

# Food & Wine



September 2012

The Journal of The International Wine & Food Society Europe & Africa Committee

Free to European & African Region Members - one per address - Issue 112

A Great Weekend in Zürich 2012

A Gift from the Sea

Choosing the Right Wine with The Right Food

The Wonderful World of Watercress





## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

### *Dear Members*

I am very pleased to welcome a new branch with 26 new members in Liverpool. The EAC meeting in July authorised the issue of a Provisional Charter to a group of youngish professionals based in the City Centre. This should not be confused with the Merseyside & Mid-Cheshire Branch which is the Society's oldest branch and which is still attracting new members. It is a demonstration of the benefits of running a successful Festival in a location.

Congratulations are due to the members of Zurich Branch for organising a super "Great Weekend" in June. Seventy two members from twenty different branches participated in all or part of the proceedings and we were particularly pleased to see members coming from as far as America and Australia. Zurich was only formed in 2006 but now has thirty four members and has run a truly successful international event.

You will be aware that part of the Strategic Plan was to reduce the costs of running the International Secretariat. We need to recruit new members and develop membership benefits as a higher proportion of subscriptions will be used at Zone level. The membership database on the website requires involvement by Branch Officers and to add incentive we are increasing the branch rebate this year.

The EAC is committed to expanding its membership amongst new generations of wine and food lovers. The latest social networking technologies are changing the ways in which we communicate and we are keen to find out what will help us achieve our goals. If you have any views on how best to take advantage of these media see our advert below.

Although I was not trying to beat any records, I visited 6 branches within the first 15 days of July. I started on Sunday July 1st at the Merseyside picnic in Wales. The highlight being a comparison of two different breeds of excellent beef served hot from the Aga. The following day I went to Blackpool to compare sweet wines with different types of cake. On Saturday I joined Manchester branch for lunch in Preston and two days later tested various wines with Indian cuisine with the new Liverpool Branch. The following Wednesday I joined Leicester at Hambleton Hall and on Sunday 15th attended my second Branch picnic, this time with Northampton. Every event was well organised and enjoyable but the diversity of events demonstrates the value of the Society. The price to members varied from £12.50 to £80 and all were excellent value for money. Each branch organises events that satisfies their local members but they welcome members from other branches as long as there is sufficient room.

We (my brother and our wives) still had time to visit Restaurant Sat Bains near Nottingham, judged by the independent 'Good Food Guide' to be the third best restaurant in the UK. It was recommended to us by eight members from Australia who visited it last year. It was horrendously expensive but we sat in a private room opening onto the kitchen and were served 11 courses, not by waiters but by the chefs including Sat Bains himself. I would certainly recommend the way they operated but I will have to save up before we return. I had only one complaint; they would not allow me to take in my own wines. I fully accept that restaurants have to charge corkage if you use their facilities. I even accept that their own wine list was excellent but for a special evening I would like to use some of my own vintage wines.

This will probably be the last column I write as your Chairman although I hope that the Editor will still accept contributions from me on wines and restaurants. When I step down after the Annual Branch Representatives Meeting (ABRM) in October I will be joining two other past Chairmen who will also be leaving the EAC in 2012. In the past Chris Bonsall also served as Society Chairman and John Valentine has been the Society Secretary/Treasurer. In the past few years we have worked together to try and implement the Strategic Plan that was accepted by the whole of the membership worldwide. We have achieved some of our objectives but a clash of personalities and individual objectives on Council have stood in the way of achieving all our hopes and expectations. This year there will be major changes in the personnel serving on Council including a new Society Chair. My hope is that it will be a woman finally killing off the suggestion that we are a misogynist Society. We will also need a new Honorary President to replace John Avery MW. I have never worked out, when all our Officers, Council members and members of Zone Committees, work for the Society without remuneration and pay their own travel and accommodation costs, why only the President is called Honorary!

More responsibility and funds are being delegated from Council to Zone level and the new EAC will be able to plan for the future in Europe and Africa. We are still slowly losing members and need to attract new and younger replacements. This is an opportunity for members who wish to contribute their time to the Society to consider putting their names forward. Three new people have been co-opted onto the EAC and are now putting themselves forward at the ABRM to join by election. But we do still need more new younger blood to develop the future of the Society in the hope that under new leadership it will remain an integrated International Society and not just an amalgamation of independent zones.

*Ron Barker*

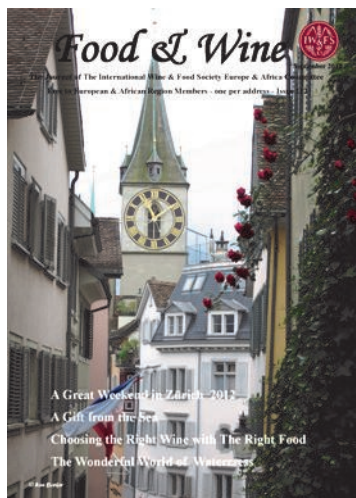
### **Are you LINKEDIN, on FACEBOOK, do you TWEET?**

If so we would like to hear from you as the EAC is shortly going to use social networking media as part of a trial marketing initiative. It would be most helpful to have some contacts who have first-hand experience of these products.

Please email [timgittins@aol.com](mailto:timgittins@aol.com) and I will provide more information.

**Tim Gittins**

**EAC Marketing & PR Manager**



## Food & Wine

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the Editor



West Yorkshire foragers at work

## Editorial

'It's a corker! Red wine costing £3.59 and sold at Aldi scoops international award'. Oh dear, there goes the 'house wine' we have been drinking for over two years. The wine in question, a 2011 Toro Loco, a deliciously smooth, Tempranillo. Judges at the International Wine and Spirit Competition awarded it a silver medal, describing it as, 'fruity, rounded and appealing' with hints of 'nice bright cherry'. If they had tried the 2010, that was even better. Fortunately we have a few cases in stock but when we called at our local store recently the manageress said she had 50 cases in that morning and they were gone by lunch time. Such is the power of the media. You can try dozens of rubbish wines before you find something good, then the wine buffs come along and tell the world about it.

Scientists involved in the burgeoning research into 'fake meat' (see F&W Sept 2011) are hoping the 'power of the media' will come into play in the autumn when Heston Blumenthal cooks the first 'fake' burger. A famous veggie is to stand in front of the cameras and take a bite out of the £200,000 lab produced beef burger in the hope that money for further research into artificial meat will come pouring in. It all sounds very eco friendly, synthesizing meat, but even if the 'yuck' factor is eventually overcome what of our countryside? In the UK, livestock production has dropped dramatically in the last ten years, half of our dairy farmers have gone out of business and there is little livestock left in the fields. No animals equate to no muck, equates to no insects and flies, it is little wonder that our wildlife is in decline, the food chain has been broken. I am reminded of Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring', published in 1962.

We have a bumper issue this time. Thank you to all branches for some super contributions. We learn how Lusaka had great fun celebrating the Queens Jubilee, in the sun! Moscow's trip to Uzbekistan sounds wonderful and closer to home Manchester branch went in search of 'The Land of Black Pudding'. West Yorkshire went foraging but it sounds as though they had a much better meal than the one served up by the worlds arch forager chef Rene Redzepi from Noma - 'The Best Restaurant in the World'. At the Noma 'popup' this summer at Claridges the five course menu, at £250 a head, started with a flower pot containing a tiny carrot, a radish, two flowers and some faux soil that had been made with mushrooms, and I quote from one attendee, 'quite frankly real soil would at least of tasted of something'. Next was a jar of lettuce with live ants. Rene Redzepi is a clever man, he could serve a cowpat and some people would try it. Richard Vines, chairman of the UK's panel, for the 'World's 50 Best Restaurant Awards' said the ants were, 'special ants from Denmark and taste like lemongrass'. Obviously a case of 'the king hath no clothes'.

Congratulations to all involved in our new branch in Liverpool. If you are a new member I hope you enjoy the articles and don't forget it is your magazine, let me know the type of articles you would like to see, I am always keen to receive feed back.

At the end of May I entered the 2012 World Watercress Soup Competition. Unfortunately I didn't bag one of the two £500 prizes on offer but I did have great fun trying. When the wine article I had commissioned for this issue arrived it was totally unsuitable so I am very grateful to London branch chairman Jeffrey Benson for burning the midnight oil, immediately on his return from holiday, and producing for us a very thought provoking article. I would like to appeal to all wine professionals amongst our members, I am always in need of interesting wine related articles.

I hope you are all finding the website useful. On page 10 John Valentine gives you more details of logging on and finding your way around. At the very successful Great Weekend in Zurich, about which you can read on page 6, one member commented that they never see, Wine, Food & Friends, the US version of the journal. Just follow John's instructions and you will find them all available to read. While you are on line have some fun by logging on to <http://foodietravel.org/?Code=IWFS> as advertised on page 9 and find out if you are a true foodie. Someone said I should mention the Olympic Games as it is now in full swing. I read that 2,500 TV hours are being devoted to coverage, suffice to say, I am very glad we don't have a television.

I hope to see some of you in the New Forest for our annual Branch Representatives Meeting in October. Remember it is your chance to come along and have a say on how the Society is run. It is at this meeting that Ron retires as EAC Chairman and I for one will be very sad to see him go. The amount of man hours he has put into the job has been quite staggering and I would like to say thank you to him on behalf of the members of the European & African Committee for all the support he has given us in the past three years. Thank you Ron, you will be sorely missed.

**Pan Brunning**



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## CONTRIBUTORS



**John Macdonald** was invited to join the Society in the late 1970s in Toronto. His position as cellar master was as a result of his work with the Liquor Control Board of Ontario as a wine taster and buyer. Tasting over 50 wines per week gave him a first hand knowledge of what was interesting and what was not for the Branch's cellar. He became branch president a few years later. He and his wife Trudi became confirmed IW&FS festival attendees after visiting the Hong Kong/Singapore event which was memorable. In the early nineties he was invited on to the American Board of Governors and helped Dr. Brian Findlay set up the Americas web site.

He retired to Switzerland in 2002, and with the support of Peter Bennett Keenan, formed the Zurich branch which received its Charter in May 2008. The Branch is truly international with members originating from Sweden, the USA, England, India, Canada and of course Switzerland.



**John W Valentine** joined the Society through the London Branch in 1987 and in 2001 became a member of the St James's branch.

Following three years as Treasurer of the 1993 International Festival in London, he received a Bronze medal. He joined the EAC and became Chairman and Events Coordinator. The purpose of this role is to ensure that Members within our Region are provided with an ongoing choice of events to attend, coordinated across Branches and countries. He became secretary/treasurer to Council and received a Silver medal in 2000. In 2009 he was awarded a gold medal and since the inception of the new Society website he has been working tirelessly coordinating with the other two zones and perfecting the EAC section.



**Jan Edwards** is a former BBC local radio presenter, who has lived on Mallorca since 2004. A freelance writer, she contributes regular articles – including restaurant reviews – to the island's lifestyle magazine abcMallorca, for which she has been freelance assistant editor since December 2010. Her articles have been published in the UK in The Telegraph (weekly expat edition of The Daily Telegraph), Living Spain, The Business Travel News, and other publications. Jan is passionate about Mallorca's gastronomy and has eaten in all five restaurants with Michelin-starred cuisine. She presents a weekly 'What's on in Mallorca' update on Talk Radio Europe, and blogs about her country *finca* home on [www.livinginruralmallorca.com](http://www.livinginruralmallorca.com)



**Jeffrey Benson** has been in the wine trade for 35 years. He meets producers worldwide as a buyer and wine maker, conveying his knowledge through his lectures and consultancy work. He was involved in the formation of 'Wines of Canada' and was the only non-North American judge to join their tasting panel at a three day event evaluating over 200 wines to determine medal winners. For twelve years, Jeffrey ran the annual evening wine school for the Society. He continues to lecture and adjudicate the Wine and Spirit Education Trust examinations and has written and contributed to seven books and many articles on food, wine and travel. [www.jeffreybenson.net](http://www.jeffreybenson.net)



**Gail Unzelman**, with a keen interest in wine and its history, has been collecting wine books and related materials for some forty years. The Unzelman Library now numbers close to 4,000 books – in all languages – dating from the 15th century to the present day. This interest led to helping establish, in 1990, "The Wayward Tendrils – A Wine Book Collector's Society." Since that date she has edited and published Wayward Tendrils Quarterly, a 24- to 36-page journal devoted to wine books, wine authors, wine libraries, bibliography, and all such matters relating to wine literature. 'A Bibliographic Remembrance of André L. Simon and His Written Works' is her latest publication.

## Dear Members

Spring at the Secretariat is the time to focus on the preparation of the Vintage Card, Report & Accounts and the Directory of Branch Contacts – the latter two you should now have received. In addition this year we have also been working hard on an interesting new monograph; details on this will appear in the next issue. This time, and also in future editions, I plan to feature the consultants for the Vintage Card who generously provide us with their invaluable knowledge on wines for which they are recognized experts. Their advice helps us to put the Vintage Card together and ensures you have the latest vintage advice at your fingertips. Below is a snapshot of three of our consultants chosen from wine regions in each of the IWFS zones. I have also asked them to let me know of a wine and/or food dish that they have recently enjoyed. More details about each, and other fellow consultants, can be found on the website.

### Austria & Germany \* – David Furer

David has broad experience in the drinks industry including wine writer, lecturer, teacher, sommelier and restaurant manager. Frequently travelling to the wine regions of Austria and Germany, plus his knowledge of viticulture and vinification obtained while working at five wineries in Germany's Mosel, Rheingau, and Württemberg regions, have meant he is more than able to give us an insight into the wines of these north European countries.

*'My June '12 visit to Austria included time with young winemaker Christoph Polz at his family's Steiermark estate in Austria. Lunch was at the family-run 'buschenschank' where, amongst other dishes, we enjoyed room-temperature beech-smoked chicken breast with peach and beet purees and fresh horseradish along with their Klassik Morillon - a dry, steel-fermented Chardonnay from the magnificent '11 vintage.'*

(\* a role shared with Michael Schmidt)



### New Zealand – Bob Campbell MW

Bob was the second New Zealander to gain the Master of Wine qualification. After working in the wine industry for 13 years he became a freelance writer and educator in 1986. He is a senior wine judge and is also wine editor of four New Zealand magazines and contributes to wine publications in seven countries and runs his own diploma courses.

*'Despite having a well stocked wine cellar I tend to drink the leftover wines from my daily tastings (I usually taste 20 wines each day). At the moment I'm slogging my way through a formidable line-up of 230 bottles of New Zealand Pinot Noir. It's not too onerous because Pinot Noir is my desert island wine. Drinking the wine unmasked and with food provides a valuable audit on my earlier assessment. I recently enjoyed a truly outstanding wine - Villa Maria 2010 Southern Valleys Pinot Noir from Marlborough. An impressively dense and powerful red it has an incredible energy that gives it an ethereal lightness - imagine Arnold Schwarzenegger wearing a tutu.'*



### New York – Peter Bell

Toronto native Peter Bell has been working in New York's Finger Lakes since 1990, first as winemaker for Dr Frank's, and, since 1995, at Fox Run Vineyards. Prior to moving to New York he lived in New Zealand, where he was an assistant winemaker in the Marlborough region, and Australia, where he received his formal training in enology. His specialty is the production of Riesling wines, for which the Finger Lakes has become world famous. He also devotes his energies to producing sparkling wines, a range of dry reds, and several styles of fortified wines.

*'I am a huge Sherry fan and have a bottle of Seppelt Solero, an Australian fortified wine in the Amontillado Sherry style. I enjoyed the wine with slow braised pork chops seasoned with fennel seeds, mashed potatoes and my favourite vegetable, brussel sprouts. That may seem an inappropriate match but it worked quite well, partly because the wine was so good and the food was also terrific.'*



The 2012 version of the **IWFS Vintage Card** will be available in October and the price to members remains unchanged. Available from me or through the website. The Card makes an ideal gift, with your seasonal messages, to friends, family and colleagues.

**Best wishes Andrea Warren**

## The Annual Branch Representatives Meeting & 'Awayday' In the New Forest

### The Annual Branch Representatives Meeting

**will take place at 4pm on Wednesday 17 October 2012 at the Montagu Arms, Beaulieu, Hampshire SO42 7ZL**

**The meeting will be preceded by tea at 3.30pm, which is free of charge.**

This is the chance for Members to listen to presentations from Committee Members and to ask questions about the way the Society is run. Come along and air your views.

You are also invited to join us at the black tie dinner which will follow the meeting at 7pm. The cost will be £65 per person to include a sparkling reception followed by a three course dinner with wines. Accommodation at the Hotel is now full, but there is alternative accommodation available nearby.

On Thursday 18 October there is still space available at the informal lunch at the Jetty Restaurant, Mudeford, but the dinner that evening at the Terra Vina Restaurant is **now fully booked**.

**Please let the Treasurer, Jim Muir, know immediately if you wish to attend any of these events.**

**E mail: [muir112@btinternet.com](mailto:muir112@btinternet.com) or telephone 01633 420278**



# A Great Weekend in Zürich 2012

## John Macdonald tells of the trials of planning a Great Weekend

**M**onths of planning with a dedicated team produced a Zürich Great Weekend of “Swissness”.

The team of Kurt Haering, organiser and team leader, John and Trudi Macdonald, Hans-Walter and Philippa Keller, Elina and Göran Selin, John (Treasurer and Transport organiser) and Joan Nicholas and Edi and Ruth Hug combined their ideas to showcase the Zürich region, its culture, food and wines to some 65 guests from around the world. Visitors came from Melbourne, Estonia, Ireland, The United States, Cayman Islands, England and of course Switzerland.

In 2011 we were visited by the EAC Chairman Ron Barker and EAC Event Coordinator Michael Messent with the idea that Zürich should put on a Great Weekend in 2012. Our first reaction was “Sure, we’d love to do it”. It wasn’t till we got home and thought, “What have we done, what have we gotten ourselves into?”

We put the team together and immediately started having meetings and hammering out ideas. Too many ideas for three days. But gradually certain things became more important/interesting than others and a general plan was decided upon. Various members took charge of certain events and with regular meetings, events coalesced into firm bookings and by April the Great Weekend had taken shape. A black tie dinner at one of the most famous Guild houses in Zurich, the Zunfthaus zur Meisen arranged by Hans-Walter and Philippa Keller, then on the next morning a walking tour of the older sections of Zürich followed by a typical Swiss lunch hopefully outdoors, after all it was June, the weather should be warm and sunny shouldn’t it? The afternoon was to be spent on a paddle wheel steamer arranged by John and Joan Nicholas with a voyage from one end of the lake to the other for dinner in the mediaeval town of Rapperswil-Jona at the Restaurant Rathaus arranged by John and Trudi Macdonald. Sunday the group was to travel by train to the Swiss wine research station at Wädenswil to visit the Weinmuseum and have a tasting of interesting Zürich area wines followed by a lunch at the famous Landgasthof Halbinsel Au, arranged by Kurt Haering. The organising team arranged for test meals at the various venues to fine-tune the meals and the wine selections. We had finalised just about everything by the start of May, except the weather.

Weather from the start was a serious factor to contend with, as Zürich is a walking city with vehicles not allowed in the centre of the town. Fortunately we had trams to help us because the weekend prognosis called for rain everyday and it certainly started out that way on Friday. But with a lot of praying and doing some begging of the higher powers, the rain mercifully stopped by six o’clock and many attendees were able to walk to the event along the Bahnhofstrasse, those of us who were a little less able took the tram and the evening worked out without a drop of rain.





**John Macdonald receives an André Simon  
Bronz Medal**

The evening started with an apéro in the Meisen reception room containing a rare Swiss porcelain collection. We all then moved to the dining room where the festivities began. EAC chairman, Ron Barker, gave a welcoming speech and at the end made a surprise presentation of the André Simon bronze medal to The Zürich Branch president John Macdonald in recognition of his work for the IW&FS in starting the Zürich Branch. The dinner began with a trilogie of local fresh water fish done in different styles, followed by a cream of white asparagus



soup with green asparagus tips. The main course was lamb cutlet and lamb entrecote accompanied by a potato nest filled with ratatouille. Dessert was another Swiss speciality, Fresh berries, Emmentaler Meringues filled with Crème Gruyere, needless to say a very light dessert! The wines accompanying the dinner were all Swiss, a Vaud a Calamin d'Epesses, a Valais a Syrah from the Zürich region and a Pinot Noir that the Meisen Zunft selects each year for their cellar served from antique pewter wine ewers. During the meal the diners were entertained with a talk from the 103<sup>rd</sup> Guildmeister, Hans-Ruedi Staiger, on the history and influence of the Guilds in the development of Zurich. Each attendee received a copy

of the address.

Saturday dawned with clouds that threatened rain, but more praying and begging got us sunny breaks and then by lunch time almost full sun for the rest of the day. This was a walking day with a guide tour of the old city, organised by our member Edi Hug, followed by a lunch at the Kongresshaus on the lakefront. A voyage on the paddle wheel steamer was accompanied by cake and coffee and beautiful weather for seeing the countryside of Zürich from the lake.

In Rapperswil-Jona, our local tour guides Werner and Jill Rüttimann, friends of the Kellers, met us. The group then had a walking tour of the old city and the castle ramparts ending up at our dinner venue where, with beautiful sunny late afternoon weather, we all sat down outdoors to an apéro of Prosecco and hors d'oeuvres.







The evening event was held in the old city government house now turned into a museum/restaurant. Our dining room was the council chamber of the Rathaus. Dinner started with Marinated fish, "Escabeche" style, the fish having been caught earlier that day in the Zürichsee. The main course was a delicious Beef roast sourced from a farm in the Graubünden, perfectly prepared, it literally melted in the mouth. The wines were a rare Chardonnay from a 5ha vineyard on the Walensee in St. Gallen region accessible only by boat. The red wine was from a famous Ticino wine maker, Feliciano Gialdi, a 2009 Giornico Merlot in magnum bottles. Dessert was a play of Strawberries and peppermint sorbet, a wonderful finish to a great meal in wonderful surroundings. During the meal, the guest speaker, Diccon Bewes, regaled the attendees with excerpts from his book 'Swiss Watching'; an insightful book into the government of the country as well as the manners and habits of the Swiss population. Each of the attendees of the Great Weekend received a signed copy of the book in their welcome bag.



Sunday dawned cloudy and once again threatened rain but by the time we had reached the Wädenswil Wine Museum tasting, skies were clearing. A tour of the museum was followed by a tasting of classic wines of the region as well as a couple of extreme rarities that are generally never seen on store shelves but which are extremely interesting varietal wines. The tasting was followed by a lunch at the famous Landgasthof Halbinsel Au. This wonderful establishment sits on top of an ancient moraine that gives a wonderful panoramic view of the lake of Zürich. Some of our less mobile participants took advantage of Ruth and Edi Hug's handicap equipped van to climb to the top. The luncheon theme was fish with white and red wines from the area. A fish broth to start, followed by a poached Zander in white wine sauce and finally a salmon-trout in puff pastry with a dill sauce and Jasmine rice accompanied by an interesting red wine, a Garanoir/Gamaret blend. Dessert was a fresh fruit dish with a pink grapefruit sorbet.



The luncheon ended with a short closing address from the EAC chairman and his surprise presentation of an award to our event organiser, Kurt Haering, a very well deserved award. Congratulations Kurt!



As The Great Weekend ended, members headed back to Zürich either by train to catch their flights home or, for those who were staying on for a few more days, the relaxing ship back to Zürich, catching a last glimpse of the beautiful shores of the Zürichsee.





## Decisions, Decisions, or better without them?

# Readers Letter



### *Dear Editor,*

When I joined the Society in the seventies it was usual at the events of some branches to find that aperitifs were not included. Inevitably some people bought their own while others opted to await the meal and the accompanying wine.

This was divisive and did not sit well with my early ideas of how an IWFS event should be structured. Happily it is a thing of the past (as far as I know) but it may have been instrumental in shaping my strong preference for events where decisions are not required of me. Thus I look to the organisers and the restaurant to put together a menu that is balanced and interesting and can be delivered in a timely fashion with wines which complement the food. In brief I want someone else to have done all the choosing, leaving those attending to enjoy the result. Fortunately many of the events held in my part of the country are so designed. Valid exceptions might include occasions where a buffet is appropriate or, for example, a Chinese meal.

A look through four issues of Food & Wine revealed that events were evenly split between those with choice and those without.

Most branches opted for a mixture, with only five always offering options and four never doing so. The range of selection was very varied, from just two main dishes at one meal to four for each of three courses at another - I pity the chef and the sommelier. The set menu events include some which are at highly rated venues and these tend to include more courses than most.

That leads me to practical considerations. Generally the meals reviewed are of three or four courses. If the number of covers is large, say thirty or more, then it seems to me that an absence of selections is likely to produce a consistent and better result and it certainly makes for better wine matching. I accept that where numbers are smaller, say up to twenty, the kitchen may be able to cope, particularly if members have identified their preferences beforehand and these have been passed on in good time. However matching wine to a variety of dishes must surely present problems. Also while I understand the attraction to members of having the opportunity to choose, some dishes may prove to be more attractive than others, leading to people rueing their selection - something best avoided perhaps.

It may be that the reports I have considered are not representative of all our Region's events but there can be no doubt about the existence of a great deal of variety and that is as it should be.

It's interesting that restaurant awards are just as likely to be made when a selection has been involved as when it has not. In fact it may be thought that a chef who succeeds in producing say nine excellent dishes over three courses has achieved more than one who prepares just three. I am happy to attend events even if decisions are involved!

Perhaps my musings will result in trenchant support for having freedom to choose with explanations of how pre ordering (or not), wine matching and similar tricky areas are handled.

**John Legg, Manchester.**

(Your Editor would like to know members views on this subject - contact details page 2)

## 'An Omelette & 3 Glasses of Wine'

(En route with Citroens)

This book which is, 45% travel, 50% cars, 5% wine & food is a compilation of 8 high quality road trips produced for various magazines over the last two decades. The compilers include world famous photographer **Martyn Goddard**, our very own **Andrew Brodie**, and possibly the best motoring writer of his generation, **Phillip Llewellyn** with contributions from **Paul Horrell & Dale Drinnon**.

Set mostly in France, this is not a 'car' book but a series of short stories with a car accent. It is a stunning mix of reportage and beautifully crafted car images with an underlying wine and food interest.

A delightful read for car lovers, travellers and wine and food enthusiasts alike. A high quality 144 page case bound large book with 136 photos and dust jacket which is a pleasure to handle. £39.50 free P&P to members. To order contact:

Andrew Brodie +44 (0) 7782172402 Andrew.brodie@btinternet.com



## ARE YOU A TRUE FOODIE?

To find out complete our survey - log on to <http://foodietravel.org/?Code=IWFS>

On behalf of several organisations within the tourism and hospitality industry research is being conducted on food and food tourism. Please take about 20 minutes to complete our survey. When you have completed the survey, you will be informed if you are indeed a 'true foodie' according to our scale, and if you have the characteristics of a gourmet international food tourist. This evaluation is based on knowledge of food and tourism research.

Your responses will be kept completely anonymous. To receive your evaluation, log on to <http://foodietravel.org/?Code=IWFS> (available first week of September) Answer all the questions and find out what type of foodie you really are.





## Our Society Website – The Next Step

For almost two years the Membership records for the EAC have been held both within our current PC based system as well as on the website. The EAC has decided that the time is right to move our master records to the website, eliminating the storage of these records on the Membership Registrar's PC. Besides saving additional work and reducing the risk of losing important information, this approach brings the major benefit that the Society, the Region, the Branches and the Members will all be using a single set of records which should always be up to date and which can be shared simultaneously by relevant Regional and Branch Officers and Members.

Clearly there will be some tasks that can be performed better on a PC than on the website. For this reason we have available a range of Excel programmes that enables all Branches and Regions to download from the website a snapshot at any time of their Member data to an appropriate PC. From October this year the EAC will use Member information from the website only, downloading the latest details whenever required, such as for mailing lists and analysis.



**Branches:** To enable this change to take place we shall move any missing historical records for Member Awards, Past Roles and Events attended to the website. However Branches should be aware of a couple of differences in the way that records are stored on the website.

Firstly, there are separate records for each Member, rather than a single record for a Joint Membership - although, in the latter case, only the nominated "primary member" will pay the joint subscription.

Secondly, there are separate records for the membership of each Branch to which a Member may belong - although only one Society subscription is required, payable through the "primary branch".

Finally, as new Members join and Branches report their Subscription receipts throughout the year, these reports should be made on a cumulative basis, so that the total payments made correspond to the total subscriptions shown on the website records for the Branch. There is an Excel programme available that will help Branches do this. The website allows Branches to collect and record Branch subscriptions (if any) at the same time and in the same manner as Society subscriptions - hopefully reducing the effort required.

For the Annual Returns in 2013 the standard Prompt Payment Rebate of £2 will be payable in the normal way, but only to Branches making their Annual Returns through the website with up to date Member contact details and subscription records and with payment received by the EAC by 28 February 2013. It would also be appreciated if Branches were to make payments to the EAC by bank transfer. Please take time to read the appropriate 'Website Guidelines' under the Europe/ Africa 'Resources' dropdown menu, as these should answer many of the questions that you may have.



As an incentive to encourage early adoption of the new approach, the Prompt Payment Rebate to Branches will be increased from £2 to £5, for 2013 only, for those relevant Memberships where Member records are fully up to date on the website, payment has been received by the EAC by 28 February 2013 and, at the same time, the details are reported to the Membership Registrar using the standard EAC *Branch Invoice for Society Subscriptions* Excel spreadsheet.

**Members:** If you haven't yet registered on the website then please take the opportunity to do so. Besides keeping informed about Events you'll also be able to keep your own contact details up to date. Details on how to register are available by clicking the link at the foot of the Europe/Africa Overview page on the website, which is a public page. If you need any more information, your Branch Contact/ Secretary has details of your Username and initial Password - which you should change when you register.

Use your internet browser and go to: [www.iwfs.org](http://www.iwfs.org). The Menu tabs on the Home Page provide public access to common topics and non-restricted information in the Regions. Now you are ready to register as a Member and sign in:



Member sign in unlocks much more content, including access to the Secretariat tab. The site recognizes members upon sign in and opens the session on the EAC's "News" page.

In addition you can click on "My Account" to update your personal details. Clearly the more Members who keep their contact information (addresses, e-mails, telephone, etc) up to date, the more this will be appreciated by hard working Branch officers. Don't worry about updating your Awards, Festivals/ Events, or past Roles - we shall update these soon as explained above.

You can also visit the pages of other Regions, such as the Americas and the Asia/Pacific. For example to read the Americas 'Wine, Food & Friends' click on 'Americas' on the Society Menu tab, then on 'Wine Food & Friends' on their Region Menu tab, select 'Current and Past Issues' from the dropdown menu, and then click on the underlined Issue # that you want to open or download.

**Benefits:** Besides Member and Branch records, our website also allows each Branch to load images and information about their organisation, each of which can be set to appropriate levels of privacy. There is an Event system to advertise, describe and record each event – and to share this with Members around the world if desired. Branch Officers may choose to have e-mail accounts through the website. There is also an E-Mail system to communicate across the Society and within Branches. There are Excel programmes available to allow Branches to produce Member & Membership listings, Subscriptions schedules (Branch and Society) and mailing labels from the website records.

*John W Valentine, Website Co-ordinator.*



# Choosing the Right Wine with The Right Food

## London Branch Chairman Jeffrey Benson Endeavours to Unravel the Mysteries of Food & Wine Matching



**F**or some people, the business of finding the right wine to go with a particular dish is something approaching an exact science. As with any scientific discipline, they feel, it must have its founding principles and its eternal laws, and the slightest intrusion of human error can result in just as much of a calamity as a civil engineer's slip with a protractor might do with a suspension bridge. I would like to make it clear here and now that I do not belong to this school of thought.

It is certainly true that there are food and wine combinations that simply don't work, for example where too strong a wine overpowers the flavour of a dish, or vice versa. Partnering a high-acid dry white wine with a richly creamy dessert will produce tears before bedtime, and if you have laboured all afternoon over a recipe that involves fine ingredients and a complex and enticing range of flavours, it would rather be letting the side down to serve a very basic *vin de table* with it. The exercise of sheer common sense, more than the mobilisation of any in-depth wine knowledge, is enough of a guide in these cases. What seems to have happened in recent years,

however (led by the most punctilious authorities in viticultural Europe, namely the French, but followed enthusiastically since by the Americans and lately the British), has been a shift towards a much more finely detailed approach to the subject. It is possible to attend food-and wine matching classes in one's spare time, some of them – as in California – organised by the winemakers themselves, others offered as evening courses at the local adult education centre.

Perhaps this isn't an entirely new phenomenon after all. I had the profoundly instructive experience in the 1960s of finding myself seated next to an eminent eye surgeon at a smart New York dinner party. As though the world of ophthalmology were not demanding enough, this gentleman had managed to find time to pursue a sideline in gastronomic studies with singular fervour. He was of confirmed opinions as to which wine made the perfect fit with practically any classic dish, but one match had for many years continued to elude him. What was the best wine to drink with spaghetti Bolognese?

Although it may not seem like the most difficult of dishes to please, nothing had quite met with the doctor's unqualified approval. Oh, there were wines that just about worked if you were prepared not to think about it too closely, but then he did think about it closely. The problem all but kept him awake at nights until one day, in the kind of sweet serendipity with which the history of scientific investigation is strewn, revelation happily dawned. There was only one wine ultimately – just as he knew there would be – that properly went with spaghetti Bolognese. And it wasn't an Italian wine, as one might have expected, given the provenance of the dish. It was Château Lafite, a *premier cru* claret from the Médoc district of Bordeaux. Not even any old Lafite either, but specifically the 1953 vintage.

The triumphant medic was in deadly earnest, and was able to justify his conclusions with impeccable logic. And it has to be admitted that, had the occasion arisen to put them to the test, not many of us would turn down the chance of drinking a top Bordeaux of a fine vintage against the corner-store Chianti we might otherwise be faced with. The point, of course, is that one can go too far. Anybody tempted to try out the combination today should bear in mind that the '53 Lafite will taste rather different now to how it tasted in the 1960s, and so it isn't even as if the finding will stand us in good stead for all time.

It is precisely this sort of manic precision that alienates those who have neither the inclination (nor the budget) to go into the subject in such detail, and readers may be relieved to hear that Château Lafite is not one of my suggestions to drink with spaghetti Bolognese. That said, there has since been something of a backlash against this type of approach, in the course of which it has got about that there isn't really any point at all in worrying about whether a particular combination of food and wine actually 'works' or not, in some arcane technical sense. Just simply choose a wine you like, and get on with it. This sounds beguiling enough – refreshingly free of snobbery, you might think – but it can lead, as suggested, to

pairings that spoil the enjoyment of either the food or the wine or both. What would be the point of drinking a powerful red Australian Shiraz with a starter of lightly grilled scallops, or a delicate, youthful Muscadet with casseroled beef, when the pairings would so obviously work better the other way around?

I am not out to tell you what you should and shouldn't drink. Even today, when a lot of the snootiness has been removed from the topic of wine and wine consumption is on a seemingly unstoppable upward curve in all sectors of society, people can still be far too shy about expressing preferences and stating opinions when it comes to wine. There is still an inbuilt fear of 'getting it wrong'.

In the dim, distant past, the basic rules of choosing wine with food amounted to little more than drinking dry white wine with fish and red wine with meats. If you wanted a drink beforehand, you had a sherry or a gin and tonic, and if you wanted something at the end of the meal, you had a brandy or a liqueur. There was champagne for special occasions, and dessert wines for – well, desserts. That was about it. What *type* of dry white wine went with the Dover sole, or red with the roast beef, didn't really much matter in an era when there was a far narrower range of wine to be had than there is today. Most of it was French, with the other main western European countries (Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal) putting in only sporadic appearances for curiosity value. It should be recalled that an unfortified table wine from Portugal was once as unusual a commodity on the wine-merchant's shelf as the likes of Uruguayan, Moroccan or Mexican wines now are.

Eventually, by about the 1970s, these apparently hard-and-fast rules got a little altered in the wash, so that it became permissible to drink a dry white wine with a white meat such as pork or poultry, while reserving the red wines for the darker meats like beef and lamb. The method of cooking turned out to make a difference. A poached chicken breast with a light creamy sauce was better served by a white wine, but a whole roast chicken seemed somehow to be done more obvious justice by a light to mid-weight red. There were even reports of some adventurous souls – avant-garde mavericks, clearly – who had been known to drink light red wines with certain fish dishes.

What has happened, broadly speaking, since then is that, just as the array of available wines has expanded, so too has the range of food we eat. Far Eastern cuisines such as those of Thailand and Japan jostle on the high street cheek by jowl with Mexicans and Greeks, with the odd Vietnamese or Turkish interloper. Indian and Chinese food adds a note of the exotic, but the difference was that nobody expected to drink wine with red-hot curries and sweet-and-sour pork, whereas now we are ready to drink wine with almost anything.

So cosmopolitan have tastes in food become that, led by the urban restaurant scene, a fashion for picking and mixing different national styles within the same menu, even within the same dish, has arisen. This has undermined at a stroke one other eternal verity of food-and-wine matching: if in doubt, match a traditional dish from one of the wine-producing countries with one of that country's wines. If you are about to set to with a salad of chicken, chorizo sausage and pasta quills dressed with chilli-spiked crème fraîche, you might be forgiven, when contemplating the wine list, for losing your bearings a little.

I am always open to new suggestions, but not so open-minded as to entertain any old bit of nonsense. Drinking a dry sparkling wine with a dessert – still an article of faith in parts of France – is not the kind of suggestion to cut much ice with me, and I don't mind telling the French as much when faced with such a grating clash of flavours. Neither do we forget, that taste is an intensely personal matter, and while it suddenly seems the last word in sophistication to drink a lightly textured red, such as a New Zealand Pinot Noir, with grilled salmon, to others the combination seems a clumsy one. Personally I can't bear the partnership of port and Stilton, but I am not about to tell generations of readers for whom it is one of the highlights of a gastronomic Christmas that they don't know what they are doing.

Eating and drinking well are among life's most cherishable treasures. If I make them the subject of a pontificating scholastic exercise, such as our ophthalmologist friend had done, then in one very real sense I am taking something of that pleasure away from them. It is often observed that people who taste wine for a living, such as those who work in the wine trade and those who write about the subject, lose something of the ability to enjoy wine in an honest-to-goodness, uncomplicated, non-technical way because we are always analysing and evaluating it. Spending a good portion of one's life trying to find the right gustatory soulmate for spaghetti Bolognese similarly risks stripping much innocent enjoyment from the business of eating.

The fact remains that there are good food and wine matches, and occasionally those that seem to reach perfection from aroma to texture to flavour to the mingled aftertaste of the two elements produce an harmonious balance. No book can ensure that you will always find such perfection since there are so many variables at work. The French have it right when they say that there are no good wines *per se*, only good *bottles* of wine. Each one is different; just as each time you cook the same dish, it will turn out slightly differently to the last time you made it, for any number of reasons. I am against drab standardisation in winemaking, and so I have no wish to introduce it into the matter at hand. Try to maximise the likelihood of finding one of those ideal marriages of solids and liquids, or at the very least of enjoying both of them together more than they would otherwise be enjoyed singly.

*Bon appétit*, and keep experimenting. Pleasant surprises make life worth living, and this subject is teeming with them. ★


***"Food without wine is a corpse; wine without food is a ghost; united and well matched they are as body and soul, living partners." Andre Simon (1877-1970)***



# The Wonderful World of WATERCRESS

## ‘Not Just a bit on the Side’

**Your Editor seeks out the worlds finest watercress soup**



**T**he World Watercress Soup Championships, sounds very impressive doesn't it?

The small Hampshire town of New Alresford has been involved in the watercress industry for many years. In the twelfth century Henri de Blois, brother of King Stephen and Bishop of Winchester, is credited with the idea of building the Great Weir or dam and designing the T-shaped town of Novum Forum, (The New Market) which soon became known as New Alresford. He died before the completion of the project and his successor as Bishop finished Alresford's T shaped town centre, as it is seen today. The medieval stone bridge is still in place crossing the outflow from the pond and leading on to the dam and connecting with the old road from Winchester to Farnham.

Watercress has always thrived in the area on the mineral-rich spring waters of the River Arle. William Camden in his 1695 edition of *Britannia* arrived at the name of the river by concluding that the town name of Alresford meant "The ford of the Alre" and so the river was called "The Alre". Confusion seems to have come in 1937 when A J Robertson in his book, "History of Alresford" quotes Camden but misspells the name as Arle. Today it is known as the Arle locally but some Ordnance Survey maps still refer to The Alre.

According to the erudite, Sir Francis Bacon, eating watercress, 'restores the youthful bloom in women'. Liz Hurley is said to swear by watercress soup for its restorative effect, so maybe the Elizabethan scribe knew what he was talking about. It was not until the arrival of the steam railway in 1865 that commercial production took off. The opening of the Watercress line connecting Alresford to Alton and the London main line meant the crop could be transported rapidly to all parts of the country. ➡



Watercress culture in the UK flourished in the Victorian era with over 1,000 acres under cultivation throughout the country. Production was concentrated in the south of England where the clear flowing streams that run off the South Down's chalk rich soils provide ideal conditions for cultivation. A prominent figure in the watercress industry in the late 1800s and early 1900s was Eliza James, who became known as "The Watercress Queen". At the age of five she was hawking watercress around factories in Birmingham, being given 40 bunches of wild watercress a day by her family to sell to the workers. Her business grew as she grew, and eventually she became the sole watercress supplier of nearly every hotel and restaurant in London. She was reputed to be the biggest owner of watercress farms anywhere in the world, owning vast watercress beds at Mitcham and Beddington in Surrey and at Warnford, Overton and Hurstbourne Priors in Hampshire. At the time of her death in 1927 at the age of 72, James & Son, the company she founded, was handling 50 tons of watercress in just one weekend. She was a well-known figure in Covent Garden, working on her stall for over 50 years. She arrived every day on a watercress cart driven by her son or son-in-law. The Daily Mirror reported: "For a woman by her own unaided efforts to have amassed £20,000 three or four times over by selling watercress is surely one of the most wonderful romances of business London has ever known".

The farms Eliza founded in Hampshire are still producing watercress and the name Vitacress was trade marked by Eliza and later sold on to Mr. Malcolm Isaac, the chairman of Vitacress Salads, who are now part of The Watercress Alliance, which also includes Alresford Salads and The Watercress Company. These companies together today farm, pack and distribute from 100 acres of watercress in Hampshire and Dorset.

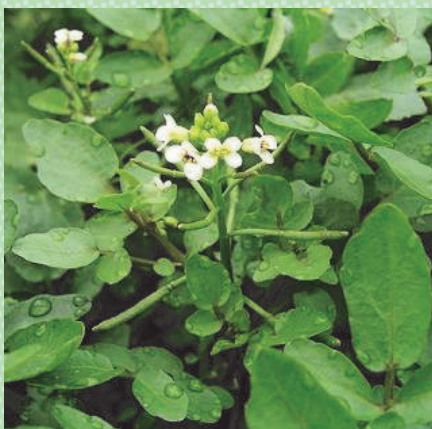
At The Watercress Company farms the seedlings are started under glass before being planted out into gravel beds that are supplied with fast flowing water. Up until recently harvesting by hand involved hours of backbreaking work for teams of workers but today a big investment has been made in mechanical harvesters which can do the job in a fraction of the time.



The Alliance is working towards making their watercress the 'champagne' of the cress world after passing the first stage of their battle to gain EU protected status for the age-old method of growing watercress in pure, mineral rich flowing water. Defra (Department for Farming & Rural Affairs) has been able to submit the application for TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) protected status to the EU Commission for consideration. If the watercress growers win EU backing, only plants grown in and harvested from flowing water will be allowed to be sold as watercress. Cress grown in soil will, by law, have to be called something other than watercress.

Nasturtium officinale and N. microphyllum are fast-growing, aquatic or semi-aquatic, perennial plants native to Europe and central Asia, and one of the oldest known leaf vegetables consumed by human beings. These plants are members of the Family Brassicaceae or cabbage family, botanically related to garden cress, mustard and radish, all of which have a peppery, tangy flavour. The name is derived from the Latin *nasus* nose + *tortus* twisted, from *torquere* to twist, distort. It is so called because the pungent smell causes one to wrinkle one's nose.

With more than 15 essential vitamins and minerals, the health giving properties of watercress have been known since ancient times. Around 400 BC on the Island of Kos, Hippocrates, the father of medicine, is said to have located his first hospital beside a stream so that he could grow a plentiful supply of watercress to help treat his patients. Gram for gram, it contains as much vitamin C as oranges, more calcium than whole milk, and more iron than spinach. It's also high in beta-carotene and Vitamin A. The peppery heat comes from the plant's mustard oils, which are released when chewed and act as a stimulant to the digestion and the taste buds. ➡





The first commercial cultivation recorded was in the 16th century at Erfurt in Germany. It was seen there by Cardon, an officer of Napoleon's army and he introduced it into France, where it was eaten at almost every meal and Napoleon himself was a huge enthusiast. The first British watercress farm was opened in 1808 by William Bradbury at Springhead in Northfleet, near Gravesend in Kent.

In its heyday the railway conveyed tons of the plant, which was packed into wicker 'flats' at the farm, up to Covent Garden Market. Street sellers would buy it and form it into bunches, which were eaten in the hand, like an ice cream cone, an early 'street food'. It was often eaten in sandwiches at breakfast time, though in poorer homes it was eaten on its own, which earned it the nickname 'poor man's bread'.

Henry Mayhew wrote, in 1861, in a series of articles entitled 'London Labour and the London Poor', "The first coster cry heard of a morning in the London streets is of 'Fresh wo-orter-creases'. Those that sell them have to be on their rounds in time for the mechanic's breakfast, or the day's gains are lost". Obviously 'The Watercress Queen' was an early riser.

Richard Rowe reported, in 1881, in *Life in the London Streets*, "In fine weather, in spite of the general squalor of the street-retailers, it is rather a pretty sight to see them flocking out of the great watercress market with their verdant basketfuls and armfuls, freshening their purchases under the sun-gilt water of the pump, splitting them up into bunches, and beautifying the same to the best of their ability to tempt purchasers. The fresh green, and even the litter of picked-off wilted leaves, pleasantly remind one of the country, in the midst of our dusty, dingy drab wilderness of brick and mortar; and there is something bird-like in the cress-sellers' cry as one after another raises it".

The watercress industry continued to thrive during both World Wars when the country had to rely on home grown produce and watercress sandwiches at "high tea" became almost a national institution. Watercress was a staple ingredient in school dinners and experiments conducted by the Ministry of Health in the 1930s concluded that watercress was excellent for promoting children's growth.

In the second half of the twentieth century with the demise of the railways and the advent of more exotic salad stuffs watercress became 'just a garnish', but in 2003 British watercress farmers joined forces to raise the profile of this great British ingredient. A promotional campaign was launched claiming it was, "Not Just a Bit on the Side", and pointing out its health giving properties. This has resulted in the industry enjoying a renaissance, with watercress once again being recognised as the original superfood.

There were two classes in the first ever World Watercress Soup Championships, with 47 entries in the 'Speciality' section and 20 in the 'Classic' section vying for two prizes of £500 and a 'golden' soup ladle trophy each. Watercress, pear and lemon drop chilli soup, watercress with a baby eel garnish, spiced watercress and coconut, and watercress and stout were just some of the way-out, wonderful and downright weird soup recipes entered into the Speciality section.

The keen contestants turned up at the Alresford Cook Academy on a dry but blustery Sunday morning in May clutching their flasks of soup. There were entrants from as far a field as the Lebanon, Spain and Portugal competing with local residents, chefs and catering establishments. It was a challenging

For more information and recipes go to [www.watercress.co.uk](http://www.watercress.co.uk)

event, but after a week of experimenting with different twists and turns on flavours and consistencies I think by the time the morning arrived many of us were sick of the sight of watercress soup. I suspect, by the end of the day that the judging panel, headed by Sophie Grigson, were also souped out!

No, I didn't come home with a trophy, however, here are the champion soup recipes for you to try, but I don't think I will be trying watercress soup again for a while.



Another hopeful contestant delivers his soup.



## Hampshire and Dorset Watercress Farmers Celebrate a Souper Weekend



© Louise Grace

Local residents scooped both prizes. School teacher Amanda Jones impressed the judges with her Classic Watercress Soup recipe. Judge Kate Hughes said the soup was chosen as a winner due to its 'Beautiful colour, lovely smooth consistency and great balance of flavours, particularly the watercress'. Amanda was thrilled to have won and said the recipe was passed down to her by her mother and tweaked by her boyfriend, who suggested she use shallots instead of onions.

### Classic Watercress Soup by 'Traditional' 2012 World Watercress Soup Champion Amanda Jones

#### Ingredients

2 shallots  
170g fresh watercress  
200g potato, diced  
25g butter  
50ml cream  
500ml chicken stock  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper and a pinch of grated nutmeg

#### Method

Sweat shallots and garlic in butter  
Add diced potato, stock and seasoning and simmer for five minutes  
Add watercress and cook for a further two minutes  
Puree the mixture. Add the cream and serve



Kinga Clements, was the winner in the Speciality Soup category with her Soupe Henri-Louis. Kinga, a keen foodie, named her soup for the generous glug of Pernod added to the recipe. Celebrity cook Sophie Grigson commented: 'We loved the Henri-Louis because of its beautifully judged balance of flavours, animated by a winning dash of Pernod.' Kinga said she would be definitely coming up with some other new watercress based recipes after her success in the competition and would be back next year to defend her title.

### Soupe Henri-Louis by 'Speciality' 2012 World Watercress Soup Champion Kinga Clements

#### Ingredients

2 cloves smoked garlic, finely chopped  
1 onion, finely chopped  
2 large handfuls grated, fresh pecorino cheese  
2 large bunches fresh watercress, chopped  
1 mug chicken stock  
1 small cup single cream  
Glug of Pernod  
1 generous handful fresh basil, chopped  
Ground black pepper

#### Method

Sauté chopped onion and garlic until soft  
Add chopped watercress and stir to get a good coating of onion and garlic. Continue to sauté for 5-10 minutes, frequently stirring  
Add basil and stir for a further two minutes. Add a generous glug of Pernod and simmer until the liquid has reduced by a third  
Add chicken stock and simmer for 10 minutes, gradually adding grated pecorino  
Add one small cup of single cream and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
Serve hot or cold



# A GIFT FROM THE SEA

by Jan Edwards

Harvesting the salt flowers. Photo by Oliver Brenneisen

Type 'gourmet salt' into Google and it will find you more than 42 million results. There's never been such a wide choice of the oldest and most used seasoning – even though we're constantly being advised to reduce our daily salt intake. One type is particularly prized for its artisanal production and purity, and has been referred to as the caviar of salts. Delicate in flavour and texture, it's a finishing salt, added by the chef or cook, or at the table.

The salt marshes of Guérande in the Loire-Atlantique, south of Brittany, are probably the best-known source of this *fleur de sel*, which has been harvested by hand from the waters of the Atlantic since the 9<sup>th</sup> century. *Flor de sal* (as it's known locally) is also harvested in Portugal and Spain. On the Spanish mainland, the major source is the Ebro Delta (Tarragona) – home to 970 hectares of salt pans. The Balearic Islands are also important Mediterranean sources: Ibiza was once better known for its salt than for the nightlife with which it's often associated today. The Romans, Phoenicians, and other ancient cultures harvested sea salt in the southernmost part of sister island Mallorca.

The growing gastronomic reputation of Mallorca owes something to an enterprising Swiss German woman, who moved to the island in 2002. The previous year, Katja Wöhr had been fascinated by the harvesting of *fleur de sel* during a visit to France. She came to Mallorca to be the first person to harvest and commercialize *flor de sal* from the salt marshes behind Es Trenc, the 3.5-kilometre-long white sand beach within an officially protected area that's home to some 180 species of birds. In 2003, after obtaining the necessary licence, Katja and a friend began to harvest *flor de sal* manually, using the traditional French rake known as a *lousse*. Initially, they bagged the crystals and sold them, alongside an honesty box, at the entrance to the salt marshes. Visitors to Es Trenc beach would buy the salt as a souvenir.

The early involvement of Marc Fosh – the first British chef in Spain to have his cuisine recognised with a Michelin star, and now owner of three acclaimed restaurants in Palma de Mallorca – was key to the product's early success.

"When Katja told me about her intention to produce *flor de sal* in Mallorca, I thought it was an inspired idea. I'd already been using my own home-made flavoured salts in my kitchen, and suggested producing flavoured *flor de sal* too," Marc explains. "We had several different tastings over the following weeks and finally decided on black olive, Mediterranean herbs, and hibiscus, as the first flavours." Others followed and, today, there are ten varieties; in addition, limited editions are produced each year, using local organic ingredients. "There are lots of flavoured salts from all over the world on the market these days," Mark continues, "but Katja was a real trailblazer and I was extremely happy to play a small part in the success of Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc."

The climatic conditions here are perfect for the creation of *flor de sal*. This part of the island receives only a third of Mallorca's average rainfall. Summers are long and harvesting can be done from May until October. The delicate salt crystals are formed when there's an optimal combination of sunshine, wind and low air humidity, allowing a fine layer of crystals to form on the surface of the pools – like a layer of intensely white ice.

Gathering the crystals with a *lousse* is an artisanal task, requiring sensitivity and patience, because only the upper layer contains all the beneficial minerals that make this product a healthier salt choice. Harvesting is done just before dusk, and the arrival of damper evening air which would destroy the crystals. Today, some 15 people are involved in the process. The *flor de sal* is put into baskets, made from natural materials, and dried under the sun the next day. Next stop is the workshop, where some is enriched with herbs or spices, and the product is packaged by hand. The plain variety has nothing added or removed, making it a 100 per cent natural product.

*Flor de sal* contains more than 80 minerals and trace elements. Compared to common sea salt, it has double the amount of potassium and calcium, and 16-20 times the quantity of magnesium – the first element to rise to the surface in the crystallization process. In 2010, Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc won 'Best New Health Food or Beverage Ingredient' at Gulfood Dubai – one of several major international gastronomy fairs where the product has been exhibited.

Magnesium is also a natural flavour enhancer and, as a result, only a small amount of *flor de sal* is needed – reducing the intake of sodium chloride. I have several varieties of Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc in my own kitchen and because it's only necessary to use it sparingly, a 150g pot can last for up to 12 months.

Today, Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc is also found in the kitchens of some of the best chefs, and sold in around 30 countries around the world – and stores including Harrods in London, KaDeWe (Berlin), Whole Foods (New York), and Dean & DeLuca (Dubai). In 2011, some 250,000 pots of the salt were sold. It's also sold online on the Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc website and at the company's three shops on Mallorca, including one at the salt marshes.

Gusto Mundial Balearides – the company started by Katja to produce Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc – is now owned by a young team of professionals of different nationalities, who are expanding their business activities. Katja is involved in other projects, but remains an ambassador for Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc, particularly in Germany and Switzerland. The company is still the only one harvesting *flor de sal* from the salt marshes of Es Trenc, where they have more than 200 salt pools and are planning more. New products are also being developed with the island's nutritionists and most creative chefs.

If you've never tried *flor de sal* or *fleur de sel*, it's worth reducing your intake of ordinary salt to make room for this gastronomic gift from the sea. ➡

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

Photos by Oliver Brenneisen - Harvesters off to work & the *lousse* - the rake used to harvest the Flor de Sal





# Marc Fosh shares his recipe for a dessert featuring Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc

## CHOCOLATE *CREMOSO* WITH FLOR DE SAL, MANGO-POLLEN SORBET & BASIL JELLY

Serves 4

### For the chocolate *cremoso* - Ingredients:

250 ml cream  
125 ml milk  
300g milk chocolate  
100g dark chocolate  
10 basil leaves  
60g sugar  
10 egg yolks  
1 tspn Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc

Whisk egg yolks and sugar in a bowl until light and fluffy. Bring cream, milk and basil leaves to the boil and remove from the heat. Pour the warm mixture over the egg yolks, return to the saucepan and cook over a gentle heat until the mixture starts to thicken. Remove from the heat. Break up or chop the chocolate and add to the warm cream. When the chocolate has dissolved, whisk well and pass through a fine sieve. Pour into a plastic container and leave in the fridge to set.

### Mango-Pollen Sorbet - Ingredients:

500g mango purée  
25g glucose  
1 tbsp white balsamic vinegar  
2 tbsp of pollen

Bring to the boil the mango purée, white balsamic and glucose. Remove from the heat and whisk in the pollen. Pass through a fine sieve and churn in a sorbet machine until smooth.

### Basil Jelly - Ingredients:

50g basil leaves, blanched  
150 ml water  
15g sugar  
3 gelatine leaves

Soften the gelatine in cold water. Bring the sugar and water to the boil. Squeeze gelatine dry and add to the sugar syrup. Remove from the heat and whisk until the gelatine has dissolved. Add the basil leaves and purée with a hand blender. Pass through a fine sieve; set in the fridge for at least 2 hours, then cut into small squares.

**To serve:** Using a hot spoon, place a spoonful of chocolate *cremoso* in the middle of 4 plates. Sprinkle with a little flor de sal. Place a couple of basil jelly squares around the chocolate with a few basil leaves and a sprinkling of pollen. Finish with a little fresh mango and a spoonful of Mango-Pollen sorbet.

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