat a four, six or eight course tasting menu which can come with separate selected matching wines for each selected tasting sensation. Unlike most, if not all, restaurants in the UK and Europe, who offer a tasting menu, there is no requirement for everyone at the table to have the same selection or even the same number of courses. The waiter agrees with you when each course will be served.

We arrived by courtesy car from our hotel exactly on time (actually 2 minutes early but who's counting!) and were surprised to be asked to wait in the bar while another couple, who arrived at the same time, were taken straight through to the Tasting Room. We were offered a drink but not shown the menu. We had decided to drink nothing but local fare and my wife had a glass of excellent Ken Forrester Sauvignon Blanc but I decided to experiment with the local 'sherry'. I am a great supporter of South African wine and must admit that they can make a sweet fortified red wine that can compete with Port but they should leave dry fino sherry to the Spanish. We waited, being ignored, for 30 minutes, I know not why and if we hadn't been looking forward to it for so long we may well have walked out. When we were eventually shown into the room we were given a large window table that would have satisfied even Michael Winner and I noticed that the couple who had gone straight in were at a small table towards the back of the room.

We were now given the menu and the process explained to us. In all there were 21 different tasting dishes from which you could choose 4, 6 or 8. There was no bar on the selection or the order in which they would be served. It was perfectly possible to construct an 8 course menu from cheese and dessert dishes. It was even possible to change the wine paired with each dish but without an in depth knowledge of South African wines let alone experience of the house cooking style this would seem over adventurous. The only dish that did not have a South African wine paired with it was a lamb and kidney pie for which the recommended drink was draft Guinness.

I chose (do you need to guess) the full chef recommended 8 courses with matching wines. My wife was more selective and although she chose 4 courses that matched mine she selected 4 other dishes with their own wines. The chef complicated matters by sending two complimentary courses that were not on the menu and as we always try food off each others plate we tasted 14 different courses and 12 different wines.

I should mention that the Chef, Margot Janse is a woman and she has a reputation of running an all female kitchen. However, when asked, she admitted that to avoid the discrimination legislation she had now hired a man to work in her kitchen although she managed to give the impression that it will be a very long time before he is allowed to cook anything!

THE MENU

In the glass we had a Crayfish Bisque and on the side was Veal Sweetbreads and chicken mousse wrapped in parma ham, strawberry salad, fig glaze.



Lemon poached crayfish tail, prawn wafer, marshmallow paired with Graham Beck brut.



Franschhoek salmon trout tartare, avocado, beetroot, pineapple and ginger with a Porcupine Ridge viognier Grenache blanc 2007



Vanilla and parmesan risotto, sous-vide quail egg, truffle foam, truffle slice. Served with Excelsior - paddock viognier 2008



Tasting of foie gras, cranberry and smoked whisky dressing served with Cederberg bukettraube 2008



MARGOT JANSE



Caper and raisin puree, sous-vide egg roulade with parma ham chip, sugar-cured lamb carpaccio, lamb tartare with green beans, caper berries and pea shoots, balsamic and olive oil dressing with 2005 Haute Cabrière Pinot Noir



Watercress and bacon salad, crispy pork belly on top of the ginger pommes puree, avocado foam, pickled red cabbage with porchetta on top, asian lacquer Served with Môreson pinotage 2007



Celeriac puree, celeriac tuile filled with tomato foam and braised lamb, aubergine soufflé, mushroom and bean ragout, bacon wrapped sugar cured springbok and biltong ballotine, tomato jus. With Waterford Cabernet sauvignon 2005



Ganzvlei vastrap cheddar fritters, cumin lavosh, pickled apple with Terra madre pommes classique



Warm preserved fig terrine, vanilla and truffle sable, whipped gorgonzola, earl grey poached prunes, pea shoots, gorgonzola sabayon. With Pierre Jourdan ratafia



Pre-dessert with compliments from the pastry chef: Raspberry financier, clotted cream, fresh raspberry



Gingered watermelon, chai spiced sushi, berry and orange served with Simonsig Gewürztraminer 2008

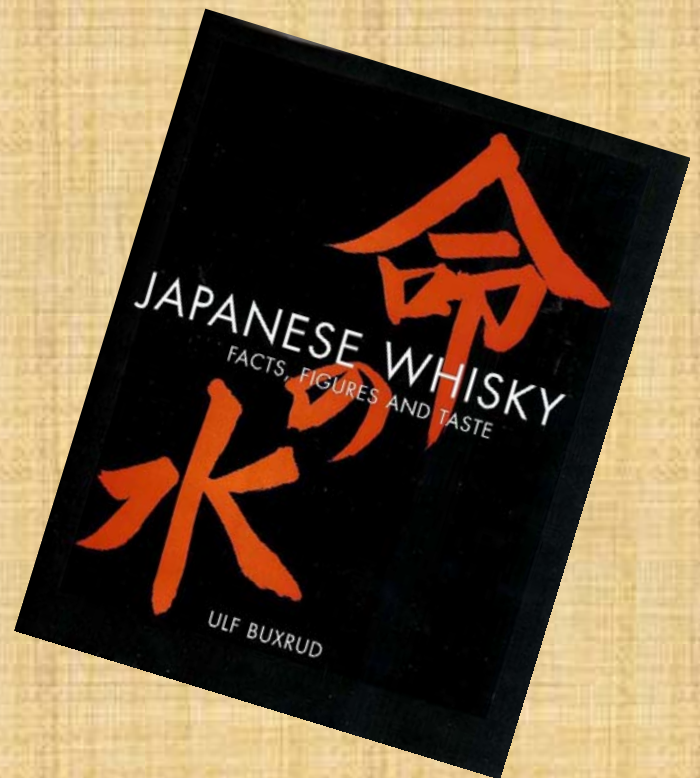


Chocolate paint with espresso ice cream, amarula panna cotta with coconut tuile, fudge foam, fudge sauce with Stony Brook v on a - natural sweet Viognier 2006



HE DID IT AGAIN!

Japanese Whisky. Facts, Figures and Taste by Ulf Buxrud



He did it again! The world-famous whisky connoisseur, a member of the Malmo and Naples branches, Ulf Buxrud has produced another book highlighting malt whisky. His first book, *Rare Malts*, won the title as the world's best book on spirits in 2006. This new book is not, however, about the "normal" Scottish or Irish whiskies but about Japanese whiskies. There are no books in English on this subject in spite of the fact that Japan is the second largest malt whisky producer in the world. Ulf's is the first of its kind. Malt whisky is very popular in Japan and at a recent large competition a Japanese whisky won the title as best in the world.

Ulf has visited all the eleven distilleries and tasted almost all their products. He relates the history of each distillery as well as the overall development of the Japanese whisky industry. His tasting notes are strict recordings and he does not normally tell you if he likes the whisky but the lengthy and detailed notes on some give you a hint of his preferences.

The book is also full of useful information on how to find the distilleries, the best way to travel and where to stay. He lists whisky bars in Tokyo and elsewhere, whisky shops and how to find whisky information on the web, in print and at trade shows, even where to find a translation service. One full page gives you the names of the Japanese and Scottish distilleries in Japanese.

The book is lavishly illustrated especially with pictures of a large number of the Japanese whisky bottles taken by Ulf's wife Birgitta. These pictures are small and need a magnifying glass to reveal their details but rather than fewer pictures!

This is a superb introduction to, and information about, Japanese whisky, a book that no whisky lover should be without.

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