

THE WINE MERCHANT.



An independent magazine for independent retailers

Issue 162, October 2026

Dog of the month: **Dita**
Kork Wine & Deli, Whitley Bay

Aussie wines were allowed to cook at sea – but why?

The Vinorium has unanswered questions after wines that needed to be refrigerated were destroyed by 45°C heat

An independent wine importer has called for greater clarity from freight companies after a £42,000 shipment was destroyed by heat damage en route to the UK.

The Vinorium, based in Kent, entrusted the Adelaide shipment to Kuehne+Nagel's specialist drinks logistics operation, VinLog. Owner Stuart McCloskey says additional thermal protection was requested, but the wine travelled in a standard rather than refrigerated container and spent around 10 days in Singapore, where outside temperatures reached about 35°C. Marine surveyors later estimated temperatures inside the container exceeded 45°C.

The wines were declared a total loss. K+N denied liability, arguing that a reefer container had not been specifically booked and calculating its contractual liability at £3,499. McCloskey argues that specialist wine logistics should include warnings where the proposed method of carriage creates a foreseeable risk.

A replacement shipment handled by another logistics company also travelled via Singapore without the specified thermal covers and was subsequently written off, taking total losses to around £84,200.

K+N declined to comment on the specifics due to client confidentiality.

• Full story: pages 22-25



Merch has become a useful sideline for many indies. The margins may not be great but hats, T-shirts and socks can all be a productive part of the marketing mix. Read about what goodies retailers like Wine Monkey in Chippenham have been creating, starting on page 46.

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David Knott: a brave loosehead prop in his time, but with a fear of pigeons

• **LIBERTY WINES** has added four Australian producers to its portfolio: Luke Lambert, Patrick Sullivan and A. Rodda from Victoria, and Tasmania's Decades. Lambert was previously represented by Indigo Wine, while Sullivan was with Les Caves de Pyrene. A. Rodda and Decades are both new to the UK market.

• **THORMAN HUNT** has taken on UK distribution of Hasher Family Wines, its first South African agency. The Upper Hemel-en-Aarde estate, owned by Frederik Herten and Céline Haspeslagh, focuses mainly on Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. The first six wines are due to arrive in the UK in late autumn.

• **HALLGARTEN & NOVUM WINES** has added Pfalz producer Weingut Müller-Catoir to its German portfolio. The Haardt estate, previously represented in the UK by Howard Ripley Wines, joins fellow German producers Dr Loosen and Villa Wolf, which have also signed with Hallgarten this year.

• **HALLGARTEN** has also taken over exclusive UK distribution of Tokaj producer Disznókő from Gonzalez Byass UK, which had represented the estate since 2016. The range includes dry Furmint, late-harvest and Szamorodni wines, as well as Tokaji Aszú 5 and 6 Puttonyos.

• **ALLIANCE WINE** has added Champagne Lenoble and Burgundy producer Maison Albert Bichot to its French portfolio.

ALL CHANGE

Recent agency activity



Lenoble was previously sold in the UK by Flint Wines, while Bichot was with Nectar Imports. The appointments come as Alliance reports a 30% year-on-year increase in fine wine sales. Lenoble is based in Damery, while Bichot's Burgundy holdings include estates in Chablis, the Côte de Nuits and Moulin-à-Vent.

• **HALLGARTEN & NOVUM WINES** has signed two Italian producers: Soave specialist Inama and Abruzzo winery Terre di Civita. Inama, which was introduced to the UK by Winetraders, works principally with Garganega on the volcanic soils of Monte Foscari, while Terre di Civita is a small family estate producing Pecorino and Montepulciano d'Abruzzo.

• **CHAMPAGNES & CHÂTEAUX** has been appointed UK agent for Hunter Valley producer Brokenwood Wines, previously represented by Bancroft Wines. It is the importer's first Australian agency. Brokenwood, founded in 1970, is best known for Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz and Hunter Valley Semillon, alongside its Cricket Pitch range.

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FLINT



Bodega opens at historic mill site

August saw the launch of Bodega in Stockport. Co-founders Tom Wilmot and Dan Watt have taken a unit in Weir Mill, the redevelopment of one of Stockport's historic industrial areas into a new residential and leisure neighbourhood.

Aside from its bar and retail operation, Bodega has a slightly different offering. "We have a wine-storage concept," explains general manager Adam Poppitt. "Our wine vault is built into the engine room of the original mill, and this holds 1,152 bottles.

"The idea is that people can subscribe to the wine-cellar experience, where we can hold either six, 12 or 18 of their bottles, which they can buy from us or provide from their own collection. Then they can book a table and consume that wine whenever they want, for a small corkage fee.

"Each bottle has its own QR code, so it's got its placement in the cellar, and every member has their own little portal or login section so they can track and pick their wines and replenish whenever they want to. We've only been open three weeks and we have six members already, some who have bought the wines from us or from Majestic."

The bar can seat 50 people inside and a further 12 outside. Poppitt says Bodega has around 50 wines available for retail, a range he hopes to increase.

"At the moment we are working with Alliance, but we are looking to other people in order to expand the retail offering," he says. "I worked at Cork of the North for a long time, so I have good contacts at Liberty, Boutinot, Raymond Reynolds and Thorman Hunt, and we definitely want to use more suppliers and expand the range."

Bodega is one of the first businesses to open in the new complex and expects to be joined by cafés and restaurants as well as an independent bookshop. More than 200 residential units are also due to be occupied.



Weir Mill is a residential and leisure development in Stockport

As the neighbourhood grows around them, Poppitt says he is already talking to potential

new tenants about collaborations and tasting events.

"I grew up in Manchester and for the first 25 to 30 years of my life, Stockport had a bit of a bad rep. It had a few amenities, but there wasn't much going on," he says.

"All of a sudden, the Underbank section, which is around the old market town, has just taken off completely. This scene is expanding and now this is here as well, which is great for the area.

"It was one of Andy Burnham's projects to get Stockport back on track while he was mayor of Greater Manchester, and I think this is the next step of that process. We're really looking forward to being a big part of it."



There are currently 50 wines in the retail range

Ugly, wonky labels but bargain wines

Matt Ellis closed The Smiling Grape in St Neots in 2025 and sold his beer website shortly afterwards, before heading off to Moldova with his wine-tour business, Tipple Tours. Now he's back with The Bargain Bottle Shop.

"The idea behind it is to buy perfectly good wines that have become commercially awkward," explains Ellis. This encompasses casualties of courier companies as well as discontinued lines and bankrupt stock.

"We'll be buying from a couple of specialist AWRS-registered wholesalers who deal in this type of clearance market. We even purchase damaged-label wines that arrive in black bags and just need a good clean after other bottles in the original wine-subscription cases have been broken. You'd be amazed how much wine ends up needing a new home simply because a courier has smashed a bottle or two in the case and ruined a label."

The business will rely solely on products bought through this channel, with no core range. "The whole idea is that the stock is constantly changing depending on what I can get my hands on," Ellis says.

"One week we might have a load of Californian Pinot Noir with wonky labels, the next it could be Italian fizz, random craft beer or something I didn't even know

I needed until somebody offered me 200 of them at a ridiculous price."

Customers can



Return of the Matt

expect significant savings. "They can save anything from a few pounds right up to 80% off the normal retail price on some of the more extreme bargains. Same wine, uglier label, much sillier price. Think of us now as the TK Maxx for booze."

The business has already launched online and Ellis says a physical shop in St Neots will follow.

"I'm treating the first few weeks as something of a soft launch while I build the range, sort the delivery areas and discover just how many bottles of booze can fit into a 100-square-foot storage unit," he adds.

Tipple Tours is still very much operational and, for now, Ellis will juggle the two businesses, putting retail on hold while he is away.

"As the business grows, the plan is to put the right people and systems in place so the online shop can continue running alongside the tours," he says.



Tony Resta: Angel delight

Store number three for Yield

Yield, the north London independent, is opening its third site.

The new premises, on Essex Road in Angel, will offer drinking in as well as take-home sales, with cheese and charcuterie also available.

Owner Tony Resta has been trading in north London for more than a decade. His first shop, Yield N16, opened in Newington Green in 2015 and was followed in 2021 by Yield N1 on St Paul's Road, Islington.



Bacchus

How low can you go?

We're delighted to see that Iris Fabre, one-time manager of the now-defunct Real Drinks indie in west London, has been running a Lowbrow Wine School at WSET headquarters. "This session is ideal for curious beginners, pop culture experts, or anyone who just loves a good meme," the blurb explains. Wines including Kylie Minogue Prosecco and Snoop Cali were paired with Perello olives, sausage rolls and crisps.



The thrill is gone

Hitchin indie The Wee Vinoteca has issued a public apology on its socials for the crime of making wine boring. "Some people like the thrill of a supermarket punt, the gamble on 'the one on offer', never quite knowing what you'll get," its statement says. But that service is not available in its own shop. "We're sorry. Every bottle is now vetted and matched to your taste, so the excitement of not knowing is gone. We take full responsibility."

Non-shoplifters of the world unite

Reading one-star Google reviews of wine shops remains something of a guilty pleasure, though in our experience they tend to expose deficiencies in the reasoning of customers more than shortcomings in the businesses they're complaining about. We wonder how many indies have had the pleasure of a visit by the self-styled "retired dentist and non-shoplifter" who entered a Yorkshire wine shop when it was technically closed, announced he would not be buying anything, moaned about the location and shelf layout and then boasted about how he scored free wine from hotels in response to complaints. Well done to the owner for patiently "listening to his many stories" before politely encouraging him, and his equally unpleasant friend, to leave.



THE INDEPENDENT ADVANTAGE

A monthly column from **Alliance Wine/H2Vin** exploring practical, creative ways independents can sell smarter – covering everything from fine-wine offers to pricing tweaks and experiential events

Picture the customer who comes in on December 23, harried, no idea where to start. What they leave with, and what they spend, was decided long before you said a word.

I know – it's barely autumn and I'm already on the C word. But a calm, lucrative Christmas season is built now, not in the scramble.

Most of the upselling happens on the shelf. Your whole range is the tool: whatever sits at the top of your range sets the frame for everything below. A £120 bottle anchor makes the £20 bottle an easy yes, and the £40 bottle feel sensible rather than a splurge. Build ladders within the producers your customers trust, so trading up feels like discovery, not a hard sell.

That's your edge over any supermarket: not the wine alone, but the journey around it – the reason they come back all year round.

That's the ground supermarkets can't touch. A story, a bottle put in a hand, the one their guests will ask about. And the Christmas table wine is rarely the whole sale; fizz to open, something sweet for pudding, a cheeky extra for the cheese.

You know all this. December is just when it pays best. That customer on the 23rd? They'll be back in January. Don't waste the year's highest-margin occasion on "goes well with turkey".

If you'd like to talk through your range, or how our Winter Offers can benefit you, please contact me at alex.baudouin@alliancewine.com.

Alex Baudouin
Head of Independent Off Trade



Friarwood debts of almost £1.9m

London indie Friarwood Fine Wines collapsed with debts of nearly £1.9m after being squeezed by rising costs, weaker consumer demand and tighter margins, according to administrator Antony Batty.

The merchant, which had branches in Parsons Green and Wimbledon and traces its origins to 1967, entered administration on July 3. Its problems had intensified since Covid: a combination of Brexit, inflation, the war in Ukraine, higher freight and packaging costs and EPR, according to Batty.

Friarwood cut its workforce from around 20 to 13, reducing overheads and stock levels and continuing to invest in its online platform. Director Ben Carfagnini spent more than a year seeking a buyer or investor, but no deal was concluded.

Majority shareholder JAC-KET Holdings, based in Canada, continued to provide financial support, but eventually declined to inject further funds.

Accounts for the 10 months to March 2026 showed turnover of £3.08m and a pre-tax loss of £320,234. This followed a £356,139 loss in the year to May 2025,

compared with a £12,124 profit in 2024.

The list of creditors contains relatively few trade names. Moët Hennessy UK is owed £2,397, Fine & Rare Wines £1,486, Bordeaux Index £1,044 and Maisons Marques & Domaines £694.

By far the largest creditor is JAC-KET Holdings, owed £1.3m. HMRC is owed around £194,600.

The administrators continued trading Friarwood for a short period after their appointment, generating around £269,000 in sales before the Parsons Green shop closed on August 3.

Remaining stock was transferred to the company's bonded warehouse, with administrators seeking buyers for the wine, intellectual property, website, customer lists and other assets. Unsecured creditors are expected to receive only around 0.41p in the pound.

• *Glasgow's **Sylvan La Cave** was granted an on-licence last month. Audrey Junner, the licensing lawyer representing the venue in Battlefield, said the premises had faced "many licensing challenges" since opening last December.*

Low-intervention wines in Brighton

La Cave Noire, a natural wine bottle shop and tasting room, will open in Brighton next year.

Reza Hojabr, who describes himself as a Brighton native, and partner Tio Mathews, who has extensive hospitality experience running venues across North America, plan to launch the business in May.

"We are just two people building a space dedicated to low-intervention, independent winemakers whose work we genuinely love," says Hojabr. "We want to create somewhere that feels tactile and grounded, focusing on small producers who are making incredible things away from the mainstream."



Ben Carfagnini in 2015

WIN A TRIP TO JEREZ!

All UK venues are invited to register and participate in **#SHERRYWEEK 2026** for a chance to win a VIP trip to Jerez, Spain, in the spring of 2027. Scan now to enter.



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COMING DOWN THE LINE

Hot topics that could impact independent wine merchants

By WSTA chief executive Miles Beale



It's not too late to contact your MP

We are staring down the barrel of another **Autumn Budget** on October 28. We have a new prime minister and chancellor, but sadly the UK's economic gloom remains. With government borrowing up, the chancellor will be looking for ways to raise revenue.

The WSTA has long argued that raising alcohol duty does not necessarily bring in more money for the Treasury, and is calling for a duty cut. Other asks include reinstating the mid-point tax rate for wine, establishing a single duty rate for drinks between 3.5% and 8.4% ABV, and increasing the National Insurance contributions threshold.

It's not too late to support these calls by writing to your MP. For help, contact samuel@wsta.co.uk.

Digital Proof of Age (DPOA) for alcohol sales became permissible on September 15. Its use is optional and physical ID remains valid. A visual check of digital ID alone is insufficient: proof must be checked through a certified Digital Verification Service listed on gov.uk.

The WSTA has also launched cyber-security guidance for wine and spirit businesses. Scan the QR code to read it. According to the National Cyber Security Centre, food and drink is a prime target for attacks including ransomware, phishing, malware and DDoS, with complex supply chains and busy periods such as Christmas creating particular vulnerabilities.



Finally, if you're in or around Manchester, join the **WSTA Get Together** at Fenix on October 8, from 6pm to 10pm. It's open to everyone in the wine and spirit trade, with discounts for SME members and free tickets for WSTA member buyers. Contact samantha@wsta.co.uk for tickets.

Find out more at wsta.co.uk



Final chapter for Novel Wines

Novel Wines entered creditors' voluntary liquidation on September 18.

Despite permanently closing its shop in Bath in early 2024, the business continued to trade online and serve wholesale customers.

Founder Ben Franks resigned as a director in July 2024. William Hill, who joined the board in January 2024, resigned in November 2025, leaving Mark Roberts as the sole director and majority shareholder.

• **August saw the opening of Sane** in Camden Passage, Islington. Launched by sommelier Maxime Maiano, the shop and bar specialises in sake as well as wine. It is close to the former location of Pacific Wines on Islington High Street, which closed earlier this year.

• **Chez Vin** in Otley, West Yorkshire, is up for sale. The business, owned by David Lawson, has a turnover of around £250,000, according to agent Alan J Picken. The business and freehold is being marketed for £200,000 plus stock at valuation. According to the sales particulars, Chez Vin has a thriving wholesale dimension to its business, and relationships with "many local restaurants and bars".



Simon Parkinson's business has now closed

Vin Santo's crypt is on the market

Vin Santo in Chester ceased trading in September. Simon Parkinson opened the hybrid store in 2020, at the height of the Covid era, in the Watergate Street site previously occupied by Corks Out.

The premises, a 13th-century vaulted cellar that has housed a wine merchant since 1863, is listed with an agent at £45,000 a year. Some of Vin Santo's former fixtures, display cabinets, bar equipment and refrigeration remain in place.

Parkinson entered retail in 2019 with Vinological, which started in Chester Market before relocating to Brook Street. It closed shortly after the launch of Vin Santo.

London independent **Lea & Sandeman** has appointed Catherine Jaën MW as head of buying, initially taking responsibility for Burgundy and working alongside Charles Lea, David Porter and Derek Robertson.

Jaën joins from Lay & Wheeler, where she spent six years as buying director. Her previous roles include positions at Goedhuis & Co and Robert Rolls & Co. She became a Master of Wine in 2017 and has been part of the Burgfest tasting group for nine years.

She also brings practical winemaking experience, having completed seven vintages in Burgundy, including a year working at Domaine Comte Armand in Pommard.



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Business rates review could save indies around £6,000



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Independents don't like it hot as weather dents sales



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Brighton indie's relocation scuppered for a second time



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The Wine Merchant
TOP 100

Pouilly-Fumé Le Troncsec

A single vineyard wine from the pretty commune of St. Laurent L'Abbaye, this elegant Pouilly-Fumé reveals delicate tropical notes and flavours of grapefruit and lime, with a hint of salinity on the complex finish.

EXCLUSIVE TO INDEPENDENTS

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Rising Stars

Harry Edwards
The Strong Water Company
Aberdeenshire

The Strong Water Company, owned by Guy and Mungo Finlayson, has two shops in Banchory and Ballater. The brothers welcomed Harry to the team in June and are delighted to support his continuing progress as he awaits the results of his WSET Level 3.

“Harry was one of the junior sommeliers at The Fife Arms, so he came to us with plenty of knowledge,” says Mungo. “There are lots of things you can teach that are easy to learn from a book, but it’s harder to be the kind of person who is willing to speak to everyone and is naturally approachable. That’s what Harry is.

“I think it’s very important in retail not to overload customers with information, which will just turn them off, and Harry is very good at identifying just the right amount of information and detail each customer requires.”

Cornish-born Harry earned his hospitality chops working at wedding venues and boutique spots such as the Talland Bay Hotel. “The general manager there started teaching about wine, which I thought was quite interesting,” he says. “When I got to the point of wanting to move away from home and travel a bit, I did my WSET Level 2 and really fell in love with wine.

“I’d always been attracted to Scotland. I’d never actually visited; I just moved up here, which is pretty wild, but it turned out well in the end.”

While appreciating all the opportunities that came with working as a junior sommelier – “it was really

good experience, tasting all these amazing wines and learning from some really cool people, though I never quite got to the 1970 Pétrus” – Harry spotted a Facebook advert for The Strong Water Co.

“I knew the guys and liked watching the shop grow in Ballater; I’d been to the Banchory one as well. I was really excited to work with them because I love what

they do, and I really wanted to see a different side of the wine industry. And I guess it’s nice to have my evenings back as well!

“It’s been really fun seeing a different kind of clientele and, because it’s retail, we have more regulars. With hotels, you don’t tend to see people again, so you don’t build as much of a connection as you do here. I’m also enjoying the style of service and the way they do things here.”

As an enthusiastic traveller, it seems inevitable that Harry’s future will involve working a harvest at some point.

“Every holiday, I try to see a different part of the world and learn about something – I’m quite an inquisitive person.

I’ve been to India and Japan, and this year I’m visiting Vietnam, Cambodia and China. I’ll probably do a big trip to South Africa next year, which will definitely include a lot of wine,” he says.

“Maybe in the very distant future I’d like to have my own business. My ultimate goal was to explore the supplier side of the business, but more recently I think I’d like to work abroad, do a harvest and see where that takes me. For now, though, I’m really happy where I am.”



Harry wins a bottle of
Champagne Devaux Cuvée D
courtesy of Liberty Wines



If you’d like to nominate a Rising Star, email claire@winermerchantmag.com



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Sandridge Barton Don't Feed the Ponies Sonny Under Flor 2022

People often wonder what would happen if you took some Devon-grown Pinot Blanc, Madeleine Angevine and Pinot Gris and left it in old oak barrels for a couple of years. It's this: autumn in liquid form, with pungent baked apples and hazelnuts coming to the fore under the yeasty flor. More English wine should be this weird.

RRP: £27 ABV: 10%

Sandridge Barton (01803 732203)

sandridgebarton.com



Dog Point Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2025

Many indies have followed Dog Point from the beginning and one merchant in particular was having difficulty containing his enthusiasm for this release at the Berkmann tasting. No gooseberries here: just wafts of smoke twirling around mangoes and grapefruits and a lip-smacking, saline finish.

RRP: £23.75 ABV: 12.5%

Berkmann Wine Cellars (020 7609 4711)

berkmann.co.uk



The Wharie Experience The Red 2023

Swiss-born Guillaume Lager's New Forest project is focused purely on low-intervention wines made from PiWi and hybrid varieties – hence this Cabernet Noir-Rondo blend. Savoury and light on its toes, it bears a passing resemblance to a slightly dusky Cab Franc. Gentle, easy-going and supremely likeable.

RRP: £15.50 ABV: 11%

The Wharie Experience (07517 492769)

wharie.co.uk



Familia Gil Vidilla Verdejo 2025

This organic Verdejo is made by Bodegas Shaya in Rueda, one of the 11 Spanish estates that make up the Gil family portfolio. Grown at 500 metres above sea level, there's a vibrancy and zest that complements the warm lushness of the fruit. It lives for the moment yet dances on the tongue long after the final sip: a happy wine at a happy price point.

RRP: £15 ABV: 13%

Bancroft Wines (020 7232 5450)

bancroftwines.com



Tenuta Sant'Antonio Scaia Paradiso Rosso 2020

A Veneto blend dominated by Corvina and Rondinella and made in the ripasso technique, which may account for the depth and power in a wine which, in the glass, has a wispy brick-red hue. There's a pleasant earthiness too, which will be welcomed by those who find ripasso wines a little too prune.

RRP: £23.99 ABV: 14%

C&C Wines (020 3261 0929)

carsoncarnevalewines.com



Léon Beyer Réserve Personnelle Alsace Pinot Gris 2024

Throw a dart at Yapp's French list and you'll always hit something remarkable – and this sumptuous Pinot Gris was as good as anything on show at the Independents' Day tasting. The Beyer family have been honing their craft since 1580 and have created a voluptuous and spicy iteration of the varietal with earthy intrigue.

RRP: £22.25 ABV: 13.5%

Yapp Brothers (01747 860423)

yapp.co.uk



Esporão Defesa White 2025

There's no doubt that consumers love zippy, uncomplicated Portuguese whites and Defesa now comes with eye-catching, capsule-free packaging that matches the wine in the bottle. An Alentejo blend of Antão Vaz, Arinto and Verdelho, it has just enough tropicality and exactly enough freshness to make it a hit with the Vinho Verde crowd.

RRP: £15-£16 ABV: 13%

Hatch Mansfield (01344 871800)

hatchmansfield.com



Hasher Family Wines Cyriel Cabernet Franc 2023

Thorman Hunt's new Hemel-en-Aarde agency, its first in the Cape, is worth checking out based on this showing. It's a soft and subtle style of Cab Franc, with tangy red fruit and natural acidity rather than crunchy greenness, and its year in old French barrels adds a faint sweetness to the mix. One to savour.

RRP: £38 ABV: 13.5%

Thorman Hunt (020 7735 6511)

thormanhunt.co.uk





82: A MEATY MATCH

Dave Elsey
Bouquet Wine Cellar, Derby

In a nutshell: A collaboration with the local butcher to recommend what styles of wine pair best with different cuts of meat.

Tell us more.

"We're in a little village and our local butcher, Barry Fitch, is just around the corner. What we sell complements each other, so why not have a collab? I was a butcher for 15 years before I started working at Bouquet, and this is a combination of wanting to support other local businesses, sparking conversations and encouraging people to try new things.

"Quite a few of us on the team were shopping at Barry's for evening meals and weekend roasts and we were pairing our wines with his meats, so I thought it'd be a really good idea if we could get him involved as well."

How does the collab work?

"About once a fortnight, we'll select a cut of meat from Barry's, pair it with a wine and share on our socials. Instead of promoting one single wine, we talk more generally about the wine in terms of style. For example, a recent cut we talked about was pork loin steak, so it was a case of 'we would match this with a dry white or an off-dry white because it cuts through the fat'. Then we can continue that conversation with the customer as they might tell us about the other ingredients they are using as well as their other preferences. So if they were making something spicy then we can talk about



*Rebecca Tomlinson of Bouquet
with Barry Fitch the butcher*

maybe a Pinot Gris, something to work with the heat.

"We've made a fast [Instagram] reel from Barry's front door to ours, so people know where we are. There's been a few times where people have come in not necessarily having bought the cut they were after, but they want some recommendations to go with what they have bought. Thanks to the cross-activity and the signage in Barry's, they know where we are and that we're happy to make suggestions based on their purchase."

Does it take long to create the content?

"Because we took the idea to them, I said I'd create all the social media content, and Barry's share it on their socials.

But it's easy to do – we don't provide a specific recipe, we just share an image of what we've made. It's about providing inspiration rather than being too prescriptive.

"It can be tricky to photograph food well, but for me it works by getting in close and maybe adding any nice-looking props, such as a chunky wooden chopping board."

Do you work with other local businesses?

"Quite a while ago we started doing Bacon and Bloody Mary Sundays. We get the bread from a local supplier and of course the bacon is from Barry's. We also do pop-ups at local events, so recently we did burgers and wings at the Little Eaton Carnival, so again we make sure that with anything we do that is food-related, we're utilising local people."

What's next?

"I'm always thinking about other things we can do, and maybe next we might go down a more individual route, with a different member of our team making the pairing each month and perhaps providing a recipe card as well.

"I know there are some things that people might not want to touch, like beef cheeks or ox tongue – things that might not be the first choice when you walk into a butcher's – but they really are superb cuts of meat that you can do lots of great stuff with and will go well with bold red wines. So that's something to think about."



Dave wins a WBC gift box containing some premium drinks and a box of chocolates.

Tell us about a bright idea that's worked for you and you too could win a prize.

Email claire@winermerchantmag.com

DAVID PERRY



Irregular Thoughts

Everybody loves good neighbours – especially if they're £8 a bottle cheaper



There are often interesting things to discover next door

We do one or two tastings every year for the Wessex Wine Society. They are a group of enthusiastic amateurs who meet monthly during autumn and winter. They pay for four bottles of each of eight different wines and generally place a composite order worth a few thousand pounds. We like them!

Having exhausted most themes, the last one we did was based around “668 – The neighbour of the beast!” Well, it should have been, but we called it “*Les Voisins*” – the neighbours.

Some of our bestsellers are just that: the lesser-known, and thus better-value, wines from next door.

It probably started on a visit to the

Loire a few years ago. On the way to Sancerre, our first stop was at a winery that produced Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé and Coteaux du Giennois. The winery was based in the Giennois, so I asked where the region was in relation to Sancerre. With a shrug, the proprietor waved his thumb at the road outside and said something like, “the other side”. It may have been miles away, but I like to tell the story as though it was just on the other side of the road. Everything has to stop somewhere, and everything has to start somewhere. I remember sitting on a beach in sunshine, watching it rain on the town inland.

Giennois is a long, thin strip of chalk running along a ridge; Sancerre is a hill of chalky clay; and Pouilly-Fumé is a hill of

flinty chalk. But all three use Sauvignon Blanc for their white wines, they are all on chalky soil and they are geographical neighbours. The difference? About £8 a bottle. Whenever anyone baulks at the price of Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé, I offer them the Coteaux du Giennois and tell them it’s “just across the road”.

On another occasion, while visiting Rhône producers Dauvergne et Ranvier (thank you, Daniel Lambert), we were offered a wine called *Les Voisins d’En Face* – the neighbour opposite. It’s a straight Syrah from the northern Rhône. The story behind this wine is that a five-star restaurant asked D&R to produce a wine it could use as its house red. It needed a few thousand bottles! D&R made the Syrah from a plot in, or rather just on the edge of, Saint-Joseph. They make more than the restaurant requires, so the rest ends up on the shelves of indies. It’s not Saint-Joseph, but it’s a pretty good looky-likey. We sell it at £15, almost £20 less than the Saint-Joseph we have.

Following that, we also have their Viognier, *Le Voisin du Dessous* – the neighbour below. Staying in the village many years ago, I remember vines growing on near-vertical cliffs descending to the road next to the Rhône. There is nothing below! This bothered me a little until it dawned on me that maybe these desperate vines, wrapped around poles and clinging to a cliff face above a fairly busy road, may well have been the neighbours below.

Condrieu would be one of my desert-island wines, but it is eye-wateringly expensive. We have one or two bottles left that were originally bought at a big discount. They are still nudging £40, though. The neighbour below is only £15. It is not the same, but it is a close enough “dupe” to be worth a go.

I guess it is like anything from handbags

Whenever anyone baulks at the price of Sancerre or Pouilly-Fumé, I offer them the Coteaux du Giennois and tell them it’s “just across the road”

to hi-fi: the closer you get to the top, the higher the price for the smallest improvement. The quality/price curve is steep at the start but flattens out as it asymptotes towards 100%. A small change at the top may double the price. A big change at the bottom is a few quid more. The jump in quality between a £15 and a £50 wine can be smaller than the jump between an £8 and a £15 bottle. Anyway, the two Viogniers sit next to each other, and I have persuaded a few people to buy both and let me know. The Condrieu always gets top marks but, as it's not an everyday wine, the neighbour gets the repeat purchases.

For the Wessex Wine Society tasting, we had to add a few more "next-door" wines. The obvious one was a Crémant de Bourgogne. Here we go: just like Champagne, and right next door. Well, not exactly. It is from Mâcon, so more than 300 kilometres from Reims, but who's counting?

Probably my favourite swap-out is Alfeno, from the Montecucco DOC, a tiny Tuscan appellation opposite the slopes of Brunello (*grazie*, Dario at Vineyards Direct). Again, it isn't Brunello, but it doesn't have the price tag either. It's about £20, which is not at all bad for a very classy Sangiovese with a pricey neighbour. You get bragging rights for discovering a DOC most people won't have heard of, which is probably more impressive than showing up with a £100 Brunello. It was the bestseller from the Wessex tasting.

Their second favourite was Mâcon-Solotr  -Pouilly from Domaine S  v   (Davy & Co). The Pouilly-Fuiss   Terroir is on the shelf at £27, but the MS-P is only £19. The descriptions on the almost identical back labels tell us that the richness of the clay-limestone soil gives the PF roundness and minerality, and the MS-P notes of fresh fruit. Same grape, same soil, same area, same family – mind you, the PF includes eight quid's worth of French oak.

Everybody loves good neighbours and, with savings like those, good neighbours become good friends!

David Perry is the owner of Shaftesbury Wines in Dorset

THE BURNING QUESTION

What are the biggest health hazards for wine merchants?



"I learnt years ago that you only want to drop a pallet on your foot once. My team know I'm ready for business if I come to work in my steel-toe-cap shoes, which I order specially from Italy. Shouting 'lift with your back!' across the storeroom can result in some funny looks and hand signals. And, obviously, there are the paper and cardboard cuts from hell. Apart from the obvious hazard of drinking too much, injuries and health problems are definitely manageable."

Simon Evans * Champagne winner *
The Naked Grape, Hampshire and Berkshire

"I'll share the regimen my dentist recommended for looking after my teeth after tastings. All that acid softens the enamel, so brushing immediately afterwards can remove thin layers of it. Rinse thoroughly with water and then with mouthwash, and try not to eat or drink anything else for about 30 minutes. My worst wine injury was when I foolishly tried to slow down a pallet on the tailgate of a truck and the driver dropped it right on top of my hand. I still have a middle finger that goes in three different directions as a result."



Archie McDiarmid
Luvians, St Andrews



"I pulled something in my back unloading a van about five years ago. I now spend £50 every two weeks trying to control it. And that's possibly not as painful as a cardboard cut from breaking down boxes. How does something so minor cause such pain? A seasonal hazard is tennis elbow from constantly wrapping bottles in December. An all-year-round source of stress is trying to explain tactfully that alcohol and dehydration, rather than sulphites, are probably what cause your hangover."

Andrew Kinnersley
The Grape & The Good, Wells

"I have a lady I see regularly for my coat-hanger shoulder. It's not a very glamorous name, but there is a thing called coat-hanger pain, and it comes from carrying heavy things in front of you too much. It's a really tight feeling across the back of your neck and shoulders. It costs me about £50 a month, but I think that's money well spent. We're supposed to look after ourselves, and we should invest in our wellbeing."

Sarah Hatton, Mitchells Wine, Sheffield



CHAMPAGNE GOSSET
THE OLDEST WINE HOUSE IN
CHAMPAGNE:   Y 1584





Edward Speakman (left) and Morgan Ward

First name terms

Morgan Ward and Edward Speakman went into business using a name that suggests approachability and informality – and the friendships they've formed in their Knutsford community bear this out.

Nigel Huddleston heads to Cheshire to say hello

Wine's inherent versatility and sociability have made it the anchor for an increasingly wide range of events. Things have moved on from the basics – food in general, or cheese more specifically – to include tastings that pair wine in more abstract ways: colours, music, literature and the like.

Cheshire's Morgan Edwards may have trumped the lot recently with a tasting that matched various wines with the residents of a local bird of prey centre.

"It was an interesting one," says co-owner Morgan Ward. "The owner comes in here for drinks every now and then and wanted to get more local people involved, rather than just bird enthusiasts who travelled from here, there and everywhere."

"It was very much the American bald eagle paired with a big Napa Cabernet, that sort of idea. Our customers who went loved it and most of them have been back there."

Leftfield tastings are just one side of the personality of the business that Morgan co-founded with old university friend Edward Speakman, eight years ago in Knutsford.

Morgan came from a high-flying job in the City, while Edward had been working in wine for well-known auction houses. As a result, top-end fine wine – including private client business and valuations – has become a core plank of the business.

"I love the bar side of things, the events and the social side," says Morgan, "and Ed

leads the fine wine side. We complement each other really well."

Having started out in the local indoor market hall, the business moved to its current location in 2022: a historic, compact and atmospheric building in the centre of the town, with the shop at street level, a tasting room/bar on the first floor and a garden terrace to the rear.

"We grew organically from day one, really," says Morgan. "We had a bit of a cult following but lockdown and doing same-day deliveries put us on a wider map and eventually paid for us to get these bigger premises."

"We're always trying to keep relevant locally and maintain the momentum, whether that means a tasting at a local bird of prey centre, or for U3A, or a charity event with the Rotary club. There's always something going on to get involved with."

How did you get started?

We were both at similar stages in our careers and wanted to start our own business, and we were always interested in wine from our university days. A friend of

We went to the Languedoc and came back looking for a premises with a van load of wine

ours who worked in the wine trade said, if you're serious, go to France, look at some vineyards, see what you think and put a business plan together.

We went to the Languedoc and came back looking for a premises with a van load of wine. At that point, we didn't know what that would look like: it could have been wholesale or it could have been retail. We quickly realised there wasn't really a decent wine shop locally and that Knutsford was the place we wanted to be.

Why was that?

I was in Sale and Ed was nearer Chester, so Knutsford was very much the middle town and we'd always meet up here. Ed was working in an auction house here as well. We knew the town well and both had family here.

It maybe gives the impression to the outside world of being a bit bigger than it actually is, perhaps because it's got a motorway services named after it?

It's small to medium-sized I'd say. There are quite a few housing estates further out from the centre but it's very much a destination town. It's peaceful and quite affluent. Tatton Park's on our doorstep, a big National Trust property, so we get quite a few tourists at the weekend, but it's certainly one of those towns where people know each other. There are lots of community groups and there was a lot

► of “shop local” going on during lockdown, which seems to have carried on, and we’ve benefited from that.

It is in this affluent area of Cheshire and people sometimes think that means the streets are paved with gold, but you really need to build up the trust of the community and be part of it. We really like it here.

How does the balance of shop and bar work?

We are predominantly a shop, but we open later on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, until 10 o’clock, and we’re normally fully booked. The bar is really important to us, as it gives us a chance to show off our wines, but we are mainly shop-focused. We do a lot of deliveries locally.

We don’t tend to focus on wholesale. We used to do a lot more when we started and we were importing a lot more ourselves, but we soon realised that the retail side was the way we wanted to go. We do a lot of private client stuff, sourcing certain vintages of Sassicaia or whatever it might be in fine wine.

Unusually, you gave your first names to the business rather than your surnames. How come?

We just thought it sounded better. Also, Edward had a great-grandfather who was called Morgan Edwards, so it just fitted



The current store opened in 2022

The bar is really important to us, as it gives us a chance to show off our wines, but we are mainly shop-focused

nicely historically. We didn’t want to call ourselves Knutsford Wine Shop because then it’s harder to expand. We wanted a more generic, traditional-sounding name, and to back ourselves by putting our names in there, hopefully building up an element of trust.

How did the upgrade to the new premises come about?

There was a hairdresser here and a very good friend of ours knew that they were looking to leave and we were looking for our next stage, so it was all very easy and fortunate for both of us. A lot of customers say they used to have their hair done here. It’s been a commercial property for hundreds of years. It’s just a lovely building and feels really homely. When we first walked in, we just knew it was the right setting for us. We’re very traditional in the wines we stock and to be in an older building suits our MO.

We knew we wanted a split space, with either two larger rooms [at street level] or, as we have here, an upstairs and downstairs. There are so many wine shops and bottle shops that aren’t a shop any more as soon as they’ve got a drinker in there. Who wants to reach over a table to shop when someone’s sat there having a drink?

It’s got a Dickensian, *Pickwick Papers* sort of look.

It does. It’s 1580s, the second-oldest building in the town centre, and that gives us this really quirky space with crooked walls and beams and things. It’s beautiful in the winter, with the candles lit, just a lovely setting for a quiet drink.

We knew we wanted it to be traditional

and we agreed on most of the colours ourselves but we’d never have thought of painting the staircase yellow. There’s a wonderful interiors shop locally, called Arthur Lee, who advised us, and they said the yellow would fit with the other colours and the furniture we had – and actually it sort of somehow does. We did all the work ourselves, except for the joinery and the carpet fitting, all the serious jobs. We did all the painting and sourcing [of furniture].

Is the building listed?

It is, Grade II, but that hasn’t caused us many problems. It has weirdly been extended at the back, which may have been before it was listed. The shell of the building was fine, so we haven’t structurally needed to do anything and the space naturally suits and breaks up what we do.

The only issue is a really small kitchen, which limits us on food, but we don’t really want to go down the restaurant route anyway because of all the costs associated with that. We do cheeseboards, olives, crisps, premium snacks, and we’re really busy with what we do. There are a lot of really good restaurants, so what we do complements them rather than clashing.

Looking at the shelves behind you there are empties of things like Tignanello and Pétrus, which makes it look a lot



Covid’s “shop local” spirit has endured

like you're rooted in the fine wine world.

Most of those have been drunk in here, but unfortunately not by us. But one or two have! It's important to try these things to be able to sell them. We're quite fortunate that we're in a fairly affluent town and there are people who really appreciate and know about wine. A lot of our customers are here to buy a gift or for a nice experience, but there is quite a large proportion who are involved in wine circles or tasting groups, who have travelled to wine regions.

The other side of that is we're fortunate to be in the triangle of Knutsford, Alderley Edge and Wilmslow where a lot of footballers live, from Manchester United, City, Liverpool, Everton. We've got a lot of stock from Napa because Napa, Bordeaux, Rioja, those bigger reds, seem to be what they're after. We'll introduce them to different wines and they'll tell us about things they've tried when they've been on holiday in LA or wherever. So, there's a real fun element there as well, in that you're never quite sure who's going to walk in.

Do you operate at a more everyday level too?

I think £8.99 is probably our cheapest bottle at the minute. For a long time, especially when we were in the market hall, our range was probably about £7 through to £25-£30, with a few fine wines above that. That's now flipped: we're mostly £20 up to £50 or £60 and then a range below that as well. But we try to cover most bases. What's very important, from £10 a bottle all the way through, is getting to know what customers like, and most of them are regular long-term customers.

Having started with the van load from the Languedoc, is that region still one you focus on?

It will always be a bit sentimental for us and we still do see the huge benefit in Languedoc wines – there's such good value from there – but it's less important now. We're now doing more valuation work or



The vertical of Tignanello is a focal point of the shop

finding fine wines through private sellers or different merchants. Our buying method has changed with what we sell.

Your website features your valuation service quite prominently.

With Ed's history of valuation work, we started out with a lot of access to private clients, and that's grown since we've been more active in that space. A lot of the valuation business comes through solicitors for probate and divorce matters, or just through people moving house and looking to move their wine on, or our own customers who have their own wine cellars. It sometimes gives us access to fine wines that might not be on the open market.

It might be advising them about particular auction houses, but quite often it is just giving a valuation where they're not yet ready to sell. It's a lot of time and travel to go all over the place to value cellars, and sometimes the money doesn't match the time taken and expense. Having said that, the benefit is having access to the wines and it's such a fun side of the business. We've seen some amazing things, some really rare wines just hidden away in the back of someone's fairly normal garage – and you just hope it's been stored correctly.

Is authentication an issue?

With Ed's history in the auction houses, he's very good at that, just from experience. We have so far been lucky and, touch

► wood, not had any issues, but we do a lot of due diligence as part of that whole process.

That side of things must pit you against some pretty big longstanding players, the likes of Berry Bros.

It means you have to be very conscious of pricing and market moves. The fine wine market can move very quickly and catch you out, and you can look expensive or get left behind. It's really about keeping on top of market data as much as margins and the like. It's a bit more fluid.

Is ecommerce significant in all this?

We do ecommerce but the website isn't

our strong point. We built it when we first started and were quite diligent about adding new products, but we've become less so as we've become busier, so we're actually in talks at the minute to upgrade the site and move to a different platform, and really get on top of it.

That's our next focus for expansion. We're really happy with the building we're in; we could always do with more space and the bar's always full, so we could do with more tables, but actually we see the website is what fails us at the minute. We've got such rare wines that when you do put them online they sell quite quickly, mostly to London but a lot to round here as well.

With all the fine wine activity going on, where do the usual UK importers fit in?

We work with most of the big boys. At any time, there are probably wines from 20--5 suppliers on our shelves, without counting the stock from private cellars. It's an ever-changing range but after eight years we've got to the level where we're happy with most of our stock. Half the stock is from agencies and more generic and the other half is something we might only have a case or half a case of. With Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rioja and Rhône, we like to have wines that are ready to drink, rather than last year's vintage, which you don't necessarily get through a lot of the more mainstream suppliers, so that tends to come through our fine wine work.

Any favourites among those more regular suppliers?

Service-wise, we've always found Cachet and House of Townend to be really good. Cachet are very easy to work with and offer a lot of helpful advice, and keen to get involved in tastings. But to be honest, most of our suppliers are keen to get involved in tastings and really help out. It's a good industry for that. We do quite a lot with Berkmann, Boutinot, Liberty ... Top Selection have been very good for us, as a slightly smaller supplier. We deal with Jeroboams as well, who are really good to work with.

Tell us about your wine club.

We do two price points, £75 or £100, either every month, every other month or every quarter, and it's either red, white or mixed. We set it up about four or five years ago and we probably have about 60 subscriptions locally. We were looking at the bigger companies, like Laithwaites and Naked Wines at the time, and it seemed people were bored of just getting the same things in their boxes every month. We set out to be more educational with it, so we include a producer profile, a region profile, tasting notes and what to pair it with on an A5 piece of paper for each wine. The tricky side is to find new and interesting wines at those price points after five years of doing



The garden area is a useful space for events

it but we still manage to do it. We've only put the price up once in that time but I think we'll probably have to do it again this year.

You said earlier that you'd moved away from wholesale. Why is that?

We really enjoyed it but you're working on much smaller margins and dealing with a lot of other small businesses. If one or two of those go bump you're left with quite a sizeable bill. We weren't using a bond and we would if we were to do it again now. We were paying the tax up front and going on the road to sell it locally, a sort of wine-of-the-week-in-the-pubs model, and once you're in, you might get a few more wines on the menu. It soon became apparent that the shop side of it was a more friendly model, less cut-throat and more social. Never say never, though. We do still keep thinking about the future and it might be the way forward if we had more staff to give us the time to find more wineries and go to tastings.

What about expansion of the retail side?

It would be lovely to have 10 shops that are all successful, but there's also a headache that comes with that. The two of us are very much part of the business. Most of our customers are regulars and we know what they like. It's actually really good fun and we've made some great friends over the years, many of whom were at Ed's wedding recently. It's very much a community business. If we had two or three shops we couldn't be in them all at the same time.

Tell us more about the events you're involved in.

We do our own Grand Wine Fair once a year. It's essentially a trade fair for the public. We do it in a local church and have about 300 wines open for 300 people. It always raises some good orders on the night. All our suppliers support it and we build on it every year.

We've done a few classic car events, where we're just there as a bar or a shop front, but also lots of corporate or private events. There are quite a few prestigious



*Most of our customers
are regulars and we
know what they like.
We've made some
great friends*

car dealerships nearby who we've worked with. We did one with Aiden Byrne, the celebrity chef who owns Li-ly down the road. He did the canapés and we did the

wine, and the Collect art gallery brought a Banksy along. We do get very interesting events coming our way. It's very hard to say no because it helps with PR and keeps the momentum going. But it goes from that to charity events where you've got a gazebo in a field on a Sunday afternoon. We do all sorts of things.

Do you have your own events in the shop?

We do our own at least once a fortnight, either upstairs or in the garden. We'll pick a region and dive into it and that can include fine wine nights or generic nights, such as the wines of Greece, or really specialist ones around something like Loire Valley Sauvignon. This evening we have the local ghost-hunter tour coming in at 6 o'clock. They get all their gadgets and gizmos out to see what they can find, but we've never had anything.

Will there be a return visit to the birds of prey centre?

They've got other events coming up soon that we're going to be involved with. There's a vulture festival coming up. There are many fun sides to this job. You never know what's going to happen.



The building is Grade II listed

SUN, SEA AND SPOILED WINE

Stuart McCloskey believes he was entitled to think that the wine he was shipping from Australia would be adequately protected from heat damage. But when a £42,000 consignment was destroyed, he was told that his cargo had not been refrigerated as he had thought – and his carrier calculated its liability at just £3,499.

By Graham Holter

There are plenty of things that can go wrong between an Australian cellar door and a UK warehouse. For Stuart McCloskey, owner of Kent-based Australian specialist The Vinorium, one shipment has provided a particularly brutal lesson in what can happen when fine wine, extreme heat and the small print of international freight collide.

The shipment left Adelaide in September 2025. It contained valuable wines from one of The Vinorium's most important producers and was entrusted to Kuehne+Nagel's specialist drinks logistics operation, VinLog.

What happened next, McCloskey says, resulted in the entire shipment being written off through heat damage.

The central issue is temperature control. Kuehne+Nagel's own VinLog blurb says that beverages can travel in standard or refrigerated ("reefer") containers; additional services including thermoliners and insulation kits are also available. The website seems pretty unequivocal: "Your temperature-sensitive wines, spirits and drinks ship in reefer containers that ensure they always arrive with full flavour," it says.

McCloskey's shipment did not. The Vinorium had specifically requested additional thermal protection, as it routinely does for Australian shipments. "We understand the particular

vulnerability of fine wine to prolonged heat exposure," McCloskey says. "It is precisely why specialist wine logistics services exist."

But, according to McCloskey, the wine was loaded into a standard container rather than a refrigerated reefer and routed via Singapore.

There it spent around 10 days, he says, with outside temperatures of around 35°C. Marine surveyors later estimated that temperatures inside the container itself exceeded 45°C.

By the time the wine reached the UK there were serious concerns about its condition. Subsequent investigation concluded that it had suffered heat damage and the £42,000 shipment was declared a total loss.

One question remains particularly important to McCloskey. He says neither The Vinorium nor its insurer has been given evidence demonstrating that the thermal protection they had requested was actually fitted.

"Why did K+N accept the shipment without warning us that the protection arranged was inadequate?"

Kuehne+Nagel, according to McCloskey's account of the dispute, denies liability.

Its position was that The Vinorium had selected passive rather than active temperature protection, thereby accepting the foreseeable risk of heat damage, and that passive protection would not have been adequate for the conditions encountered. A reefer, it argued, should have been specifically booked.

McCloskey disputes that version of events. "For the avoidance of doubt, we did not book 'passive protection,'" he insists.

It is Kuehne+Nagel's use of the word "foreseeable" that particularly troubles him.

"If K+N considered heat damage a foreseeable consequence of transporting these wines without active temperature control, why did its specialist wine logistics operation accept the shipment without warning us that the protection arranged was inadequate?" he asks.

Indeed, information supplied during the recovery process suggested that an operator involved in loading had also expected a reefer – but did not query the arrival of a standard container.

For McCloskey, that goes to the heart of what an importer is buying when it pays for specialist wine logistics.

"K+N knew the





*A container ship loads in Vietnam
(unconnected to The Vinorium's case)*

► cargo. It knew the route,” he says. “Specialist expertise was precisely what we were paying for.”

K+N’s position creates what McCloskey regards as a fundamental contradiction. “They cannot have it both ways,” he says. “If a reefer has to be specifically requested, their published description should make that clear. It doesn’t. In my view, that makes the description fundamentally misleading to wine merchants. It tells us that our temperature-sensitive wines ship in reefers when, according to K+N’s own defence, that is not necessarily the case. Ours certainly did not.”

The dispute then became increasingly legal.

Kuehne+Nagel relied, McCloskey says, on a clause in its Sea Waybill terms dealing with goods considered unsuitable for carriage in the container used. But he questioned whether that provision applied to his shipment because The Vinorium had not packed or consolidated the container: it was a Kuehne+Nagel groupage operation.

He also began looking at the wider law governing carriage by sea, including the Hague-Visby Rules [the international code governing carriers’ responsibilities for goods carried by sea] and several Supreme Court judgments.

McCloskey has no pretensions to be a shipping lawyer and does not claim the cases he studied prove The Vinorium would have succeeded in court. But he became convinced that Kuehne+Nagel’s contractual defence deserved to be tested.

One case was *Volcafe Ltd v Compania Sud Americana de Vapores*, a 2018 Supreme Court dispute involving coffee damaged by condensation. The court considered the carrier’s duty to take proper care of cargo and rejected the idea that the natural vulnerability of the goods necessarily provided a complete defence where reasonable precautions could have been taken.

“That had an obvious resonance,” McCloskey says. “If the specialist carrier

knew the nature of the cargo and considered the risk foreseeable, what reasonable steps did it take to protect it from that known risk?”

He also examined *The Starsin*, a House of Lords case concerning damaged timber and plywood, and the restrictions placed by the Hague Rules on contractual clauses that seek to exclude liability. More recently, he looked at the Supreme Court’s 2024 *FIMBank* judgement, which dealt with the Hague-Visby regime and its strict limitation periods.

None provides a ready-made judgement

“K+N knew the cargo. It knew the route. Specialist expertise was precisely what we were paying for”

on *The Vinorium*’s case. McCloskey’s argument is simply that the legal position is more complicated than pointing to a contractual liability limit which Kuehne+Nagel calculated at £3,499.

McCloskey wanted his argument tested in court, but it never was.

The *Vinorium*’s insurer, Zurich, had already paid the claim. In September 2026, McCloskey says, Zurich decided not to pursue recovery proceedings, taking into account litigation costs, Kuehne+Nagel’s asserted liability limit and the approaching deadline for commencing proceedings.

“I understand that decision,” McCloskey says. “But an economic decision not to litigate should not be confused with a court deciding that K+N was right.”

He even offered to pursue Kuehne+Nagel himself, with any recovery relating to the insured loss going back to Zurich. Zurich



Both The Vinorium’s shipments from Adelaide were routed via Singapore

Were owners of other wines told that one consignment sharing their journey had been declared a total loss?

declined and, having indemnified The Vinorium, asked the company not to pursue matters further under its own name.

McCloskey says he will respect that request – and remains grateful that the insurer paid the claim.

Indeed, one of his clearest messages to other merchants is about insurance.

“Carrier liability and cargo insurance are not the same thing,” he explains. “A freight company may be entrusted with wine worth tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds while its eventual liability may bear little resemblance to the commercial loss.”

There is another unresolved issue with potentially wider implications for the trade.

The Vinorium’s wines were travelling as groupage, sharing a multi-shipper container with other cargo. McCloskey does not know what other wines were in it, whether their owners were informed about what happened to his shipment or whether those wines were examined for heat damage.

He is careful not to claim that other wines were affected in the same way as his. “I do not know the answers to those questions, and I will not speculate,” he says.

But he believes they are legitimate questions. How much other wine was travelling in the same container? Were the owners told that one consignment sharing their journey had been declared a total loss through heat damage? Were any other wines inspected or tested?

McCloskey says his experience fundamentally changes the questions importers need to ask before their wines

leave the winery.

“Specify how your wine is to be transported,” he says. “Put temperature requirements and protective measures in writing. Understand the contractual liability limits. Keep the documentation. And insure the cargo for the financial loss your business would genuinely suffer if every bottle disappeared tomorrow.”

Unfortunately, The Vinorium’s problems did not stop there.

A replacement shipment was subsequently entrusted to a different logistics provider, with a direct Adelaide-to-UK sailing requested and thermal covers specified for every pallet.

That shipment, too, went via Singapore. McCloskey says the covers were not fitted. It was also declared a total loss. So after booking two shipments with two logistics companies, McCloskey was staring at losses of around £84,200.

It raises questions about the level of expertise wine importers like The Vinorium should be entitled to expect.

“If a company sells specialist wine logistics, specialist knowledge must mean something,” he says. “It should mean understanding the vulnerability of the product, recognising the risks presented by the route and proposed method of carriage, and warning the customer when those two things do not safely align.”

It brings him back to the word that has bothered him throughout the dispute.

“If the danger was ‘foreseeable’, the opportunity to address it was before the container left Adelaide,” he says. “Not after the wine had been destroyed.” ■



Standish Wine Co stands by its UK partner

Both of The Vinorium’s shipments contained 2023 wines from The Standish Wine Company in the Barossa Valley.

“These are tiny-production, premium Barossa wines which many of our customers buy every vintage, with some building vertical collections over many years,” McCloskey says. “Much of the allocation had already been sold to customers before arrival.

“That made the first loss particularly painful. Dan and Nicole Standish subsequently went to extraordinary lengths to help us replace the wines, including releasing stock from their own museum reserves which had deliberately been held back for future release. Those replacement wines then suffered a second catastrophic heat-damage event with an entirely different logistics provider.

“So although there is obviously a substantial financial value attached to both shipments, the greater difficulty was that these weren’t wines we could simply reorder from a wholesaler. Once those small allocations and museum stocks were gone, they were gone.”

The Wine Merchant invited Kuehne+Nagel to comment on the case. We received this reply from Paolo Montrone, global head of sea logistics for VinLog:

“Kuehne+Nagel is committed to working closely with customers to support the safe and efficient transportation of their goods. When concerns arise, we believe they are best addressed directly with the customer through the appropriate channels. Respecting customer confidentiality and maintaining constructive dialogue with our customers are important principles for our business. We understand that situations involving product damage can be disappointing and frustrating for any business. However, we are bound by confidentiality protocols and are not at liberty to disclose details regarding individual customer shipments, processes and parties’ liabilities externally.”

ROB HOULT



Another Thing

What are we doing about the cost-of-living crisis? Certainly not cutting prices



Unwelcome scenes in the Hoults car park

We have been nominated to appear in a list of the “best” independent wine businesses in the UK. I won’t say much more about it, as it’s with a rival title and I’ve spent the last decade reading the list and every now and then shouting “as if” at high volume.

Our lack of inclusion in this list beforehand hasn’t bothered me one bit, obviously.

I’m a touch uneasy about any of the awards and accolades we could end up being in with a chance of, as they require a level of self-promotion that doesn’t come naturally to me. I don’t really think it’s my place to tell my peers that I am really very

good – pride cometh before a fall and all that.

Having said that, I did decide to fill in the “please like me” form. Lots of the usual types of question. I tried to answer them in the way I would, rather than the way I might think someone would like me to. There was one question that I did find a little odd, though:

“How are you shaping your portfolio/offer to deal with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and inflationary pressures?”

Now, this might not seem so strange a question. The cost-of-living crisis is used to define so many current issues, but I struggled with it in relation to what we do

for a living.

I’m not making light of the current financial strains that many people are dealing with. We are in Huddersfield, a once prosperous woollen town that is now trying to become a commuter town for Leeds and Manchester. The Transpennine Route Upgrade now appears to be its largest employer, if all the folk in orange high-vis are anything to go by. And I’m not suggesting that our clientele aren’t “that” type of person either: we’ve got every type of customer, from students on a budget to the ones who have their butler place the order.

No, what I’m struggling with is where the price of our wine fits in when it comes to the cost of living as a crisis. I don’t think that me offering Châteauneuf-du-Pape at £9 a bottle is the answer to era-defining socio-economic issues. I think if you have to choose between turning the central heating on in winter and a bottle of Rioja Reserva, then maybe the problem is more than merely financial, and to that extent we’d only become part of the problem rather than the solution. Alcohol can be addictive and we seem to be constantly on shaky ground from a health perspective. I don’t think we want to rock that particular boat by encouraging those in financial hardship to think that the answer is Chateau Musar.

I recently read a post on Instagram from a high-end bakery and delicatessen complaining about the constant financial pressures put on them by successive governments and urging Mr Burnham to do something about it. Again, I don’t disagree that times are tough for many businesses, particularly those with high staffing costs. But one of the comments they made was about having to absorb cost increases to help their customers with the cost-of-living crisis. Really? We’re not on about a simple sliced white loaf; we’re talking artisan

I don’t think that me offering Châteauneuf-du-Pape at £9 is the answer to era-defining socio-economic issues

(their word, not mine) sourdough loaves, and they definitely don't sell for a quid a go.

If it's all about price, then Aldi exists, and fancy sourdough loaves would have gone the way of the dodo a long time ago. I'm not sure that suburban, tattooed hipsters are really that stressed about a 30p increase on a £6 loaf of bread. But it's that bit about "absorbing" rising costs that I really struggled with, and I've seen it mentioned when it comes to wine too. The rising costs of gas, electricity, rent, rates, dry goods etc are the nature of inflation, and if you start absorbing those costs, then your prices won't fit and you'll very likely run out of cash.

Back in 1986, we sold Moët & Chandon for £119 a case of 12 bottles. Nowadays, everyone is going to be selling it for a darn sight more than a tenner. A quick note: we also sold a wine simply called EEC White Blend at £17 a dozen, so some things have definitely changed, thankfully!

We run our business to make a profit, and I'm sure most businesses do. We don't fleece our customers. We constantly look to value as the guiding principle rather than just "how much" – we are in Yorkshire, after all. Absorbing price increases is just taking money out of your own wallet at the end of the day. When alcohol duty goes up, as it inevitably will, I don't care whether it's 2p or 20p: that cost has to be passed on, and with a margin too. If that means that a wine doesn't sell, or a customer deems it to be the straw that broke the camel's back and goes elsewhere, then so be it.

Absorbing costs only reduces profit margins and creates a sort of downward spiral that makes it harder to hold true to the principles that a business is built on. I know it's lovely to think that we're being very altruistic by seeking out the finest wines and matching them to each customer, but we are, at the end of the day, retailers, and making money makes a business work properly. Let's not think of profit as a dirty word. I'm off now to scoff gold-plated swan sandwiches and count my sovereigns. ■

*Rob Hoult owns Hoult's
Wine Merchants in Huddersfield*



BOOK REVIEW

THE WINES OF PROVENCE

BY ELIZABETH GABAY MW
AND BEN BERNHEIM

CLASSIC WINE LIBRARY
£35

In the 2010 film *The Ghost Writer*, the protagonist, played by Ewan McGregor, says he's never seen the point of white wine; well, for a long time, I didn't really see the point of rosé. It was somewhere between white and red wine, and I thought it was inferior to both.

A recent, excellent bottle of Tavel somewhat mollified me, however, so I approached *The Wines of Provence* with interest and an open mind. (I realise that Tavel is in the Rhône Valley, but let's not split hairs.) Moreover, as the authors observe in the concluding chapter of this book, "one thing has always been clear: Provence is more than rosé".

Like a batsman playing himself in, the book takes a bit of time to hit its stride. There's an obligatory opening chapter about "Provence history", which I really didn't find very diverting. "No shortage of actors, film stars and directors have been attracted to the area for holidays" was one of the rather desperate observations I highlighted in my copy.

Things start to pick up when the writers, Elizabeth Gabay MW and Ben Bernheim, move on to "the business of Provence wine". I think this is a really fascinating subject. There have been some visionary people involved in the marketing of Provence rosé, and the brilliance of the labelling and bottle design turns out to be less of a modern phenomenon than I assumed. The curvy Domaines Ott bottle and the sublime Clos Cibonne label have long histories, I learned.

Unusually for a book in The Classic Wine Library series, the producer profiles are

frequently more interesting than the sections about the regions where the grapes are grown. There's a good reason for this: I'd never heard of areas like Pierrefeu or Notre-Dame-des-Anges, but the names of brands like Minuty, Mirabeau and Miraval were familiar to me. Even so, too much of the book is devoted to describing estates whose wines drinkers will never see or taste, even if they travel to the south of France.

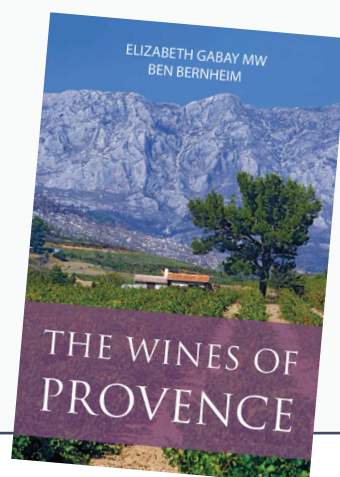
Reflecting my preference for reds and whites, I thought the parts about Bandol and Cassis were the highlights of the book. The latter has an air of mystery about it: a diminutive coastal appellation, one of the first to be awarded AOC status in 1936, whose wines are expensive and as rare as hen's teeth.

I don't think I've ever seen a bottle of Cassis, but the whites – "soft, rich" and "sometimes flabby" – sound very appealing. It is "clearly the region for white wine in Provence", according to the authors, with Marsanne and Clairette, those stalwarts of the Rhône Valley, the principal grapes.

This is a good book, by two people who clearly know their stuff and write well. I think it may be a hard sell, unfortunately, as the majority of drinkers of La Vieille Ferme and Whispering Angel probably don't give a monkey's about things like grapes and terroir.

While that may be true of wine drinkers in general, there's usually a market of specialists for these books. Dare I say, though, that most people working in the trade probably don't drink Provence rosé?

Michael Walker





Favourite Things



JACK BALDOCK
Broadway Cellars, St Ives

Favourite wine on my list

I have recently been enjoying Duncan Savage's Salt River Sauvignon Blanc. 30-year-old bush vines, textured, layered, saline freshness – it has it all.

Favourite wine and food match

Blue cheese (preferably a Stilton) and Billecart-Salmon, demi-sec. Something a little bit different to the traditional Sauternes pairing.

Favourite wine trip

I was lucky enough to go to Vinitaly last year with Liberty Wines, and what an experience it was. It's less a wine fair and more a full sensory assault, in the best way.

Favourite wine trade person

Over the years I've met so many incredible people, each bringing their own kind of passion, knowledge and enthusiasm to the table. That's one of the best things about this industry.

Everyone you meet, whether it's a producer, a sommelier, an importer or someone just starting out, will teach you something new every time. There's no ego required to love wine properly. The best people in this trade are usually the most generous with what they know, and the most excited to share a bottle, a story, or an opinion you didn't expect.

Favourite wine shop

Bacchanalia Wine Merchants on Mill Road, Cambridge. Jim has an incredible selection of wines and his knowledge is second to none.

Jail terms for fine wine scammers

British businessman Stephen Burton has been jailed for six years in the US for his part in a wine investment fraud involving almost \$100m.

Burton and fellow Briton James Wellesley, also known as Andrew Fuller, ran Bordeaux Cellars, telling investors their money was being lent to wealthy wine collectors and secured against more than 25,000 bottles, including Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Château Lafleur. Prosecutors said the company controlled as few as 217 bottles.

The pair used clients' money to fund personal expenses and make interest payments to other investors. Wellesley was sentenced to 10 years in prison earlier this year, while Burton received his six-year sentence in September.

Bloomberg, September 3



Investors were told DRC wines were involved

Sémillon Gris gets official status

Sémillon Gris has been formally recognised as a grape variety in its own right, with South Africa registered as its country of origin.

The pink-skinned grape is a naturally occurring mutation of Sémillon rather than a deliberate crossing. Andrea and Chris Mullineux have been among those working to secure its recognition and establish clean planting material.

The variety survived in some of South Africa's old vineyards despite coming close to disappearing, and can now be propagated from certified material.

Decanter, September 4

• **A cork that can be opened and resealed without a corkscrew** has been recognised at this year's Vinitech-Sifel Innovation Trophies. Amorim's Twist & Pop is a microgranulated closure designed to be twisted out by hand while still fitting a conventional wine bottle and existing bottling lines. It was among 30 products recognised at the awards.

Vinetur, September 22



The Shipping News

Updates from the supply chain

• **Shipping lines have cancelled 58 scheduled sailings** on major east-west routes between late September and early November. Fewer ships mean less available space and a greater risk of delays. (*Drewry*)

• **Disruption around the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz** continues to make some shipping routes slower and more

expensive. Around 2.5m barrels of oil a day are now being transferred between ships near Oman to keep supplies moving, adding extra costs. (*Reuters*)

• **France's 2026 wine harvest is estimated at just 33.9m hectolitres**, 17% below the five-year average. Champagne is particularly badly affected, which could mean tighter supply and firmer prices for some French wines next year. (*Reuters*)

• **UK ports handled 5% less freight** by tonnage in the second quarter than a year earlier, although container and other unitised traffic was almost unchanged. (*Department for Transport*)

Forklifts borrowed to steal Barolo

Thieves made off with more than 3,000 bottles of Barolo in a carefully planned raid on Conterno Fantino in Monforte d'Alba.

Four masked intruders broke into the Piedmont winery on the night of September 16 and spent around three hours loading bottles, including magnums and wines from the Vigna Sorì Ginestra vineyard.

The gang reportedly used the winery's forklift and vans, pushing the vehicles away from the property before starting their engines. The stolen wine is estimated to be worth hundreds of thousands of euros.

La Stampa, September 22

• *California vineyard managers are testing an **autonomous robot** that uses ultraviolet light to tackle powdery mildew. The Thorvald machine moves through vineyard rows at night, exposing vines to concentrated UV-C light in an attempt to control the disease without conventional fungicides.*

Yahoo Tech, September 16



Plant is more than 450 years old

World's oldest vine bears fruit again

Maribor's famous Žametovka vine is celebrating its 40th ceremonial picking.

The Slovenian vine, recognised by Guinness World Records as the world's oldest grapevine, is thought to be more than 450 years old and still produces a small annual crop.

Cuttings from the vine have been planted around the world, while Maribor now stages events, exhibitions and a festival around its remarkable survivor.

Visit Maribor, September 27



QUIZ TIME

With Flying Füchs

1. Which of these grape varieties is NOT permitted in Châteauneuf-du-Pape?
(a) Counoise (b) Muscardin
(c) Mondeuse (d) Vaccarèse
2. The wine region of Tokaj straddles Hungary and which neighbouring country?
(a) Slovakia (b) Romania
(c) Slovenia (d) Croatia
3. Which of these was invented first?
(a) The corkscrew (b) The tin can
(c) The bicycle (d) The postage stamp
4. What name is given to the small vessel traditionally used for tasting wine in Burgundy, often worn on a chain by a négociant or winemaker?
5. Which country is home to the wine regions of Kakheti, Kartli and Imereti?

Answers on page 52

CORKAGE

BY BRETT







Rioja and the rest

Spain's red wines are dominated by its pre-eminent region, which is enjoying buoyant sales in a turbulent market. But there is so much more for consumers to discover

By Jacob Stokes

If this article on Spanish reds mirrored the country's total DO export figures, Rioja would account for around 40% of the word count.

The truth is that Rioja is a phenomenon. In a global market that has been shrugging off red wine for two decades, and has just recorded its lowest overall consumption since 1961, a region such as Rioja should surely be in a Bordeaux-like crisis: ripping up any idle vine in sight and manically distilling grape juice into hand sanitiser. But no, not a bit of it.

In 2024, Rioja increased its sales by 0.6%, while global wine consumption fell by 3.3%. Sales retreated in 2025, with shipments to the UK – by far Rioja's most important export market – down by 13.2% as the new strength-based duty system took effect. Even so, Rioja achieved a record 39.1% share of the value of Spain's PDO wine exports. At home it remained just as dominant, accounting for 38% of Spain's red-wine market even as the wider category shrank by 3.5%.

Even without the figures, anyone working in the UK trade can sense that stability. At its root is the effortless, almost automatic demand for Rioja across the board. Many merchants will have had the same names on their shelves for years, knowing exactly what to expect from one vintage to the next. At a time when indies' attention is being pulled in more directions than ever, Rioja is the part of the range that simply delivers, quietly and confidently.

From juicy joven styles that chill down to immensely smashable levels to reservas and gran reservas for savouring with a beautiful roast, Rioja can be as casual as it is special, and as straightforward as it is complex. It can service almost any need a general consumer might have. Perhaps it is not the part of the range that has a merchant skipping out of the house in the morning, but rather the bit that gives them a house to skip out of in the first place.

Garnacha: a climatic chameleon

Away from Rioja, Spain is awash with red wines of a more skip-inducing nature: wines that lived in the shadows of the country's heavy hitters, at least while bigness and power were the yardsticks for success. Even in regions such as Ribera del Duero and Toro, whose wines have long been prized for their dictatorial intensity, styles are steadily shifting towards freshness and elegance. It is no surprise that winemakers seem keen to point this out in every other sentence.

As Priorat and Roussillon have shown for years, and producers across the globe are demonstrating with increasing frequency, Garnacha/Grenache is a climatic chameleon. It can produce elegant, mineral-driven wines in the heat and some of the most hauntingly delicate expressions when pushed to its cool-climate limit – in South Africa's Bot River, for example.

In Spain's red-wine prospectus, there is arguably no Garnacha more attuned to current tastes than the mountain-grown expressions of Sierra de Gredos. Here, just over an hour's drive west

Left: mist swirls in Ribeira Sacra





► of Madrid, Garnacha reveals its Burgundian side. Old bush vines are scattered across three distinctive valleys at 600m to 1,250m above sea level, largely rooted in sandy granite soils.

These are the credentials that have enthused and energised a new generation of winemakers. Like the people behind many a modern revival, this cohort has no desire to put itself – or, indeed, a cooperage – ahead of the personality of the terroir, instead favouring low-intervention methods. The result is a distinctive style, particularly when set against the richer expression of Garnacha found in Aragón, which is widely regarded as the grape's birthplace.

Sierra de Gredos remains without a DO of its own, largely because the mountain range crosses three autonomous communities. Its wines can instead fall within three DOs – Cebreros, Méntrida and Vinos de Madrid – or a regional IGP. Cebreros, recognised nationally in 2017 and protected at EU level in 2019, covers the Ávila section of Gredos between the Alberche and Tiétar river basins. Its three broad zones – the Alberche, Alto Alberche and Tiétar valleys – help to explain the area's climatic and geological diversity. Cebreros wines may also carry the supplementary term Sierra de Gredos when they meet the relevant origin rules.

Red wines from green Spain

As Spain begins to reimagine its red-wine offer for the tastes of the moment, one area looks more suitable than any other: the cool, wet north west. With Rías Baixas Albariño already firmly established on the world stage, this corner of Spain, sitting above Portugal on the Atlantic coast, is also capable of producing exceptional reds led by the local Mencía grape.

Although Mencía is grown in varying quantities across the north west, two DOs stand out above all: Ribeira Sacra in Galicia and Bierzo, just across the regional border in Castilla y León. Bierzo may not technically be Galician, but its climate and resulting wines have more in common with Galicia than with Ribera del Duero and Toro, which share its autonomous community.

There are plenty of parallels between the two

regions. Many of their finest vineyards cling to steep river-valley slopes. In Ribeira Sacra, some terraces – which legend says were first carved out by the Romans – sit on inclines of more than 60%. Slate and schist are recurring features in both regions, particularly on the poorer hillside sites. It is on these steep, infertile slopes that Mencía finds some of its finest expressions.

The regions begin to diverge in the ways their climates are moderated. The textbook comparison is the Douro, where conditions become more continental as you travel inland and east, away from the Atlantic – a point the WSET syllabus seems determined to beat into every student. The same broad pattern applies here. Ribeira Sacra grows more continental towards its eastern edge; then comes Valdeorras, followed by Bierzo over the border in Castilla y León.

Ribeira Sacra's wines are often leaner and fresher, but Bierzo has altitude on its side. Ribeira Sacra's vineyards can reach around 700m to 750m, while the Bierzo PDO extends from 355m to 1,200m, with most vines between 400m and 800m. That broad span gives producers plenty of scope to temper the region's more continental conditions.

Before a drastic reshaping in the 1990s, Bierzo was known for unremarkable, dilute wines from its fertile valley floor. Today, when all its key factors come together in the right hands, it leans beautifully into a more intense, fruit-loaded expression of Mencía: one that sits between the floral, red-fruited tension of Ribeira Sacra and the power of Spain's more traditional greats. ■



Rioja: a cultural treasure

Eva de Benito has helped shape Viña Real's wines since joining the Rioja Alavesa producer in 2003. She explains how its vineyards influence wines such as Bakeder, Gran Reserva and La Virgen – and why Rioja's traditional and site-specific identities can thrive side by side

In association with Hatch Mansfield

What makes Rioja Alavesa distinctive, and how does it influence your wines?

Although it accounts for only around 20% of Rioja DOCa's production, Rioja Alavesa has an extraordinary diversity of producers, many small and family-owned. Around 40% of its land is planted to vines. Clay-limestone soils and the protection of the Sierra de Cantabria define wines with expressive red and black fruit, freshness, austerity and ageing potential. Our ambition is to capture all those nuances.

How has your approach to winemaking changed during your time at Viña Real?

Rather than changing, I would say Viña Real has shaped the way I understand winemaking. I joined in 2003, just before the Laguardia winery opened. The challenge has been to preserve the identity of this Rioja Alavesa name while exploring new styles, without losing the house's hallmark longevity and vibrant fruit. It also allows me to explore Laguardia through Bakeder and interpret an exceptional vineyard such as La Virgen.

What was the idea behind Bakeder, and what does it express about Laguardia?

Bakeder is a Laguardia village wine, a pure Tempranillo that speaks of its vineyard landscape. The fruit comes from our south-facing vineyards on clay-limestone terraces. It expresses what Laguardia Tempranillo means to us: red and black fruit, floral notes and fine-grained tannins, with freshness and acidity. These vineyards have historically supplied Viña Real, so Bakeder carries that legacy forward.

And the Gran Reserva?

Gran Reserva is Viña Real's flagship,

admired for its ability to age while retaining a youthful spirit. The secret is simple: exceptional fruit. High-quality grapes produce balanced, elegant wines, with freshness, acidity and tannin working in harmony. I feel a responsibility towards that legacy. My goal is for today's Gran Reserva to be opened with pride 50 years from now and to show the graceful evolution that has always defined it.

Has the style of Viña Real Gran Reserva changed over the years?

It has evolved in certain respects. Time in oak has been reduced, the proportion of French oak has increased and recent vintages no longer include Garnacha or the small amount of Viura once used in the blend. But its ageworthy character remains unchanged. It is still released almost a decade after harvest, in the knowledge that it will be opened many years later. In many ways, time itself is one of its ingredients.

What's special about the vineyard that produces La Virgen?

La Virgen is more than 45 years old and lies in the traditional San Cristóbal area



of Labastida, sheltered by the Sierra de Toloño. It is a two-hectare section within a larger vineyard, planted on clay with a surface layer of gravel. Warm days and cool nights before harvest preserve freshness while allowing the fruit to develop precision and clarity. The wine is vibrant, with defined fruit and lively natural acidity.

Do you think Rioja is becoming more focused on individual vineyards and villages, rather than simply Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva?

The two approaches coexist, and the traditional categories remain an essential part of Rioja's identity. A new generation of smaller producers focused on individual vineyards has encouraged larger wineries to pay closer attention to particular places. Both models make sense in a region as diverse as Rioja: its landscapes, soils and vineyards allow different narratives to exist side by side.

What should indies be telling their customers about Rioja today?

Rioja is one of wine's great cultural treasures, bringing together centuries of history, diverse soils and climatic influences. Historic wineries now sit alongside a new generation bringing energy and fresh perspectives. For merchants, it offers a story that remains alive and continues to evolve, as new ways of understanding vineyards find expression in wine. That diversity is one of Rioja's greatest strengths.



DUNCAN McLEAN



Northabout

Our product range is pretty good. But a lot of people just like pretty colours

I've mentioned before how I regret starting to sell cheese, and how my days are haunted by the accursed stuff and its ceaseless demands for wrapping and unwrapping, cutting and weighing, paring and peeling, cleaning and cleaning, and cleaning and cleaning. In the years before cheese (BC), footfall was low, and I sold a few dozen bottles of wine each day, spending the rest of the time reading *Decanter* and *The Wine Merchant*, pondering new wines from suppliers, and writing tasting notes and food-matching ideas for fliers and shelf talkers. Now, AD

(After Dolcelatte)



footfall is vastly higher, I still sell a few dozen bottles a day, but there is no time for reading, pondering and writing,

as my day is filled with wrapping and unwrapping, cutting and weighing, etc, etc. The increased footfall is all in the direction of the cheese fridge ...

One particularly depressing thing about cheese is how customers are so easily attracted to brightly coloured varieties. We could have, amongst 50 other choices in our fridge, wonderful 22-month-matured Parmigiano Reggiano, fine and subtle Ossau-Iraty, delightfully mushy Baron Bigod, but if we plunk down a block of pale factory cheddar infused with liquidised spinach so it's the colour of a 1970s bathroom suite, that's the one customers will ask for.

A few years ago someone asked if we could source a particular cheese we'd never heard of. It was Christmas, we were feeling jolly, so we said yes, even though the product in question (which shall remain nameless to protect the innocent) was a pale factory cheddar infused with port, so it was the colour of strawberry bubblegum that had been chewed up and spat out. The customer loved it, and so did everyone else. Soon it was our festive bestseller.

"Ooh, I like the look of that pink one," they'd exclaim. "What does it taste like?"

"It's rather unpleasant," I'd reply.

"The texture's reminiscent of stale marshmallows and the flavour's like a strawberry-scented candle. If any port has ever been near it, I guarantee it's not 1963 Quinta do Noval."

"Sounds great! Give me 200 grams. In fact, just give me the whole block!"

I was reminded of the seductive force of garish blocks of colour again this week, when I noticed three customers in a row exhibiting the same peculiar behaviour in front of our whisky shelves. Let me tell you, our whisky shelves are things of beauty. They fill one wall of the shop and are built from the original wooden shop counter that our founder, James Kirkness, a joiner before he became a shopkeeper, lovingly crafted in the 1850s. A dozen years ago we installed subtle LED lights at the back of the shelves: they show off the golden glows of the

bottles to full advantage, from light pine to rich mahogany.

And yet these three customers were all staring at the ceiling. To be exact, they were staring at the top of the highest shelf, where there's just space to line up a row of empty tubes and boxes. Stock of fast-selling bottles waits in a handy cupboard, but if someone wants something slow-moving we have to get the stepladder out to fetch the relevant box down.

"You see that Invergordon 18-Year-Old?" one of them said, pointing almost vertically upwards. "How much is that?"

I walked round the counter to the bottle which was literally in front of his nose. I pointed at the price label.

"Are you interested in single grain whiskies?" I said. "That's a rare preference."

"No, I just like the box," he said. "Such lovely colours! I'll take it!"

When it comes to wine, I have a liking for plain white labels with an old-fashioned serif text telling me where the wine comes from and who made it. Best of all, I like the labels where words pile up like concrete poetry, or an explosion in a typesetter's storeroom. Rioja seems to be keen on labels like this; Queirón Mi Lugar from Ontañón is a favourite, with its great agglomeration of text detailing the name of the village, the fact that the grapes were picked by hand, that the vineyards have been in the family for four generations, that the vines are low-yielding, and a whole lot more. There's only slightly less text than in *Don Quixote*. Needless to say, it sells a lot slower than the Merlot with a cartoon of a wombat on it.

Queirón Mi Lugar and I are up against human nature. And that nature is a highly visual one, evolved over the aeons our ancestors spent learning to spot lunch as it trotted across the African savannah. Ah well. There's a big gale blowing in, meaning the last cruise liner of the season has been cancelled. It's going to be a quiet day. Time to get out my felt pens and do some colouring in.

Duncan McLean is proprietor of Kirkness & Gorie, Kirkwall



180 YEARS OF DEVAUX



Pascal Dubois, CEO of Champagne Devaux, reflects on a big milestone – but his focus is firmly on the future

180 years is an extraordinary milestone. But what does 180 years actually mean for Devaux today?

It means responsibility, transmission and time. Devaux has survived because it has constantly adapted while remaining true to its roots.

Today, 180 years is not about looking backwards, but about using that heritage to make the right decisions for the next generation.

In Champagne, time is essential – both to the wine and to the building of a House.

Devaux's history is one of constant reinvention. What have been the decisive turning points?

The move from the Jura to Épernay was an important first step, as the House expanded its activities. The decisive turning point came in 1987, when Union Auboise acquired the Devaux brand and brought it to the Côte des Bar.

From then on, the ambition was clear: to establish Devaux as a leading Champagne House of the Côte des Bar and demonstrate that the region is a distinctive terroir capable of producing exceptional wines.

For us, terroir is not simply a place of origin; it has to be felt in the glass – through the freshness, structure and precision of the wines.

Devaux is a collective story – a House owned by winegrowers. What does this model bring?

It creates a very direct connection with the vineyard. Our winegrowers have a long-term stake in the health of their land and the future of the region. That shapes the way we think and invest.

We are not simply buying grapes;

we are building a Champagne House together with the people who cultivate its vineyards.

The book about Devaux's history describes a strong culture of long-term thinking. How does that influence decisions today?

Champagne itself requires long-term thinking: vines last for decades and our wines can spend years in the cellar. At Devaux, we invest in reserve wines, ageing, vineyards and relationships with our partners. Some decisions may not deliver immediate returns, but they strengthen the House over time. The best decisions are those that benefit future generations.

How important is it for Devaux to help define and promote the identity of the Côte des Bar?

It is central to our identity. Our role is to demonstrate this through our wines and to help make the Côte des Bar better understood and recognised within Champagne.

How do you see environmental responsibility and the long-term future of Devaux?

For me, environmental responsibility is part of a much broader duty towards what we have inherited. We are only passing through. We have received vineyards, know-how and a heritage, and our role is to enrich them before handing them on.

This means respecting the soil, the balance of nature and the people who work with us. Our environmental approach started in the late 1990s, well before sustainability became such an important issue.

The challenge is to adapt without

losing what makes Champagne exceptional.

The UK has been an important market for Devaux for decades. What can the UK contribute to the next chapter?

Our relationship with the UK goes back many years, including our partnership with Liberty Wines since 2005. The UK has a sophisticated wine trade and a strong openness to wines with a sense of place.

We want to deepen understanding of Devaux and help more people discover the Côte des Bar.

What would you like people opening a bottle of Devaux at the 200th anniversary to say about the House?

I would like them to say that Devaux moved forward without losing its soul. That it remained deeply connected to its winegrowers and the Côte des Bar while continuing to evolve.

And, above all, that the wines still had a sense of time. If someone opens a bottle in 2046 and says, "This is unmistakably Devaux", I will consider that a success. ■

*In association with
Champagne Devaux
The range is imported by
Liberty Wines*



‘All our wines must be delicious –

Few importers inspire quite the same loyalty among independent wine merchants as Les Caves de Pyrene. Director **Doug Wregg** explains why natural wine is only part of the story, where he sees value in a squeezed market – and what keeps him hooked after all these years

Almost everyone in the independent trade will have heard of Les Caves de Pyrene. What do you hope they would say about the business, and what might they get wrong?

I hope people would think of us not just as a business, but as a group of people who are passionate about good wine, love telling stories, and enjoy helping our customers convey the excitement and pleasure these wines can bring. Some may well think we are niche, dealing only in natural wines, or only French, because of the name. But we have all wines for all times, so to speak.

Broadly speaking, what’s the underlying philosophy behind your buying, in terms of the style of wines you look for and the producers you work with?

We believe that wine is made in the vineyard and that each wine should be singular, reflecting its origin and vintage. We work with, and ship directly from, small artisan producers around the world, and specialise in wines made from grapes grown in organic, biodynamic and regenerative vineyards. We’re associated with low-intervention wines, but we’re less concerned with labels than with making sure every wine is as delicious and drinkable as it can be.

How much has the range grown and evolved recently? Or has it been reined in a little in response to market conditions?

If anything, we’ve trimmed our range. But we still have 2,500 products! We have developed one part of the portfolio in response to demand, working with producers and co-ops to make more entry-level organic and low-intervention wines. When consumers are counting the pennies, having a selection of wines like these is invaluable.



Doug Wregg at the Real Wine Fair

We know consumer spending is under huge pressure. Do you think people will make compromises in their buying habits, perhaps in how much they spend or in the sustainability credentials of what they buy?

In terms of what they spend, perhaps. I’d like to believe that, if you love decent wine, you wouldn’t compromise your principles or trade



Biodynamic viticulture at Loxarel, Catalonia

down to a wine of inferior quality. Knowing the provenance of a wine is empowering and helps us make more informed decisions. My feeling is that we should examine our choices more, buy better and drink less.

Do you worry that words like “sustainable”, “low intervention” and “natural” are too vague, and in some cases abused by people in the supply chain? There is a feeling that parts of the wine industry are quite prone to greenwashing.

I don’t worry too much. You have to define most wine terms, as a lot of people don’t necessarily know what they mean. I do use words such as low intervention and natural because they indicate a particular no- or low-chemical farming approach and a light-touch winemaking method. Of course, terms I see as positive may be considered pejorative by others. Each wine is only as good as its tastes, and categorising it simplistically, without due explanation, is not helpful. It’s true that there is a lot of greenwashing, but that tends to happen in bigger companies trying to make their products appeal to a younger generation. Which is why we need to tell the real stories instead of trading on buzzwords.

Indies tell us how much they like working with you. Why do you think this bond is so strong, and how is it maintained?

We love working with enthusiastic people and feel invested in their businesses too. Although we have grown as a company, we encourage all our employees to feel part of the family, and many of them are given shares in the business. The service ethos extends throughout the company, from the reps and the sales desk taking orders to the credit control and shipping teams.

and drinkable'



How would you sum up the situation in the UK wine trade right now, and specifically for indies?

We are all floating in a kind of limbo. Businesses have taken on the burden of so many extra costs in such a short space of time, with increased taxation and regulation. The prognosis isn't good either, with the climate crisis becoming more severe and wars, both military and trade. Society is atomising. Innovation within the trade can bring positive change, but government could also help enormously by offering more business rates support for small businesses, as well as cutting VAT and duty.

Tell us about the most interesting and exciting developments at Les Caves in recent times.

There are two. As mentioned, we are developing a portfolio within the portfolio of high-quality, low-priced organic and low-intervention wines, with examples from France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Australia and elsewhere. Although the thinking behind the farming and winemaking is similar, the wines are very much rooted in the traditions of their respective regions. The second is training. We are finally offering our own courses, which will be certified for students taking WSET Levels 1 and 2.

Are there any countries or regions that you are especially hopeful about at the moment in terms of wine production?

Central Italy currently seems to have more farmers working biodynamically and making cracking wines from "humble" grape varieties such as Trebbiano, Verdicchio, Montepulciano and Falanghina. The country that has come on leaps and bounds at all levels in recent years, and is seemingly beloved by all sectors of the trade, is South Africa.

If a merchant is interested in starting to work with you, what is expected from both sides?

Feedback and transparency are key to any good relationship. Any potential problem can be solved if we work together. Do ask for advice and recommendations, and give us a clear brief about what you might like. We want to show you wines that we love, but also wines that are relevant to your business.

You've been doing this job a long time. What keeps you enthused?

The friends I have made, and am still making, within the trade, the bottles we share, and those occasions when I am surprised and delighted by something I am drinking. I am forever learning, and I love sharing what I have learned.



**In association with
Les Caves de Pyrene**

*Find out more at lescaves.co.uk
or call 01483 538820*

Some highlights from the Les Caves line-up

Clos Lapeyre, Jean-Bernard Larrieu, Jurançon

Thrillingly fresh dry and sweet wines from the foothills of the Pyrenees, made by a producer we have worked with from the beginning.

Mas de Daumas-Gassac, Guibert Family, Languedoc

An iconic estate that rose to world fame in the mid-1980s, making wonderfully elegant organic wines from its beautiful terroir in the Gassac valley.

Thierry & Louis Germain, Saumur-Champigny

Classy Cab Franc and Chenin of purity and tension from biodynamic vineyards.

Domaine Pierre Frick, Alsace

One of the original biodynamic domaines. Profound wines, many from grand cru vineyards, that are worthy of long ageing.

Comando G, Dani Landi & Fernando Garcia, Sierra de Gredos

Tiny parcels of old Garnacha vines dotted around pockets in the mountains of Gredos, west of Madrid. These are some of the most sought-after wines in Spain.

Ferdinando Principiano, Serralunga, Barolo

Eloquent and elegant Baroli from carefully tended vineyards.

Arianna Occhipinti, Ragusa, Sicily

A legendary low-intervention estate making benchmark Frappato, Nero d'Avola and blends from amazing sandy soils.

Radford Dale, Alex Dale, Stellenbosch and Elgin, South Africa

Several ranges of wines, made mainly from low-yielding bush vines. Radford Dale is leading the organic charge in South Africa with its Elgin project.



Comando G, Sierra de Gredos

Cellar 21, a decade on

Bon Coeur Fine Wines in Melsonby, North Yorkshire has been trading for more than three decades. The team recently celebrated 10 years of its wine shop, Cellar 21, which shares premises with the company's bonded warehouse.

Claire Harries catches up with founder James Goodhart

Tell us about the beginnings of Bon Coeur.

I started the business 32 years ago. When you're 24, you think you know a lot, and you learn that you don't. But I suppose that gives you the confidence to start something yourself. Plus, at that age you don't necessarily have any dependants, so the risk is all yours.

You were selling wholesale and to private clients until you opened Cellar 21 a decade ago?

The main thing was buying the premises. We had to rebuild them, which allowed us to design the building exactly how we wanted it. Having a shop on the premises just gives you another side to the business.

Is there much difference between selling direct to consumers and selling to your other clients?

They all want to know what the trends are and what they should be buying, and they all look to you.

Private customers are all different. Some are almost like influencers – old-school influencers, I suppose. They'll find a new wine and tell all their mates to buy it, and their mates look up to them because they know their stuff.

You need to keep changing your portfolio to stay fresh and interesting for your customers. There are "safer" wines that you know people always want, but you've got to work out where the market's going



James Goodhart (centre) with the retail team

and expand that way.

It's about getting in front of your customers, offering good service and building those relationships. We often say it's 50% about listening and 50% about knowing your wine.

How much of your range do you import directly?

We probably ship in about 80% of the wines ourselves, but we don't hold any agencies.

We like to be entirely independent, to be honest, and we don't like to be tied. Often, if you have an agency for something, you've

When you're 24, you think you know a lot, and you learn that you don't. But that gives you the confidence to start something yourself

got to do 100,000 bottles a year. That encourages your sales team to recommend those wines because you need the volume, not because they're the right wines for the job.

We work with quite a few UK suppliers. You have to if you want brands – if you want Taittinger, you have to work with Hatch, and if you want Pol Roger, you work with Pol Roger. But we're trying to do our own thing. Even if a wine is shipped into the UK, you can put your own label on it so you look a bit different from everyone else.

Do you supply other indies?

Not at the moment, but it's something we might do. A lot of people about the same size as us are doing it, so it's a market I could look at. We're big enough to play the volume game; turnover is about £7m.

What are the biggest challenges facing the wine industry right now?

I think if you asked most wine merchants whether they'd start up again, knowing how much red tape there is – and there's more and more of it – they'd probably say no.

The first thing I'd ask the government is to help with shipping. Since Brexit, it's costing us twice as much to ship. They had a good system in place and decided to get rid of it, so it's not as though it's never worked. There's so much paperwork that very few companies want to do it any more.

By the time you add it up, the paperwork



A local butcher supplied a birthday pork pie to celebrate 10 years of the shop

for each shipment costs £165, shipping costs have doubled, and you've got fuel surcharges running at about 15%. Then there are the packaging taxes ...

Have you seen a shift in consumers' attitudes to wine over the years?

There's a huge willingness among people to learn more about wine. The further north you go, I think there's less access to wine education than you'd have in London, where you could probably go to a tasting every night.

A lot of younger people are becoming more health-conscious, and those who drink generally prefer cocktails. I think every country is having the same problem.

I was with a Dutch wine consultant who said it's awful in Holland, where there's so much advertising about alcohol being bad for you. Wine has been hit from lots of different sides and consumption is going down.



A mile and a half off the A1

What's the size of your catchment area here?

We're lucky. We're almost in the middle of nowhere, but we're a mile and a half off the A1, a major north-south road, and we've got the A66, a major east-west road.

We get a lot of people on their way up to Scotland, to go fishing or something like that. They pop in, we give them a free coffee, and they end up with five or six cases in the back of the car to drink at some lodge in Scotland. It gives them a break and a bit of retail therapy.

We do events and tastings all the time, which a lot of the locals love. They enjoy learning and having a bit of fun, so we keep things casual.



PORT WAS ONCE A PUB CLASSIC

At the height of Queen Victoria's reign, 90% of the wine consumed in Britain was either sherry or port. Port crossed the class divide: vintage port for the wealthy, cheap ruby for the pubs, often served with lemonade. The scale of the trade emerges in Hansard's record of a 1958 Commons debate on alcohol duty. One MP said: "Contrary to the general impression, port has not been a rich man's drink; over 90% of port drunk has always been part of the public house trade."

A FRESH START WITH CASK FINISHES

Whisky labels routinely spell out the cask finish, with ex-sherry, port and Madeira casks all playing important roles. Enthusiasts want to know what each contributes and, almost by accident, learn the flavour profiles of different fortified wines. That gives the fortified wine sector a chance to sell more than its old barrels to distilleries. It could sell the wines themselves to a new band of curious, discerning drinkers.

Jacob Stokes runs through some quirks, titbits and trivia that surround port, sherry and Madeira



IS MADEIRA INDESTRUCTIBLE?

Madeira takes the idea that nothing lasts forever as a personal affront. At a vertical tasting last October, a collector opened 18 Madeiras from the 1870s. According to Jancis Robinson MW, only one was “in anything other than peak condition”. The oldest wine reviewed on her website is a 1780 Madeira, which scored 17.5/20. For context, in that vintage an 11-year-old Napoleon Bonaparte was starting his first year at military school.

Madeira was as entwined with the American Revolution as tax evasion. North American colonists had enjoyed it since the 1640s, developing a taste for the oxidised style created by the long sea voyage. By the mid-18th century, British North America accounted for a quarter of Madeira exports, and producers blended their wines to suit the tastes of individual colonies.



A SHAKE-UP IN SHERRY COUNTRY

Sherry can't be accused of standing still, even though its vineyard area has shrunk from 22,000ha in 1978 to 7,000ha today. Alongside a promising future for still wine, the Consejo has introduced some important regulatory changes.

The biggest is the removal of the rule requiring sherry to be aged in one of the three traditional towns of Jerez, Sanlúcar de Barrameda and El Puerto de Santa María. Bodegas anywhere within the demarcated sherry region can now make and age it. This brings to an end the so-called “sherry triangle”, in place since the DO was created in 1933.

Other changes include the authorisation of six historic local varieties and the introduction of Fino Viejo, effectively a counterpart to Manzanilla Pasada. Both must be aged for at least seven years before release.



YOUR BARD

Sherry, then known as sack, is mentioned more than 40 times across eight of Shakespeare's works. Its greatest champion is Falstaff who, as one of literature's most famous drinkers, can surely be trusted on the subject. In one sprawling monologue, he claims that sherry clears the brain and warms the blood, and that skill at arms and book-learning are useless “till sack commences it and sets it in act and use”.



WHERE HAS ALL THE BANYULS GONE?

In the 1950s, 50 million bottles of VDN were sold each year.

Roussillon's VDNs from Rivesaltes, Banyuls and Maury were traditionally made for extended ageing. But from the 1990s, as anything other than dry table wine fell out of fashion, that became increasingly hard to sustain. Outdoor conditioning in demijohns, followed by decades in vast old oak barrels, has all but disappeared. In its place are token VDNs made simply to meet minimum appellation rules.



TAWNY'S TIME HAS COME

From the affordable pleasure of a 10 Year Old to the rarefied territory of a 50 Year Old, Taylor's Aged Tawny collection offers merchants a remarkably broad range of styles, occasions and price points

Port has never exactly been short of tradition. The problem, perhaps, is that some of those traditions have become a little too successful.

For many customers the word still conjures up Christmas, Stilton, decanters and the vague feeling that somebody should pass it to the left. Aged tawny provides a useful reminder that port can be considerably more relaxed than that.

There is no decanting to worry about. The wines are bottled ready to drink and Taylor's recommends serving them slightly chilled, between 12°C and 16°C. And because the long ageing has taken place in seasoned oak rather than principally under cork, an opened bottle is rather less of a now-or-never proposition than vintage port.

For an independent merchant, that makes aged tawny an unusually straightforward category to talk about. It can be poured after dinner, certainly, but equally brought out with dessert, nuts, cheese or simply a couple of glasses at the end of an evening.

Taylor's also offers a particularly neat way of illustrating what happens as time in cask increases. Its range moves through 10, 20, 30 and 40 Year Old Tawnies before arriving at Golden Age, its 50 Year Old. It's not simply a case of each wine becoming richer and heavier. Fruit gradually gives way to nuttiness, spice and savoury complexity, while concentration is balanced by a freshness that stops the wines becoming ponderous.

10 YEAR OLD: GREAT FOR GIFTING

Taylor's 10 Year Old Tawny is the natural entry point, typically appearing on UK shelves at around the £30 mark. That puts it comfortably within gifting territory without requiring a particularly momentous birthday.

The wine is matured in seasoned oak casks of around 630 litres, during which time its youthful colour and fruit are gradually transformed. There is still plenty of ripe berry character in the finished wine, but Taylor's describes fig, chocolate, butterscotch, oak and nuttiness too.

That combination makes the 10 Year Old arguably the most immediately versatile wine in the range. Taylor's suggests



In association with Mentzendorff

almonds, berry-fruit desserts and dark chocolate, as well as blue cheese. Walnuts or roasted almonds are another, gloriously uncomplicated, option.

In other words, this does not need an elaborate ceremony. Slightly chilled tawny, a bowl of nuts and two glasses is perhaps a more useful image to put into a customer's mind than the traditional port decanter.

20 YEAR OLD: THE NEXT STEP

At around £50, the 20 Year Old represents a significant step up but remains within reach as a serious present or special-occasion bottle. Current UK listings put it broadly between £45 and £55.

Here, the balance between fruit and mature cask character has shifted. Taylor's says the fruit has mellowed further while the spicy and nutty aromas of ageing have become more intense. The house's tasting note brings in orange flower, oak, jammy fruit and a long, rich finish.

This is also where tawny port's affinity with caramelised flavours becomes particularly useful. Crème brûlée is an obvious partner, as are figs, almonds, caramel and strawberries. Dried fruit and walnuts allow for the even simpler approach of putting the bottle on the table and dispensing with pudding altogether.

For merchants who only want two aged tawnies on the shelf, 10 and 20 years make a logical pairing: one accessible enough to encourage experimentation, the other offering an obvious upgrade.

30 YEAR OLD: NEW TERRITORY

The jump to 30 Year Old takes the category into a different realm. Taylor's says only every two or three years is a reserve with sufficient structure, fruit and power set aside for prolonged oak ageing. Wines that have reached their peak after three decades are then blended to achieve the required balance and house style.

UK retail prices are currently around £115, so this is less an impulse purchase than a bottle with a reason attached to it: a 30th birthday or anniversary perhaps, or simply a present for somebody who has moved beyond the familiar choices.

The profile has become correspondingly more contemplative. Dried fruit, honey, caramel and nuts are wrapped in a silky

texture, but Taylor's also points to a slightly austere quality that stops sheer richness taking over.

The suggested food territory remains figs, almonds, caramel and crème brûlée, but at this level there is a good case for keeping things simple. A few walnuts, dried fruit or no accompaniment at all allows the wine itself to become the pudding.

40 YEAR OLD: DRAMA UNFOLDS

By 40 years, tawny has moved decisively into luxury territory. Taylor's 40 Year Old is produced in limited quantities and currently sells in the UK at roughly £175 to £195.

Four decades in wood have concentrated the wine dramatically. Taylor's talks about dried fruit, honey, nutmeg, roasted coffee and intense nuttiness, with evaporation over the years creating an almost viscous texture and extraordinary length.

What is interesting is that the basic serving advice does not suddenly become more complicated as the price rises. It remains ready to drink, with no decanting required, and is still best served gently chilled. The food suggestions remain refreshingly attainable too: figs, almonds, caramel, crème brûlée, strawberries, walnuts and dried fruit.

There is something rather appealing about pairing a £170-plus bottle of port with a handful of good walnuts.

50 YEAR OLD: STRIKING GOLD

Finally comes Taylor's Golden Age 50 Year Old Tawny. At around £250-plus in current UK retail listings, this is emphatically a special-occasion wine. Taylor's itself presents the wine as a natural choice for a 50th birthday, anniversary or other five-decade milestone.

It is blended from rare ports that have spent five decades in seasoned oak, with wines originating in the eastern reaches of the Douro and matured in Taylor's cellars.

By this stage the flavour vocabulary has become decidedly exotic. Taylor's finds rum and raisin, clove and nutmeg, prunes, quince and apricot, lemon and orange zest, scorched pineapple, passion fruit and lychee, together with toasted coconut, almonds and butterscotch. Crucially, alongside all that concentration is enough



acidity to provide freshness and poise.

That freshness is an important part of the story across the range. Aged tawny may be sweet, complex and increasingly concentrated as the decades accumulate, but it need not feel heavy or old-fashioned.

Perhaps that is the most useful message for merchants. Taylor's five age statements create an unusually clear ladder, from a bottle in the mid-£20s to a genuinely rare wine costing 10 times as much. Customers can quickly grasp what they are trading up to: additional time, rarity and complexity.

Taylor's Aged Tawny range comes in gift presentation boxes for maximum impact in the festive season



To Christmas – and beyond!

The festive season gives port its biggest shop-window moment, but the bottle need not retreat with the decorations. Lanchester Wines is encouraging merchants to use **Vista Alegre**'s range as a route into chilled serves, spritzes and cocktails throughout the year

Port has a peculiar retail habit. It enjoys a burst of attention in December, takes its place beside the Stilton and then, all too often, disappears from the conversation. That leaves both the merchant and the customer missing much of the fun.

Lanchester Wines thinks the answer is to begin with a familiar Christmas purchase, then show people what else port can do. Its Vista Alegre range covers white, rosé, ruby and tawny styles, giving retailers several ways to move the bottle away from its after-dinner connotations.

In Portugal, serving port chilled, over ice or with tonic is hardly radical. In a British wine shop it can still feel like a useful little revelation.

There is a solid Douro story behind the range. Vista Alegre is made by Vallegre, a five-generation family company headquartered at Quinta da Vista Alegre in the Cima Corgo, a few kilometres from Pinhão. The estate's winegrowing history reaches back to the 19th century. At Vallegre's Midão cellar, port matures in casks, vats and barrels that can be more than 100 years old.

The styles give merchants the chance for quirky handselling. **Fine White** can be poured cold with tonic and mint, or lengthened with pineapple juice over ice. **Fine Rosé**, made from Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz and Tinta Barroca, brings raspberry, cherry, floral and grapefruit notes. It can work as a

In association with Lanchester Wines

For more information about Vista Alegre and all other wines in the range, visit lanchesterwines.co.uk



Fine Rosé: an obvious spritz ingredient

straightforward chilled aperitif, but its colour and berry fruit also make it an obvious spritz ingredient.

Ruby remains the fruit-driven option for chocolate, blue cheese and the traditional post-dinner glass. Tawny heads towards spice, dried fruit and nuts: **Vista Alegre Fine Tawny** spends five years in oak casks and makes a persuasive partner for mature cheese, nut-based puddings or nothing more elaborate than a bowl of roasted almonds. Keep the cheeseboard, of course. Just give staff more than one script.

Cocktails provide the most visible alternative. Lanchester Wines suggests a Tawny Port Old Fashioned, combining 25ml of Vista Alegre Fine Tawny with 50ml bourbon, maple syrup, Angostura bitters and orange peel.

Rosé can take the place of sweet vermouth in a Negroni-style serve, with gin, Campari and fresh orange, or form the base of a lighter drink with Prosecco and blood orange soda.

None of this requires turning the shop into a cocktail bar. A chilled bottle at a tasting, a simple recipe card or a small "Port beyond Christmas" selection will do much of the work. Merchants could bundle a bottle with tonic, bitters or soda, or use a January event to revisit the bottles customers bought in December.

That follow-up matters. Port offers plenty of flavour for the money and a bottle provides numerous modest serves, but versatility only becomes a selling point when somebody shows the customer what it looks like. A festive sale is welcome. Better still is a reason for port to keep earning shelf space once the tinsel has been packed away.



A Tawny Port Old Fashioned



Quinta do Vesúvio

Queen of the Douro



Known to many as “The Queen of the Douro”, Quinta do Vesúvio’s magnificent house, chapel and winery were built in 1827 – almost two centuries ago. Its vineyards have long been considered among the most important in the region.

Described as a cornerstone of Douro winemaking by the Viscount of Villa Maior in 1876, Vesúvio was central to the development of the Douro Superior at that time.

Covering 137 hectares, Vesúvio’s vineyards have predominantly northern and western exposures, at altitudes ranging from 110 metres near the Douro River to 450 metres. Their sheltered aspect and relatively cool conditions help produce grapes of extraordinary freshness and finesse, despite the heat of the Douro Superior.

Quinta do Vesúvio produces a concise selection of wines. Its “second wine”, Pombal do Vesúvio, and the estate’s flagship Quinta do Vesúvio are considered two of the finest wines in the Douro Valley.

The quinta also produces a Vintage Port; the 2024 vintage earned 98 points from James Suckling.

Quinta do Vesúvio *Vintage Port 2024*

The first declared vintage in seven years was well worth the wait. The 2024 marks a return to classic Douro elegance and harmony. As Charles Symington puts it, these are “wines that whisper, rather than shout”. Production was smaller than usual at Vesúvio, which remains the only estate to foot-tread its grapes in traditional lagares. Irresistible young, but it will age beautifully.

Quinta do Vesúvio 2022

One of the Douro’s marquee wines. A cool September after an extraordinarily hot summer brought freshness and elegance to match its concentration and power. Made from 65% Touriga Nacional and 30% Touriga Franca, and aged for 15 months in French oak, it offers dark, brooding cassis and bramble, with the quinta’s hallmark notes of garrigue and lavender.



In association with Fells

For enquiries or more information,
email info@fells.co.uk



Pombal do Vesúvio **2023**

The estate’s second wine is largely made from the same varieties, with a touch of Alicante Bouschet for ripeness and earlier drinking. Ten months in French oak barrels have accentuated its plush fruit and emphasised the elegance of high-altitude grapes. Beautifully balanced, approachable and remarkable value.

INDIE
WINE CLUB
TOOTING MARKET

WINE CLUB

magnificent MERCH

Creative, commercially savvy and never shy of a bit of branding, plenty of indies have made merchandise a useful sideline. **Claire Harries** exits via the gift shop and admires some particularly eye-catching wares

Amy Gaiger

Indie Wine Club, Tooting, south London

"Branded wine glasses were always something I wanted when I opened Indie Wine Club," Amy says. "I think they help to reinforce the brand and they also look cool. The glasses are mainly for daily use in our bar, but we also sell them in our shop.

"The only tricky element was that we also needed the certified 125ml measure on them since we pour at the tables. It took quite a bit of searching, but we finally found a supplier that did both. Once we found the supplier, the process was very easy. I added 'Tooting Market' to our existing logo so when they are in people's cupboards at home they remember where we are – whether they bought them, or if they somehow found their way into their bags!"

Actually, stolen glasses have not been a problem. "Even at our larger tastings, they are all returned to us," Amy says.

Perhaps it helps that they are available to buy in store, which serves as a gentle reminder that these items have a value attached.

"They make great gifts and mementos, especially around Christmas. We've had some of our customers buy them to remember us by when they've moved away, which is sweet.

"As well as our regular wine glass, we also had a limited-edition first birthday glass designed by an artist, which was a fun way to celebrate our first year.

"They're not a massive money spinner for us, but that's not why we got them. They are great for brand recognition and engagement. Our customers love them and they are always photographed and posted on social media."





Bryan Houde

Wine Monkey, Chippenham, Wiltshire

"Merchandise is one of those things that is nice to have but it's not an essential," says Bryan. "I'd love to do more but it's about finding time, ideas, suppliers, and obviously money to do it."

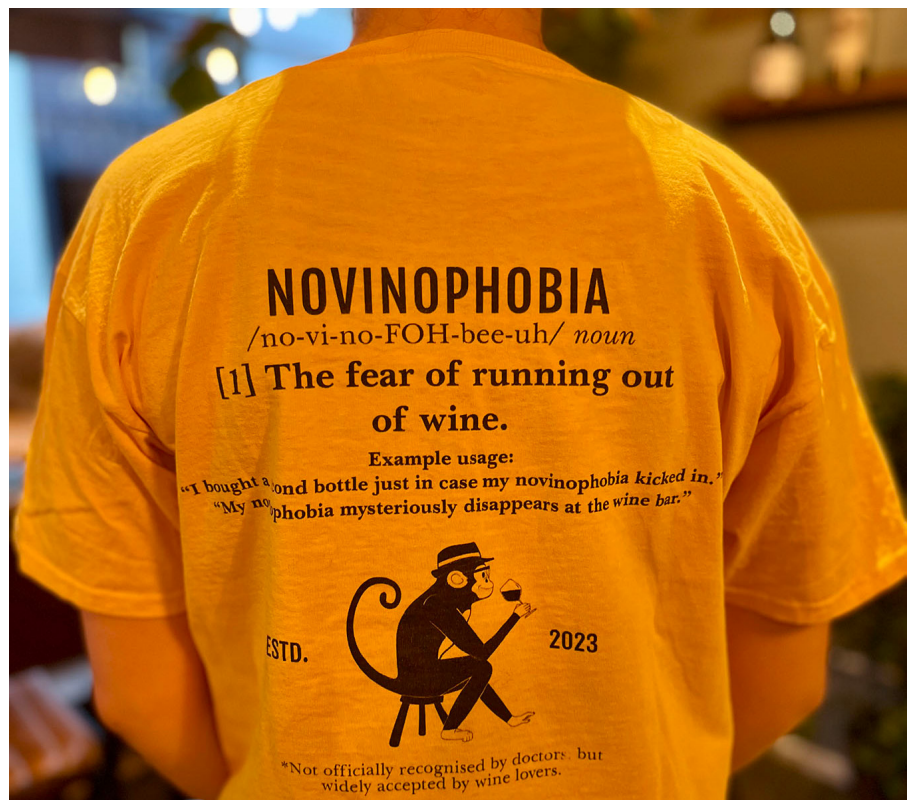
Currently the Wine Monkey merch consists of T-shirts in two different designs, bobble hats, corkscrews, jute bags and DropStops.

"It's expressive and fun and allows customers to join in. Plus if someone is walking down the street with my Wine Monkey bag or bobble hat, they're advertising for me," says Bryan.

"The jute bags are great because they're heavy duty and will last almost forever and they are a little bit different to the regular tote bag that everyone else makes. The corkscrews are really good for gifting – if someone is buying a nice bottle for a gift, it's a nice add-on, a sort of grab-and-go concept.

"The DropStops are a really good tool because they are inexpensive, so they are great for giving away to certain customers. We also use them in the bar and they're a good talking point because a lot of customers have never seen them before. I've built them into the bottle price of every single bottle I sell, so we encourage them to take them home as they are reusable and then there's my brand sitting in someone's kitchen drawer."

Like the DropStops and corkscrews, the T-shirts are also an item used within the business as they form part of the uniform. "I'm looking for other ideas of things that are useful," Bryan adds. "It would be great to do branded ice buckets."





Suzy Nutt

Pulp, Ealing, west London

Pulp's tote bags, caps, T-shirts and socks all feature the signature "scrollsant" pastry mashup of a flaky croissant and a rolled scroll synonymous with the wine and coffee shop.

"It's a silly little doodle I did years ago but it just seems to work on everything really well because it's so simple," says Suzy. "I think once you've been into the shop and had one of them freshly baked it's all very identifiable, especially within our neighbourhood.

"I love merch and I also love quality, so I've made sure all our stuff is really high-end. That said, I didn't want to price people out of being able to get something.

"Not everyone wants to spend £25 on a cap or £30 on a T-shirt, but the socks are only a tenner. They are made of organic cotton bamboo and they look great. We're already ordering a repeat run because they've been so popular. It's funny because they've appealed to all age groups. Teenagers, parents and grandparents are all wearing them.

"It makes sense to do as big an order as possible so we can pass on a reduced price to our customers. We don't work on big margins at all when it comes to merch as for us it's more about having customers come in and buy something at a reasonable price that they can take away and wear around London. Maybe we are looking at a 15% or 20% margin."



HAPPY HAMPERS



ICED BISCUITS

These hand-decorated biscuits from Original Biscuit Bakers come individually wrapped. Cheery, bright and affordable hamper fillers and a thoughtful festive extra at the till.

Available in a case size of 16 (20 for Santa Man & Tree).

RRP £1.75-£3.50

info@originalbiscuitbakers.co.uk

Keep the tills ringing throughout the festive season with some tempting gourmet gifts.

Whether you choose to display chocolates alongside the vintage ports, have some festive cookies by the counter or go full-throttle with a dedicated bespoke Christmas hamper station, there's always room for extra treats



Family-run **Tenuta Marmorelle** is synonymous with premium Italian food products. Traditional Panettone is very much part of its offering, and this Christmas sees the launch of the ultra-luxe Red Velvet Panettone. RRP £19.50

tenutamarmorelle.com



BREAKFAST TEA

This single-estate Assam tea is all about terroir: it's created from selected leaves from the Tonganagaon tea gardens. Roots & Wings specialises in organic products, and the loose leaf Organic English Breakfast Tea is new to the range. RRP £6.99

p.furniss@rootsandwings.uk.net

EDIBLE ART

Art Chocolat has created a really bougie box of chocs. The miniature Jackson Pollock-like creations look festive enough to hang on the tree. Flavour combinations include yuzu dark chocolate, raspberry and black sesame, ginger and miso, and on more familiar ground, milk chocolate orange. RRP from £13.99 to £69.99.

info@art-chocolat.com



CRANBERRY SAUCE

Cranberry sauce is a Christmas classic, and this version from GingerBeard's Preserves offers a modern twist. The deep and rich flavours of the Moor Beer Old Freddy Walker combined with the tart cranberries brings something new to the party. RRP £4.55

claire@gingerbeardspreserves.co.uk



CHRISTMAS GIN

For Christmas in a bottle, look no further than Orkney Gin Company's Special Edition Christmas Old Tom Gin. Beautiful on the outside and quintessentially Christmas on the inside with flavours of citrus, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves.

RRP £38

info@orkneygincompany.com



GOURMET MUSTARD

Jazz up cold-cuts and leftovers with some gourmet condiments. The sweeter Dijon base of the Truffle Mustard, combined with the earthy truffle flavours, will thrill mustard lovers and convert any doubters of the yellow stuff. RRP £10.95

truffleguysuk.com



CHEESE BISCUITS

Baked on the Isle of Mull, these melt-in-the-mouth cheese biscuits are made with award-winning local mature cheddar ensuring a satisfyingly cheesy punch. RRP £3.99

islandbakery.scot



ARTISANAL CHOCOLATE

Choc-Affair is an ethically run artisanal chocolate company based in York. Every bar tells a story and its Christmas range is no exception. Chocolate bars that deserve a spot on wine merchants' shelves all year round. RRP £3.99

choc-affair.com

HANDMADE GINGERBREAD

As good as home-baked and, in some cases, infinitely better, this traditional and spicy gingerbread is handmade in small batches in a West Sussex family bakery. A gluten-free version is also available.

Available in a case size of 10. RRP £4.98 per 300g unit.

lesleyward@horshamgingerbread.co.uk





Tain l'Hermitage in the Rhône Valley

Thorman Hunt Rhône Tasting

The tasting will present Rhône wines from family growers, including 2025 en primeur samples and wines from drinking vintages.

Producers include Vieux Télégraphe, Jean-Luc Jamet, Lionel Faury, Yves Cuilleron, Laurent Fayolle, Mas Mellet, Vincent Paris, La Soumade, La Collière, Chaume-Arnaud, Les Pallières, Domaine des Bernardins, Roger Sabon and Charbonnière.

Email vanessa@thormanhunt.co.uk.

Monday, November 2
67 Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5ES

Maltby & Greek Xinomavro Tasting

Maltby & Greek marks International Xinomavro Day with a drop-in tasting featuring five Greek producers.

Alpha Estate, Domaine Karanika, Magoutes Vineyards, Maras Winery and Melitzani Winery will be pouring. A masterclass starts at 3pm.

For more information, email clare@island-media.co.uk.

Monday, November 2
Wildflowers Restaurant
57 Pimlico Road
London SW1W 8NE

Best of Portugal Tasting

Beth Willard presents wines selected from her Portugal Special Report for timatkin.com.

The report covers close to 100 producers and 672 wines, including older vintages and wines yet to be released. The tasting will feature wines scoring more than 93 points, including Willard's first Portuguese 100-point wine. A masterclass, "Journey Around Portugal with 10 Top Wines", starts at 3pm.

Email clare@island-media.co.uk.

Tuesday, November 3
Westminster Chapel
Buckingham Gate
London SW1E 6BS

Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux Tasting

More than 100 members of the Union des Grands Crus de Bordeaux will present wines from the 2024 vintage.

The tasting covers appellations including the Médoc, Graves, Pessac-Léognan, Sauternes, Barsac, Saint-Émilion and Pomerol.

By invitation only. To request a place, email celine@otaria.co.uk.

Tuesday, November 3
RHS Lindley Hall
London SW1P 2PB

Eight Wineries Eight Perspectives South African Tasting

Eight South African producers will pour wines from family-owned estates.

The line-up is Mullineux, Vilafonté, Kanonkop, Klein Constantia, Meerlust, Sadie Family Wines, Hamilton Russell Vineyards and Restless River.

Places are limited and by invitation only. Email clare@island-media.co.uk.

Monday, November 9
Level 9, Blavatnik Building
Tate Modern, Bankside
London SE1 9TG

Bergerac-Duras Tasting

Producers from Bergerac and Duras will pour their wines at a walk-around tasting.

Two masterclasses begin at noon and 3pm. Places are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

To register, email vdevimeux@hopscotchgroupe.com.

Monday, November 9
Carousel
19-23 Charlotte Street
London W1T 1RW

QUIZ TIME

Answers to questions on page 29

1. (c) Mondeuse 2. (a) Slovakia
3. (a) The corkscrew – versions of the "bottle screw" were documented in the 17th century, well before the tin can, bicycle or postage stamp
4. Tastevin 5. Georgia

Love Loire Tasting

Masters of Wine Beverley Blanning, author of *Wines of the Loire Valley*, and Rebecca Gibb, Loire specialist for Vinous, are behind this event.

Producers will pour wines from across the Loire, including Sancerre, Chinon, Muscadet, Saumur, Bourgueil, Saint-Nicolas-de-Bourgueil, Anjou, Vouvray, Montlouis and Touraine.

Email clare@island-media.co.uk.

Tuesday, November 10

**Westminster Chapel
Buckingham Gate
London SW1E 6BS**

Fine Rosé Day

This tasting follows the 2025 "Can Rosé be a Fine Wine?" debate and discusses to what extent fine rosé is influenced by its terroir.

Rosés from around the world, including older vintages, will be available to taste.

To register, email ben@pink.wine.

Monday, November 16

**One Great George Street
London SW1P 3AA**

New Zealand Winegrowers New Release

New Zealand Winegrowers will present recent releases, including wines from the 2026 vintage.

The self-pour tasting will arrange wines by variety, vintage, region and price. All wines are produced in accordance with a recognised New Zealand sustainability programme.

To register, email sarahs@nzwine.com.

Tuesday, November 17

**St James Room
67 Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5ES**



Autumn arrives in the Loire Valley

Wines of Bolivia Masterclass

Tim Atkin MW and Cees van Casteren MW will lead a masterclass and tasting.

Bolivia's vineyards range from 1,600m to 2,850m above sea level. The tasting will include wines made from local and international grape varieties.

The masterclass runs from 11.30am to 12.30pm, followed by a tasting and food. Luis Pablo Granier, president of Wines of Bolivia and owner of Campos de Solana, and Franz Kohlberg of Tours des Étoiles will attend.

Email eleanor@randr.co.uk.

Monday, November 23

**67 Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5ES**



Maybe the wines have nice alpacaging



Unbottling

with Rachel Gibson MBACP

Eating disorders

What do eating disorders have to do with the wine trade? Quite a lot, it turns out.

The latest research indicates that up to 3.5 million people in the UK are living with some sort of eating disorder (NHS, 2023). Of course, this covers a wide spectrum, from life-threatening illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia, to lesser-known conditions such as orthorexia and even drunkorexia (worth reading up on).

The wine trade is notoriously sociable. In this industry there are inevitably regular invites to social events, from drinks in the pub to formal dinners and tastings. Social anxiety is a powerful and sometimes crippling worry for many of us, but combine this with an eating disorder, and you may find yourself in an impossible situation. The way we treat our bodies is, without doubt, intrinsically linked to our minds and mental wellbeing. There may be an overwhelming sense of panic at the thought of having to eat or drink in front of other people. Feelings of shame, fear of judgment and feeling exposed can control our thoughts and often our decision-making.

Colleagues may look perfectly healthy on the outside as eating disorders don't always show up in our physical appearance. Some of us may be struggling with a diagnosable eating disorder, yet so far are doing a good job of hiding it. As an employer or colleague of someone you think may be suffering, it is important to keep the avenues of communication open and to be sensitive. In my experience as a professional therapist working with eating disorders, the common factor that sparks a route to recovery is feeling a sense of hope. We all need something to live for, a purpose and a reason for being here. Not easy in such a challenging world, but also not impossible, and feeling the support of caring people is a good place to start.

Rachel is an integrative counsellor and a member of the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy. She formerly ran Wine Utopia in Winchester. She offers ongoing online counselling sessions at the reduced rate of £35 per 50 minutes, so mention this article. Email rachel@rachelgibsoncounselling.co.uk or visit rachelgibsoncounselling.co.uk



ASK Phoebe

Phoebe Weller of Valhalla's Goat in Glasgow is our unregulated agony aunt

How can I win something but stay sane too?

Dear Phoebe

I've been nominated for yet another Prestigious Independent Wine Shop Award, but I simply cannot bring myself to fill out the 12-page questionnaire about our "brand values". How many times do I have to state that we sell good wine to people who want to drink it? The administrative chest-thumping makes me want to gouge my eyes out. And yet, deep down, I desperately want to win something – if only for the brief, glittering illusion that my life isn't just stocking shelves and waiting for the coffee buzz to wear off so's I can have another coffee. What on earth should I write?

Augusta, St Augustines

Dear Auggie

I simply do not know. Have you thought about getting a marketing degree? Despite my Beloved murmuring "not marketing, son" when his youngest signed up, his retellings of Strategic Brand Positioning, Behavioural Segmentation, Stakeholder Management and Omnichannel Strategy have kept me and the cat on tenterhooks! The OU may have something that would fit into your time between Tactical Shelf-aesthetic Management and Iterative Caffeine Onboarding. You're never too old for Adaptive Skillset Integration!

HTH, Phoebe

Cheated of victory by charlatans

Dear Phoebe

Just up the road, the local rivals have picked up yet another shiny trophy for



Would you want the job of dusting it?

their window. Frankly, it's a farce. We have a far better range, our staff actually know what malolactic fermentation is, and our punters love us. Yet year after year, we get completely overlooked by whatever shadowy panel of judges decides these things. Why do the charlatans always get the glory while proper shops get ignored?

Deirdre, Dirleton

Dear Deirdre

Dearie, dearie me, dear Deirdre – get you with your Knowledge and your Range and your Big Moanie Pants. No one likes a Moanie Pants, Deirdre. Have you thought maybe your gigantic, hole-y Moanie Pants are the reason you've not got Winning

Pants? I may have said this before, but suck it up! Catch yourself on! Gaia provides the conditions for your growth and fulfilment, like an apple with its little winking calyx arse and carpelled pips, ready to sprout and unfurl, grow tall and take root, and spread gracious chlorophyllic palms to the heavens – but not with those skiddy MPs on. Winning Pants! Not Moanie Pants!

HTH, Phoebe

So maybe you can buy success

Dear Phoebe

Every year when the Top of the Pops Indies List comes out, I notice a suspicious correlation between the shops taking top spots and the shops racking up the biggest invoice totals with the competition's lead sponsor. Do I actually need to transform my business model to get on this sodding list, or do I just need to start shifting forty cases of commercial Pinot Grigio a week from whichever importer has their logo on the trophy?

Lucian, Scremerston

Dear Luci

How very dare you! I can tell you, hand on heart, that those Pinot Grigios are both nipped and tucked and fantastically refreshing – the real thing, Vorsprung durch Technik, Every Little Helps, I'm lovin' it! – and in no way a cynical ploy for a sticker on a door. It's a help to be helped for those that need no help. A helpful hand of happy helping hands.

HTH, Phoebe

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Julia Langshaw, north of the UK:
julia@richmondwineagencies.com

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ESPORÃO

OLIVE OILS The Perfect Christmas Gift

Two new additions to the Hatch portfolio, perfect for the festive gifting season: premium **Extra Virgin Olive Oils** from **Esporão** and **Zuccardi**, bringing the same quality and provenance as their wines.

FAMILIA ZUCCARDI

Pioneers of Argentine olive oil since Miguel Zuccardi's first monovarietal harvest in 2004, today growing over 100 varieties across their groves. Producing: **Organic Blend Extra Virgin Olive Oil** and **Arauco Extra Virgin Olive Oil**.

ESPORÃO

Founded in 1973, Esporão is one of Portugal's leading wine and olive oil producers, cold-pressing native Alentejo varieties at their own estate mill using sustainable methods. Producing: **DOP Norte Alentejano Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil** and **Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil**.



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AWIN BARRATT SIEGEL
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**ROBERT
WEIL**
Junior

Have you tried Robert Weil Jr. yet?

It's the perfect collection for the upcoming holiday season with something for everyone

The range comprises a white, red and rosé collection crafted from Pinot varieties including Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir and Pinot Noir Rosé. The fruit is sourced from long-standing grower partners in neighbouring Rheinhessen. This project is spearheaded by the fifth generation of the Weil family.

For further details or samples, please contact your Account Manager.

FELLS

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Four exciting new additions to our Spanish portfolio

For over 30 years, visionary winemaker **Telmo Rodríguez** and his partner **Pablo Eguzkiza** have been on a winemaking odyssey to rediscover and revive Spain's lost vinous heritage. **Basa** was the first white wine they made, in 1996, sourced from the historic Rueda village of La Seca. A few years later, the duo helped restore and protect the wealth of very old bush vines in Toro. Today, many of the ungrafted vines used for the **Gago** wines are over 100 years old. We are thrilled to add two more of Telmo's projects to our list.

Rising star **Javi Revert** has been a driving force in revitalising remarkable old vineyards and local varieties, particularly the near-extinct Arcos, in La Font de la Figuera, south of Valencia. Javi's beautifully poised wines are made in small quantities with meticulous attention to detail and are certified organic.

Forjas del Salnés in Rías Baixas is owned by Rodrigo "Rodri" Mendez, widely regarded as one of Galicia's most talented and intuitive makers of Albariño. Sourced from the prominent, coastal Val do Salnés sub-region, Rodri's Leirana is vibrant and expressive with a saline finish.



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sales@hnwines.co.uk
www.hnwines.co.uk



Welcome to our portfolio, Inama

Scan here to
find out more.



We are delighted to welcome leading Soave producer, Inama, to our Italian portfolio.

Widely regarded as one of the foremost producers in Veneto, currently with the highest-scoring Soave on The Wine Advocate, Vinous and JancisRobinson.com*, Inama is helping to shape the future of wine production in the region.

With a proud heritage spanning three generations, the founder, Giuseppe Inama, began purchasing plots in the region in the 1950s. The winery has since developed a reputation for producing highly complex Soave from 100% Garganega, grown on the ancient volcanic soils of Monte Foscario.



I N A M A

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www.mentzendorff.co.uk

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1858



Taylor's holds one of the most extensive reserves of very old cask aged Port. They include a collection of rare Single Harvest Ports. These are Ports from a single year which age to full maturity in seasoned oak casks and display the year of harvest on the label.

In 1976 The Douro Valley experienced an exceptionally dry winter followed by a hot summer, with conditions bordering on drought. There had not been a truly rainy winter since 1972. Rain finally arrived at the end of August, and September was cool, with light rainfall. The harvest began on 23 September, with fully ripe bunches free from disease.

This Limited Edition Port is rich chestnut in colour, with a broad amber rim. An elegant, floral, beautifully perfumed nose with an opulent core of wild honey, treacle, tea leaf and a delicate red cherry compote, delivers wonderful freshness. Cedary cigar box aromas, notes of wild rosemary, thyme and a kiss of fresh mint add a discreet level of complexity. The palate is luscious and lifted by a fresh acidity with flavours of blood orange marmalade, dried figs, apricots and rum babá. The finish is bright, lean, fresh and harmonious.

A superb Single Harvest Tawny Port!



Q&A

“I have a completely irrational fear of pigeons and chickens!”

David Knott
Graft Wine Company

David started with Majestic before completing a wine MBA at the University of South Australia followed by five years as buyer for the Emirates Group. He founded The Knotted Vine, which merged with Red Squirrel to form Graft, which he now runs. He also created Mother Vine, the bar and shop near Sloane Square in London.

What's the first wine you remember drinking?

I remember secretly tasting Champagne with my brother at my uncle's wedding when I was about nine years old. But as a legal-aged drinker, probably something like Clos de los Siete Malbec.

What job would you be doing if you weren't in the wine trade?

Romantically, something in music.
Realistically, a restaurant GM.

How do you relax?

I've recently got into crosswords ... they really help me to switch off when work is full on.

What's the best book you've recently read?

With two young boys, reading lots of books is a distant memory and mainly limited to cookbooks. I love Fuchsia Dunlop's books on Chinese food: I think she is the best food writer out there. Her new book came out a few weeks back and is superb. Novel-wise, I recently reread *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by Murakami, which I loved.

Give us a TV recommendation.

I really enjoyed *Widow's Bay* and I'm slightly obsessed with the Michael Jordan documentary, *The Last Dance*.



Do you have any sporting loyalties?

Diehard Harlequins supporter. I have a close friend who I have known since I was four whose father Roger Looker was chairman of the rugby club (a bit of club legend and a key figure in turning rugby into a professional game in the 1990s), so we used to go down to the stadium from a very young age. Nowadays I have a season ticket with my brother and it's a great way to catch up with him in our busy lives over a few beers. It is as much about the Harlequins community and the social aspect as it is the actual rugby.

Who's your favourite music artist?

Tough one, so many. A Tribe Called Quest, Pharoahe Monch, LTJ Bukem, Pink Floyd and Billie Holiday would all be in there somewhere.

Who's your favourite wine critic?

I miss Matthew Jukes dearly. I didn't know him that well but he was always very supportive of Graft and our producers and was generous with his time. And a meticulous taster: I was always amazed

(and envious) by his patience and attention to detail.

Any superstitions?

Not really but I do have a completely irrational fear of pigeons and chickens.

What's your most treasured possession?

My signed vinyl of *Dark Side of the Moon*.

What's your proudest moment?

Becoming a dad.

What's your biggest regret?

I had an opportunity to live and work in Florence for a well-known Chianti producer, before I started Graft. And if I knew then how hard it was to start your own business, I think I would have taken the opportunity to enjoy a few years in Italy before coming back to start this company.

Who's your hero?

Jason Leonard, and my dad. As an aspiring loosehead prop when I was younger and a kid growing up in the 90s, Leonard was always my sporting hero. And my dad: just because he's a great dad. He has always been so supportive and was vital to the business at the start. There were many teary phone calls when I didn't know how we would have enough funds to pay the VAT bill. He has always given me the space to make my own decisions (and mistakes) whilst making it clear he was always available to help or lend an ear if needed, which I really appreciate.

Any hidden talents?

Sadly, I can't think of many. I'm pretty handy at Scrabble but not sure that counts.

What's your favourite place in the UK?

I love London. I lived abroad for nine years before starting Graft and I missed London a lot. I still get a kick of how diverse it is as a city and how much of it there is to explore. I find a new corner or area almost weekly that I haven't been to before and I'm very lucky that my job lets me explore the amazing restaurants the city has to offer. I do also love the Lakes, so Coniston Water would be up there too.

If we could grant you one wish, what would it be?

Bit cheesy but that my children lead a happy life and find love. And a world without pigeons and chickens, of course. ■



*Or would you prefer
something more obvious?*



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