THE WINE MERCHANT.

An independent magazine for independent retailers

Issue 163, November 2026



Dog of the month: ***Billie Holiday***
Lovetts. Newlyn

Beaujolais Nouveau boom continues in the indie trade

Importers have been upping their orders this year despite a challenging vintage plagued by frost, drought and hail

Beaujolais Nouveau is making a comeback in the UK independent wine trade, with several suppliers reporting substantial sales growth as the 2026 release approaches and indies plan celebrations.

At Yapp Brothers, sales have doubled in just one year. The company reintroduced Nouveau in 2025 after a 20-year absence, initially prompted by enquiries from trade customers.

"We are definitely seeing a renaissance of Nouveau," says Yapp's Tom Ashworth. "We shipped around 600 bottles and it all sold that week – mainly to bars and indies, with a little direct to consumer."

This year Yapp has doubled its order to around 1,200 bottles of Arnaud Aucoeur's unfiltered Nouveau, encouraged by increased trade interest and consumer pre-orders.

Flint Wines is also experiencing a surge in demand. It first listed Château Thivin Nouveau in 2025 in response to customer enquiries and reports a 50% increase in sales this year.

"The best contemporary Nouveau wines are crunchy, bright and chillable in a style that's currently bang on trend," says Flint's Will Heslop. "Beaujolais, in general, has captured the imagination of a new generation of wine lovers."

Tim Killen at Alpine Wines agrees that Nouveau is attracting a broader



Anton Rodriguez

Rohit Paktar and Emma Hunt didn't plan on opening a second shop at the same time as they were doing a major refurb of their original site. But that's the way things worked out and now they're reaping the benefits. Story: page 7

INSIDE THIS MONTH

4 COMINGS & GOINGS
Good news for Poole, Saddleworth and Nottingham wine lovers

10 BUDGET ROUND-UP
No respite on duty, but indies will benefit from business rate changes

19 BRIGHT IDEAS
Move over John Lewis, there's a better Christmas ad in Morpeth

21 THE BURNING QUESTION
How many wines can you taste before palate fatigue sets in?

28 MERCHANT PROFILE
Into the heart of polo country with Fairview Wines in West Sussex

36 SUSTAINABILITY
The green credentials of wine can be a talking point for indie merchants

43 WINES UNDER £15
It seems there's no shortage of excellent wines at bargain prices

52 RUNNING CLUBS
The independents who welcome sweaty striders on a regular basis

67 Q&A: MARK SAVAGE MW
Meet the man who blames Hugh Johnson for everything

Nouveau novelty has not worn off

audience. "You've got people in their 60s who remember the Beaujolais runs and the parties, but there's also a younger crowd who like Gamay. They like a lighter style of wine, but also something with complexity."

He reports incremental sales growth, while Wines Under the Bonnet says volumes are holding steady after several years of renewed interest. The latter has even sold a dozen jeroboams, reflecting Nouveau's increasingly celebratory appeal.

The UK is now the third-largest export market for Beaujolais Nouveau, behind Japan and the US. Globally, around 13.8 million bottles were sold in 2025, with exports accounting for approximately 4.9 million. Yet the renewed enthusiasm among British independents appears to be as much about changing perceptions of the wine as a revival of the traditional November festivities.

Improved winemaking has helped shake off Nouveau's old reputation for thin, bubblegum-flavoured reds, although Heslop at Flint believes its essential appeal remains its playfulness rather than its ageing potential.

The 2026 vintage could prove particularly interesting. Frost, drought and hail have severely reduced yields, with some growers reporting losses of around 50%, but early assessments suggest concentrated, well-balanced wines.

"It's been both a horror and a magnificent vintage," says Killen at Alpine. "Most of our growers are 50% down on their harvest. But the contrast is that the quality is stunning."

For Ashworth at Yapp, Nouveau's revival reflects something beyond wine quality. Nostalgia plays a part, but so does the growing appeal of informal, experience-led drinking.

"A *bavette* and a bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau among friends is a good-value, fun night out," he says. "It's a contrast to tablecloths and tasting menus."

• *Indies plan their Nouveau celebrations – page 48.*



A recipe for a "good-value, fun night out"

THE WINE MERCHANT MAGAZINE

winemerchantmag.com 01323 871836 Instagram/Bluesky: @WineMerchantMag

Unit 52 Newhaven Enterprise Centre, Denton Island, Newhaven, East Sussex BN9 9BA

Editor and Publisher: Graham Holter *graham@winemerchantmag.com*
Assistant Editor: Claire Harries *claire@winemerchantmag.com*
Reporter: Jacob Stokes *jacob@winemerchantmag.com*
Advertising: Sarah Hunnisett *sarah@winemerchantmag.com*
Accounts: Naomi Young *naomi@winemerchantmag.com*
Admin and reader liaison: Charlotte Gingell *charlotte@winemerchantmag.com*

The Wine Merchant is circulated to the owners of the UK's 1,022 specialist independent wine shops.

Produced in Sussex by East Print. © Graham Holter Ltd 2026 Registered in England: No 6441762 VAT 943 8771 82

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper | Supporting responsible forestry FSC® C014531



The Savoy
London

CHAMPAGNE
Laurent-Perrier
MAISON FONDÉE
1812

Héritage is borne out of the savoir-faire of Grand Siècle, a complex blend of reserve wines, exceptional for their freshness, elegance and complexity.

Laurent-Perrier

Héritage, chosen by the best.



be**drinkaware**.co.uk

Pooling resources for Dorset launch

Canford Cliffs village in Poole will soon be home to a new indie. Fox & Vine is a joint venture between two friends, Tom Fox and Daniel Freeman.

There's no doubt that this stretch of coastline, which includes Sandbanks, is an affluent one, but Freeman is keen to stress that Fox & Vine will cater for all budgets. "We don't want Fox & Vine to feel exclusive or intimidating. Quite the opposite," he says.

"We want someone looking for a £12 bottle for supper to feel just as welcome as someone choosing a £100 bottle of Champagne. Good wine shouldn't have to come with an attitude."

Freeman has had his eye on the premises for a while. "I've lived here for around 20 years now," he explains, "and this shop has been empty since 2022 or 2023, and every time I walk or drive past, I go, 'we should do something with that unit'.

"It's quite a sizeable shop with room for about 50 or so people to sit comfortably in the bar. There are two areas really – the front will be dedicated to retail and in the back area we'll have a bar, some nice comfy chairs and a big table. People will be able to come in and have wine by the glass but we're mainly looking at an 80/20 split in favour of retail."

Plans also include the hosting of wine tastings and producer-led events, and Freeman is confident the local community will be eager to participate.

"We've put stuff on social media, and we've had some really good feedback from people already, saying that they're really looking forward to doing wine tastings. That's quite a large part of the offering that we'll have," he says.

"I've been talking to one of the guys that used to run the Oddbins in Lilliput and he said they used to have customers who had second homes down in Sandbanks, coming in at the weekend and ordering between five to ten grand's worth of wine at a time. There are still people around who do that, thankfully, but we're creating something that we feel the area has been missing; a proper independent wine merchant, offering a carefully selected range of wines, Champagnes, spirits and locally produced drinks, with a real emphasis on quality."

The pair are also in the process of developing a piece of AI software that they hope to share on an iPad in store to help guide customers. "The idea is that the customers can use it themselves, or we can lead with it and use it alongside our own expertise," Freeman says.



Daniel Freeman (left) and Tom Fox expect an 80/20 split in favour of retail

• ***Le Vieux Comptoir*** *in Marylebone, London, has closed after 13 years of trading. The business, owned by Laurent Faure, comprised a restaurant on the ground floor, with a wine shop above.*

Final date for Callander indie

Macmillan Wines in Callander, Perthshire, has ceased trading. The business was officially dissolved on September 1.

The shop on Main Street had previously been home to a branch of Victoria Wine, managed by Athol Macmillan. When the chain went out of business at the end of 2009, Macmillan, whose family owned the freehold, took on the premises and launched his own shop a few months later.

• ***Bonjour Wines*** *in Cheshire has closed its high street location in Tarporley. Sue Kelly, and daughter Kelly Coop, started the business in 2022 and will continue to operate online only, offering free local delivery and wine subscription boxes.*



Nobu Hotel London
Portman Square

CHAMPAGNE
Laurent-Perrier
MAISON FONDÉE
1812

Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature is crafted in our cellars from exceptional Chardonnay reserve wines to allow for a zero dosage.

Laurent-Perrier

Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature, chosen by the best.



bedrinkaware.co.uk

Tiny deal sees Reserve get bigger

Manchester's Reserve Wines has increased its footprint to five shops, with the recent purchase of fellow merchant Tiny's Tipple in Chorlton.

Ed Gillibrand had traded from the Wilbraham Road store since he started the business almost 14 years ago, but vacated the premises in October once the deal with Reserve was done.

Kate Goodman, owner of Reserve Wines, says: "Ed built something really special here, and we're going to keep that going while adding a few touches of our own.

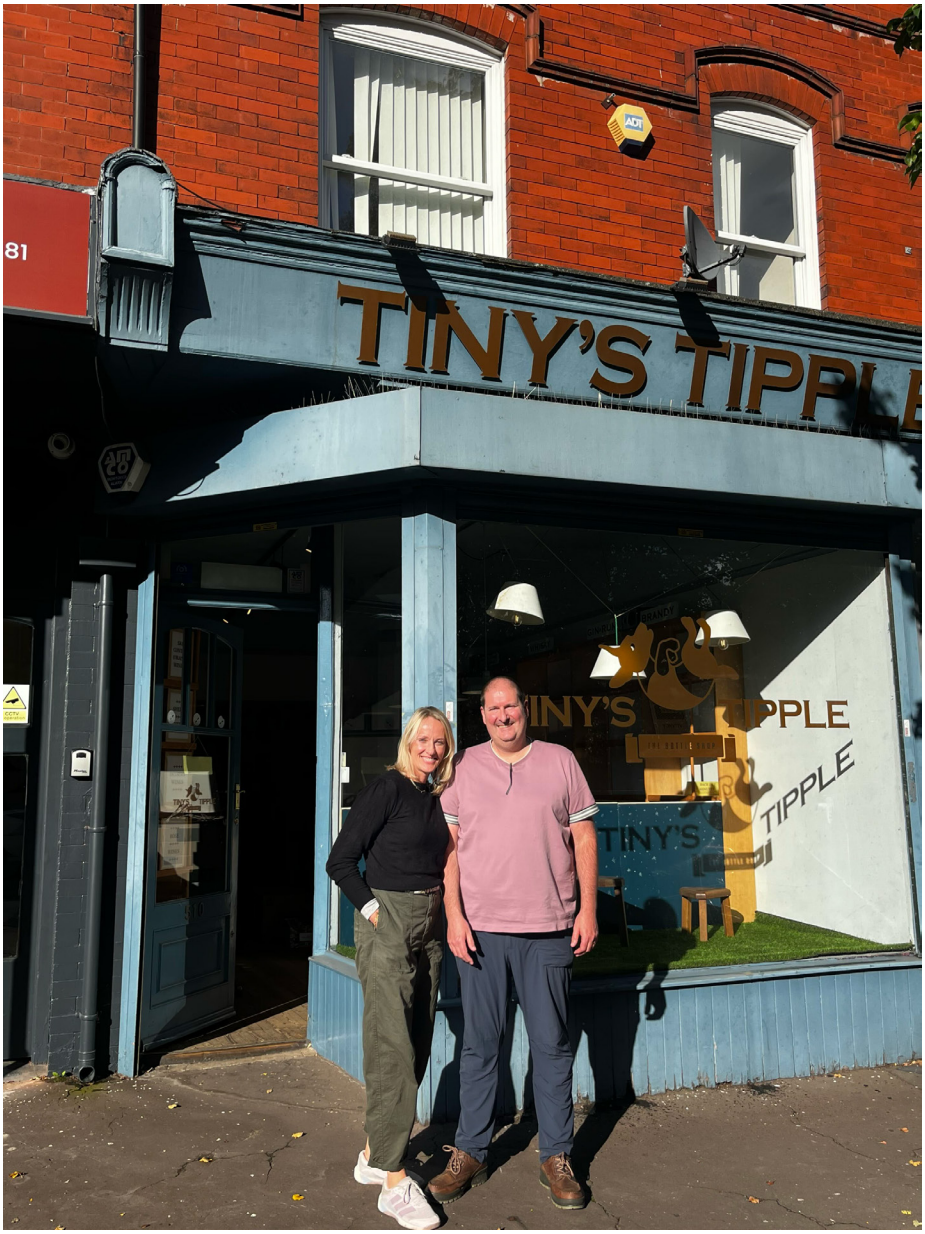
"It will still be a bottle shop, but we'll also be adding some seating so you can enjoy a drink in too. There'll be plenty of wines by the glass, you can open any bottle off our shelves for a small corkage fee, and there'll be sharing boards and nibbly bits including cheese from Chorlton Cheesemongers just up the road."

Gillibrand adds: "The lease had come to an end a while back and although we had plans to move to Devon, we weren't ready, so I was just sort of holding over.

"If we were to stay here we would probably do something similar to what Reserve are doing, but it's a lot of investment; you have to staff it and you've got to change your opening hours. Obviously Reserve have been doing it for years and they've worked out what works and what doesn't. The fact that it continues to be a wine shop is my legacy really."

Goodman adds that she's "itching to get going" with all the ideas she has for the shop which is scheduled to reopen under the Reserve name in mid-November.

Can we expect to see a Tiny's Tipple in Devon any time soon? "I haven't completely ruled it out," admits Gillibrand. "It would have to be a slightly different sort of venture, so a bit like the hybrid model as I think it's hard to stay as purely retail these days. When it goes well, it's really enjoyable, but when it's not going so well, it's not so great."



Kate Goodman with Ed Gillibrand. "He built something really special here"

Saddle up for new Saddleworth indie

Taste Saddleworth was scheduled to open in the Pennines as *The Wine Merchant* went to press.

The new venture, based within the Rose & Crown Business centre in Delph, is led by Lee Donnelly, who has been documenting his progress on Instagram since July.

The last few months have seen Donnelly carrying out the renovations as well as attending trade tastings and supplier meetings. The shop promises to offer wine, craft beer, artisan spirits upon opening, with plans to add cheeses and charcuterie boards as well as tasting events in the future.

• *Licensing permitting, Stockton-on-Tees may soon welcome its only independent wine shop.* ***Lu Lu's Pantry & Wine Room*** *will have a deli, café and retail offering on the ground floor and a wine room above for tastings, and wines by the glass.*

Double trouble for Cornish couple

A Cornish wine merchant which committed to a major expansion at its Newlyn site found itself opening a second shop in the middle of the refurb.

Lovetts owners Emma Hunt and Rohit Paktar are now starting to reap the rewards of opening Arcade Wines in Penzance.

The commitment to opening a second shop coincided with an unexpected option to extend the original Lovetts premises.

"About this time last year our landlord told us that the hairdresser who had the premises next door and upstairs was retiring and offered us the space, increasing our footprint by 100%," says Hunt.

"We'd already taken out a loan to do Arcade Wines in Penzance, but we couldn't say no. Basically we had to do both at once and, I won't lie, it was very hard, and almost killed us, even though we have lots of experience. We haven't clawed ourselves out yet, but we're getting there."

Running two sites means double the overheads, but Hunt says they have "a small but very good team" which includes a "highly skilled barista", an essential for a business that prides itself on the quality of the coffee as much as the wine.

"Our focus at Arcade Wines is incredible coffee. If someone asks, 'where can you get the best coffee in Penzance?' the answer 'I'd like to hear is 'Arcade Wines'. If the question is 'where can I buy a really interesting bottle of Greek wine in Penzance?' the answer is also 'Arcade Wines'.

The two shops may only be a couple of miles apart, but they are sufficiently different to attract a wide range of customers.

"There is some crossover of clientele, but there are people in Penzance that we don't see in Newlyn and vice versa," says Hunt.

"Arcade Wines is a bottle shop that specialises in really high-end coffee to drink in and take away. It has a very small brunch menu, a select wine list to drink in, and it's only open during the day Wednesday to Saturday.

Lovetts, now in its eighth year, serves coffee and other provisions during the day, and is also a bar.

"We have wine on tap, we have a mixologist and we do small plates in the evenings too," Hunt says.

"Newlyn is a working harbour and we have an incredible community. It's very diverse with artists, fishermen, builders and lots of people who have set up independent businesses in the area."

• *Bath indie **Kingsmead Street Bottle** has closed. Owner Simon Bowden says: "We have tried everything over the last couple of years to increase revenue to cover the ongoing increase of all costs, along with the government not hearing the calls from many in our industry to cut VAT. It has left us no choice but to close our doors." Palmer Street Bottle in Frome, a sister company also owned by Bowden, continues to trade.*



Anton Rodriguez

Arcade Wines: the best coffee in Penzance?



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

Some of the best margins in the independent wine trade come from a slightly unglamorous place – the overstocked importer with a clearance list and a deadline to shift it.

We've all been there. A line sells well, you back yourself, you order big, and then it just … slows. Suddenly you're staring at excess stock you were very confident about three months ago. It's the same story for importers, only when their stocktake is done, there could be a few hundred cases of perfectly good wine needing a new home, fast.

Bin ends have an unfair reputation. The word alone conjures dusty bottles and lines nobody wanted – but that's rarely the case. When an importer needs to move stock quickly, margins improve, significantly. The trick is being first to know. Ask your rep to flag clearance lines, get on the email list, and when something interesting lands, move on it.

And when the stock arrives, have a little fun with it. A keenly priced mixed case (just in time for gifting season), a box of wrapped mystery bottles at the till, a "members first" email before anything hits the shop floor. Bin ends don't need a fanfare. They just need a merchant who knows what to do with them.

If you are interested in seeing Alliance's current clearance list, please drop me an email at Alex.Badouin@alliancewine.com.

Alex Baudouin
Head of Independent Off Trade

Importer takes the retail plunge

Specialist importer Basket Press Wines launched a new wine shop and bar, Six Seconds, in Hackney last month.

Founders Jiri Majerik and Zainab Majerikova have chosen the former Haacha Bar site on Kingsland Road.

The Basket Press range of low-intervention wines, sourced from central and eastern Europe, will be supplemented by additional bottles from other UK importers. These include Otros Vinos, Dynamic Vines, Progression Wines and Wines Under the Bonnet.



Six Seconds opened in Hackney last month

"We wanted to have our own wine shop for a long time," says Majerik. "But the idea grew a bit with the space we found. It has a proper bar and a small kitchen so we can do more than we originally planned.

"We will run it as a shop during the day, and in the evening too as there will always be the retail option, but from 2pm when we open, people can come in and have a glass and a bite.

"At the moment we are doing small plates but we are hoping to have chefs come in to do residencies. We're planning to do different events including wine tastings and winemaker's visits. It's going to be quite a varied space."

Why the Six Seconds name? "If you look up the six seconds theory, there's at least two or three which are related to how your brain works," explains Majerikova.

"They're not directly related to wine but six seconds is the time your brain needs to switch between a rational and emotional state.

"For example, if you're kissing somebody it takes six seconds for that kiss to start having a positive effect on you, to begin releasing oxytocin and serotonin to your brain."

Going natural in Nottingham

November will see the arrival of Subterranean Wines in Sneinton Market, Nottingham.

A collaboration between retailer Essen General Store in Beeston, owned by Sam Skinner-Watts and Edward Moore and wine importer Joel Wright of Wright's Wines, the shop will specialise in natural wine.

Wright says the vision is cave à manger style, with a few small tables so customers can have a bit of cheese and charcuterie to accompany the wine, which will mostly be sourced from his portfolio of more than 30 winemakers.

"We are putting in a little bar and we're going to have keg lines as well," says Wright. "The price point for natural wines is a little bit more and having some wine in keg means we can offer them at a good price.

"We'll have an orange wine, which will be a Gewürztraminer blend, and for the white we'll have a Riesling/Pinot Gris blend from Alsace. The red will be a light Syrah from the Ardèche. Our keg wines will probably continue to be from Alsace and the Ardèche, which are just two regions where I think you can still find really good value.

"We sell a lot to restaurants, I guess because there aren't that many wine shops that specialise in natural wine," he adds. "We are starting to grow all around the UK, but primarily natural wine is still biggest in London, so I'd say roughly 80% of our wines go to east London."



UK IMPORTER: TOP SELECTION
T: 020 3959 0759 E: INFO@TOPSELECTION.CO.UK

© DUCKHORN VINEYARDS, ST. HELENA, CA. PLEASE ENJOY IN MODERATION.

Relief on business rates, but not duty

Chancellor John Healey's October statement confirms a 4.55% increase from next February, though some independent wine shops could save nearly £7,000 a year depending on their rateable value

The government has confirmed another inflation-linked increase in alcohol duty. But there was better news for independent wine retailers, with thousands of small shops set to benefit from an increase in the business rates relief threshold.

Chancellor John Healey announced in the Budget that alcohol duty will increase by 4.55% from February 1, 2027, adding further costs for wine merchants and their customers.

The increase will add 14p in duty to a bottle of Prosecco and 18p to a bottle of 14.5% abv red wine. A bottle of gin will attract an additional 49p in duty.

The WSTA described the decision as "breathtaking", arguing that successive duty increases are damaging sales, squeezing businesses and failing to deliver additional revenue for the Treasury.

Miles Beale, WSTA chief executive, said: "No one will be toasting this record-breaking 4.55% RPI increase on top of rising inflation – least of all British consumers who will be paying for this.

"Instead of providing breathing space in a cost-of-living crisis, the Chancellor's alcohol tax hikes will further suffocate British business and serve up nothing for consumers."


THE WINE MERCHANT.

Business rates review could save indies around £6,000

The business rate cut has been the subject of speculation since the summer



Consumers will pay £1.50 more duty on some red wines compared with August 2023

The WSTA says wine sales volumes have fallen by 8% since the introduction of the new alcohol duty system in August 2023, while spirits volumes have declined by 15%.

It calculates that, by February next year, duty on a bottle of 14.5% abv red wine will have risen by £1.50, or 56%, since August 2023. The equivalent increases for port and gin will be £2.19 and £2.15 respectively.

Beale urged ministers to "stop the hikes, look at the numbers and listen to those being impacted", adding that the current approach was closing businesses and pricing consumers out of the market.

But independent wine merchants in England received more encouraging news on business rates.

From April 2027, the rateable value threshold for 100% small business rates relief will increase from £12,000 to £18,000 for qualifying retail, hospitality and leisure premises. Tapered relief will extend to properties with rateable values of up to £21,000, compared with £15,000 currently.

The change means that many smaller independent wine shops currently paying business rates could see their bills eliminated, provided they meet the qualifying conditions. For some, the saving could be almost £7,000.

At Symposium Wines in Lewes, East Sussex, the figure will be more modest – though it's still welcome, says co-owner Henry Breeze.

"It is positive news, undoing the significant business rate increase we experienced last year," he says. "Our bill was £1,309.40.

"Given the increases of costs, notably the minimum wage rises in the last two or three years, this is very welcome and will help reduce the burden."

• The government has given little encouragement to wine importers hoping for a return to duty easement or a fundamental overhaul of the controversial strength-based alcohol duty system.

An HMRC evaluation published on October 28 concludes that the reforms introduced in August 2023 are broadly achieving their objectives, despite acknowledging increased complexity for parts of the wine trade.

The report recognises that calculating duty on individual wines, particularly across different vintages and alcoholic strengths, has created additional administrative burdens. But it argues that businesses have generally adapted to the system.

HMRC acknowledges that incentives to develop lower-strength wines have had little impact. Average wine strength has dipped only marginally, from 11.7% to 11.6%.



Domaine J.A. Ferret

Fondé en 1840

Pioneers of Fuissé

Rooted in Fuissé since 1840, Domaine Ferret has been shaped by generations of remarkable women and safeguarded by Maison Louis Jadot since 2008. Celebrated for the parcel-by-parcel vinification pioneered by Madame Ferret herself, the Domaine crafts distinctive Chardonnay from 100% organic vineyards, capturing Fuissé's extraordinary mosaic of soils.

Pouilly-Fuissé

A true ambassador of Fuissé, crafted from the finest parcels of its picturesque amphitheatre. Elegant and mineral, with beautifully balanced richness and freshness, and layers of stone fruit, acacia and spiced hazelnut.



HATCH MANSFIELD

Contact Hatch Mansfield, the exclusive UK distributor of Domaine Ferret.
info@hatch.co.uk | www.hatchmansfield.com

Trolls can't hurt Matt as he stands up for RNLI

Wnco Mwnco owner faces abuse from the far-right after he bans them from his shop in Cardigan – and then doubles down by donating £2 to the lifeboat charity for every bottle sold



Matt Jones: "It was a bit overwhelming"

Few business owners relish a public spat with far-right trolls. But Matt Jones, owner of Wnco Mwnco in Cardigan, decided it was worth putting his head above the parapet to show his support for the RNLI.

"I want to make myself absolutely clear," he explained on his social media, in remarkably measured tones. "If you think that RNLI volunteers who sacrifice their time to help people in need at sea are anything other than heroes … you're not welcome in my shop. Don't even bother. Fuck off."

Matt reports that "about 64,000" people saw the post, a fair proportion of whom responded with abuse.

"I expected some dickheads, but I really had no expectation that this was going to happen," he says. "It was a bit overwhelming, to be honest.

"I mean, I do recognise I'm not supposed to mix business and politics. But I read things, and I just can't keep my mouth shut sometimes."

Didn't the scale of the abuse shake him up, even a bit?

"Not really, to be honest. I did a post around election time about how I'd sent one of Reform's flyers back to them with some helpful commentary and attached it to a really heavy book on English history and posted it to their freepost address.



"I'd had a few dickheads come out of the woodwork after that one, so I wasn't going into it blind. I knew there'd be some kind of pushback. But yeah, it was a lot more than I expected.

"But I also knew that these people are all talk and they don't actually do anything to back up what they say. And actually that [Reform] post was at the time my most popular post I'd ever done.

"So yeah, it's just something to talk about with customers. And luckily for me, most of my customers are nice, rational people who feel the same way."

Out of all the responses to his RNLI post, Matt estimates that about 500 comments were hostile.

"About half of those are bots, at least, and then the rest of them don't live anywhere near me, and they're not anyone I need to worry about," he says.

"So actually, the abusive comments are nothing to me. What matters is the people waving to me on the street and saying, 'love your post'.

"I've had a lot of people coming into the shop for the first time just because they've seen the post and they want to support. The goodwill I've had outweighs the bad."

Matt decided to reiterate his admiration for the RNLI in another post and pledged to donate £2 to the charity for every bottle sold the following Saturday.

He raised about £120. "It did feel a bit insignificant, to be honest, but it's a gesture of support, and I really hope that other people see this and hopefully aren't afraid to do something similar," he says.

"It felt like the right thing to do, but I didn't want it to seem like I was virtue signalling and just trying to bring in business. I wanted to put my money where my mouth is and double down."

Cardigan RNLI station wasn't involved in the saga. "I've not had any contact with our local team about this," Matt says. "They're customers; I don't want to put them under any other pressures.

"I donate to their raffle every year. I supply wine at cost to their fundraising events, and I give the members a discount in the shop. The only stipulation is that they have to come in and say 'I've got barnacles on my bits' to get the discount."

Matt isn't likely to be less vocal in future on subjects that he cares about. "My biggest learning from this is that it's not going to discourage me from doing anything like that again, because I think overwhelmingly it's been positive," he says.

> Luckily for me, most of my customers are nice, rational people who feel the same way

LE CHIPSIER FRANÇAIS

Brets







'These are the quintessential snacks to sell in any wine bar or shop. These amazing French flavours are like angels weeping sweet tears of joy onto your tongue. Fantastic customer service, and prices are perfect to make a tasty margin'

Marc, Cork of the North









VICTUS EMPORIUM VE

Contact us on: **01172421669** or **sales@victusemporium.co.uk**
You can view more of our amazing products at: **victusemporium.co.uk**

Rising Stars

Elizabeth Cox
Sarah's Cellar
Battle, East Sussex

"To say that Elizabeth has saved me sounds really dramatic," says Sarah Truman, "but before she arrived, everyone would say to me, 'you *are* Sarah's Cellar. You've got to be here or it wouldn't be the same.' That makes you nervous because I've put my name over the door. I'm here all the time. I know what people like to drink, where they like to sit and who they get on with. I manage the space and my customers really carefully, but in Elizabeth I've found somebody who can do exactly the same thing."

Recruiting staff from among happy customers makes sense: the relationship is already established and they understand the culture you've created. Elizabeth is a case in point.

"Elizabeth has been a customer of mine since I opened in the original premises," says Sarah. "She hasn't got a wine background, but she's clever and makes notes on everything. She comes to every tasting in the shop and listens to customers. She has an exceptional personality – she's great with people."

Disenchanted with her career as a primary school teacher, Elizabeth found refuge at Sarah's Cellar, first as a customer and then as an employee. Both experiences helped rebuild her confidence.

"Teaching is an incredibly stressful sector," she says. "Trying to build interpersonal relationships at work is hard because your colleagues are already stressed and the other people you work with are children. I would go to Sarah's Cellar because it's so lovely and has given me a real sense of community. There's a big table in the middle and it doesn't matter if you've come in on your own or with a group – you end up talking to people. Sarah has created something really fun and enjoyable, with a great atmosphere. It's a place where time just seems to flow like the wine; nice and relaxed, with always time for a chat."



Working part-time at Sarah's Cellar leaves Elizabeth time for her creative projects and the possibility of returning to supply teaching.

"Sarah's not going to need a full-time employee unless things go really crazy, so it's nice that I can balance Friday evening shifts, Saturdays and tastings with the extra hours she needs when she's away. I've got my teaching, I write as well, and I've got a little craft business. Having lots of different projects and learning about different things really suits me. Sarah keeps a small stock which constantly rotates, so learning about what we have in is my main education – I get to learn loads."

Sarah is delighted that she can now step away from the shop, even taking a recent holiday. "Elizabeth said she wanted to get her teeth into reorganising things in here," she says. "She's remerchandised, moved everything around and done some super-cleaning. I don't know how she's done it, but it looks great. And now she's handled the ordering for a week, it's given me the confidence to realise I don't have to be here all the time. She can work on a Saturday and close up for me, and I can go home at a normal, sensible hour."

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



If you'd like to nominate a Rising Star, email claire@winemerchantmag.com



THANKS TO ALL OUR READERS & ADVERTISERS FOR YOUR SUPPORT IN 2026

OUR NEXT EDITION WILL BE PUBLISHED ON JANUARY 15, 2027

THE WEBSITE WILL CONTINUE TO BE UPDATED THROUGHOUT DECEMBER AND INTO THE NEW YEAR.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Kukla BEVERAGE LOGISTICS

from vineyard to venue... flawlessly



Robert Kukla
Spedition UK
t: + 44 (0)1708 922 250
e: info.uk@kukla-spedition.com
w: kbl.kukla-spedition.com

AEO UK Authorised Economic Operator

BIFA BRITISH INTERNATIONAL FREIGHT ASSOCIATION

CfA Centre for Assessment ISO 9001 ISO 14001 UKAS MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS 0120

What if your website served like your best staff member?

open imagination



In your shop, the little things make the difference. The producers behind the wine, personal recommendations, and the feeling that someone truly understands what you're looking for.

That feeling shouldn't end at your website.

Grapes is built for the wine trade. It brings the same care online with smart recommendations, mixed cases, producer stories, and alternatives when a wine sells out. Trade customers get their agreed prices and simpler reordering.

Bring the best of your shop online.

Book a free 20-minute call to explore Grapes.

Call 01865 922110 openimagination.co.uk

Grapes Grapes by Open Imagination. Over a decade in drinks ecommerce.

Scan to book



Or would you prefer
something more obvious?

By Appointment To
His Majesty King Charles III
Champagne Supplier
Pol Roger & Cie Epernay

CHAMPAGNE
POL ROGER

PROUDLY UNDERSTATED
since 1849

Eduardo Torres Acosta Versante Nord Rosso 2022



The parcels used here are all bush vines over 50 years old from the northern side of Etna. Delicately perfumed with smoke, cranberries and rocks, with a palate tightly coiled with citrus peel, taut red fruit and an amaro bitterness. Piedmont levels of seriousness, and there's no doubt that patience will be rewarded.

RRP: £31 ABV: 14.5%
Indigo Wine (020 7733 8391)
indigowine.com

Domaine de la Taille aux Loups Clos de Mosny 2023



Jacky Blot elevated this often-overshadowed Loire appellation to heights that few others could have managed. Clos de Mosny is a really special wine: like fine Riesling in its ripping precision and with a texture and authority that seems inherent in world-class Chenin, though not often at this humble price.

RRP: £30 ABV: 12.5%
Justerini & Brooks (020 7484 6430)
justerinis.com

Chateau Ksara Obeïdi 2025



The Bekaa Valley producer is on a mission to showcase Lebanon's signature grapes in single-varietal form. That started with Merwah in 2018, then old-vine Carignan, and now it's the turn of Obeïdi, an aromatic, low-acidity variety that in this case produces a satisfyingly rich wine. The high-altitude vines imbue mountain freshness and a stony edge.

RRP: £22 ABV: 13%
Berkmann Wine Cellars (020 7609 4711)
berkmann.co.uk

Lorca Lo % Ancellotta Malbec 2025



Expectations are always lowered when alcohol dips below 10% and there's no point pouring this for anyone who only enjoys Malbec in fruitbomb form. But here, picked early and blended with a variety known for its colour and fruitiness, it produces a very credible, chillable and guilt-free midweek quaffer.

RRP: £12.65 ABV: 9.5%
Ucopia Wines (01435 517080)
ucopiawines.co.uk

Château Maison Blanche Yvorne Grand Cru 2022



Chasselas rarely gets much kudos in the UK, where it's sometimes dismissed as blandly aromatic. This Schenk-owned Chablais estate makes a very different case. Fermented in barrel, the wine is luscious and honeyed but there's a distinctive flinty minerality too. Complex and full-bodied – a real treat.

RRP: £39.95 ABV: 12.6%
Schenk Family UK (01753 521336)
schenkfamily-wine.co.uk

Victor Berard Vinsobres 2022



Victor Berard famously makes super reds in various Rhône appellations, usually at punchier prices than this Vinsobres. But you're getting the full Berard experience for your money. Black cherries, garrigue notes, pepper and spice are all in the mix, and while the wine is undoubtedly plush and powerful, it's also nicely balanced – and a lot of fun.

RRP: £16 ABV: 14.5%
GCF Exclusive (07789 008540)
lgcf.fr

Tiko Estate Saperavi Solo 2024



Made in Georgia's Kakheti region, this has crowd-pleasing brightness and a red-cherry bite, and the supple, rounded tannins that you might associate with the variety. There's a lovely umami element too – a gentle earthiness that suggests a wide array of potential food matches. Bring on the *mtsvadi*, *pkhali* and *badrijani nigvzit*!

RRP: £18 ABV: 13%
Astrum Wine Cellars (020 3328 4620)
astrumwinecellars.com

In Situ Gran Reserva Carmenere 2024



Owner and winemaker Horacio Vincente studied oenology at Bordeaux university and worked at Mouton-Rothschild, so there's a slight French accent to his Aconcagua wines. This one is velvety and luscious, with violets and blackcurrants, but the faint stalky note in the background completes it.

RRP: £18.50-£19.50 ABV: 13.5%
Delibo Wine Agencies (07802 405627)
delibo.co.uk

Christmas

COMING FASTER THAN YOU THINK?

WBC has everything you need to present, pack and deliver Christmas joy!



Explore our extensive range

wbc.co.uk
020 7737 4040
sales@wbc.co.uk

The full package

wbc



83: Beat John Lewis at their own game

Mark Stephenson
Grape & Grain, Morpeth

In a nutshell: Don't have several million pounds for a glossy Christmas campaign? Embrace the lo-fi approach with a social media reel and you might just make an ad to rival the big names.

The concept:
As a shopkeeper contemplates the changing seasons, his melancholy is interrupted by some furry friends. Oliver Postgate would be proud.

Tell us more.
"The things you have to do for your business these days! The crazy thing is, it's totally against my character to do daft things like that. I'm quite reserved. In a group, I'm always the quiet one at the back, and I'm more comfortable with one-to-one conversations.

"From day one, I've wanted to avoid coming across as pretentious. I want to be able to take the mick out of myself, and social media is a good way of doing that and making people feel at ease before they come in."

The violent arrival in your reel of your shop Santa, heralding the festive season, will strike a chord with fellow indies.
"I think it's something we can all relate to. I'm a bit of an open book, and sometimes it's good to show the warts and all. We all have those moments when you're looking at the till and there are no sales, or someone comes in asking if you sell Guinness 0.0%. We've all got the same problems. That's the gist of it."



Mark is reconciled with a problematic Santa

Your videos certainly feel authentic.
"We haven't got the tools of the big boys, so these films are literally just me on my iPhone. I don't want them to be polished or slick. They're a bit clumsy, but we're authentic – we're a small independent and that's part of our charm. We're proud of who we are."

Does making them help pass a quiet day?
"Without a doubt. I made one in January to have a laugh during a very quiet month. It can be lonely in the shop, but doing something like that gives you a purpose. It sparks interaction with people and gives you a boost.

"You can't go weeks without posting anything. You have to keep on top of it. Sometimes you wonder, 'Is it really worth it?' But then you go to trade events or customers come in saying, 'Your latest video had me howling,' and you think it's pretty fun."

Do different platforms reach different audiences?
"Facebook reaches a more local audience, whereas Instagram is good for reaching the wider industry. That's partly down to demographics. Like a lot of market towns, our customers tend to be 30 or 40-plus. A lot are on Facebook but probably not Instagram.

"Instagram brings us closer to the wider trade and the people whose products we sell.

"We're not on X. It's a hornet's nest of negativity."

Has a customer ever caught you mid-strangulation by a puppet?
"Yes! I was filming the *Titanic* one, wearing that silly beard. When a customer came in, I ripped it off and said, 'Right, how do I explain this?' They said, 'You're not doing one of those videos again?'"

wbc



Mark 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@winemerchantmag.com

DAVID PERRY



Irregular Thoughts

The rosé has finally stopped selling. Meanwhile, my Bacchus bubbles away

It's getting towards the end of the first week of October, and this morning the weather changed. When my alarm went off at 7.30am, it was still quite dark. Normally I know it's time to get up because the light is flooding into the bedroom and onto my face. Not today. Mrs P mumbled something that sounded like "twirly" and I peered out at a miserable winter's day.

We had to venture to the bank in Salisbury a couple of days ago, and I wore a T-shirt all day. (Gone are the days when you put on your best suit to talk to the bank manager. Anyway, I'm sure young Rhianna wouldn't have been impressed. And I wasn't begging for a loan.)

The strange thing is that, despite the weather staying summery right through September and into October, people stopped buying rosé about three weeks ago. Why?

People were still in shorts. I was in a T-shirt at the bank. Brave souls were still splashing about in the sea. Families were still having barbecues. I still had a huge stack of rosé in the middle of the shop … but sales simply stopped.



14 litres of juice squeezed, but no time for a third pressing

For a while I'd been thinking I would have to put the remaining rosé away at some point and bring it back out next spring. I'd mentally made space in the storage area. This morning, with cold drizzle chilling the air and another delivery of mature claret to find room for, I took the plunge. "Some point" had arrived.

What was all summer rosé yesterday is Saint-Émilion, Aussie Cab Sauv and Rioja today. Overnight we've gone from poached salmon and salad to beef stew and dumplings. Window displays are full of pumpkins, and Christmas is in the supermarkets.

I'm sure there used to be a gap between summer and Christmas. Not any more.

In a normal year, English vineyards would still be nervously hanging on for another few days before accepting that they had to harvest, whatever the sugar level, and maybe chuck in a few bags of Tate & Lyle. Not this year.

I picked my grapes almost three weeks ago. The sugar level was only 13, rather than the 20 it ought to be. As ever, it's a toss-up: hope for a bit more sun and ripeness, or risk losing the lot to powdery mildew – again.

Having dug up the early potatoes, I had a patch of earth with nothing in it. It's a beautifully crumbly, "friable" bit of rich soil that begs for something to grow in it. In a moment of weakness, I invested 99p in a packet of pumpkin seeds from Bargains opposite. I dropped them into the empty bed. They grew quickly and rampantly. As the pumpkins plumped up, the leaves went white and powdery. That's powdery mildew. The pumpkins don't mind it. The mildew looks elsewhere. On the plus side, I have five big, orange pumpkins in my window display.

I lost all of last year's grapes, so this year I abandoned organic growing and bought some more of Bargains' bug spray (which promises to deal with mildew as well). I



Pumpkins don't mind a bit of powdery mildew

I can imagine scaling it all up to a full commercial vineyard. I'm absolutely not going to, but I can imagine it

sprayed each individual bunch of grapes half a dozen times, and it appeared to work.

By mid-September, they were still looking healthy, but a few grapes were beginning to go mouldy – not mildew, but maybe botrytis. I left the sole Chardonnay vine alone. All its grapes have now rotted, so I made the right choice.

One evening, at closing time, Mrs P joined me and we picked the lot. Seven big, flat cardboard wine boxes full. Enough to fill the back of my van. We rushed them home, where I had a small press waiting.

As I started pressing the grapes, Mrs P began sorting them. She discarded a bucketful of wrong 'uns. Pressing each batch of grapes twice, we worked furiously and, as the sun began to set, the 25-litre fermentation bucket was about half full. There was still a lot of juice in the must, but no time for a third pressing. We might have squeezed out another few litres, but decided on quality over quantity. Anyway, it was getting dark and we were tired and hungry.

I was concerned about oxidation, but Alice's Nick had slipped me a small packet of white stuff that did the job. Something-or-other metabisulphite – magic stuff. I'd abandoned organic already, so "contains sulphites" was hardly an issue.

Today I have 14 litres of Bacchus bubbling away. I had to add a bit of sugar. It still tastes sweet, but it's clear, clean and aromatic. It's in a cold place, so fermentation is nice and slow. I'll give it another couple of weeks.

Having planted the bare-rooted vines, tended them for five seasons, harvested the grapes and started making wine, I can imagine scaling it all up to a full commercial vineyard. I'm absolutely not going to, but I can imagine it.

Hopefully, in a few weeks' time, I'll have around 18 bottles of Clos Shaftesbury Vines Bacchus 2026, just right for summer drinking – oh, hang on. I'll have to find somewhere to store three half-cases of white. I may have just the place – on top of this season's rosé.

David Perry is the owner of Shaftesbury Wines in Dorset

THE BURNING QUESTION

How many wines can you taste before your palate gets tired?



"We all have good days and bad days. There are times when you don't feel it, only to be encouraged by that second wind you can get when running. You can get into a rhythm when the senses are in tune and convey with ease the words you need – magic. Blind tastings are fun but the concentration levels required are taxing on the old brain cells. During the Bordeaux En Primeur tastings, parched lips are not uncommon after a few days. An early-evening cleansing ale revives the palate sufficiently to enjoy something decent with dinner!"

Will Gardener ***Champagne winner***
Nickolls & Perks, Stourbridge

"The maximum I can taste in one session is around 20. Then I refresh myself with water and a break. Like everything else to do with the human body, you get better with practice. I think it's important to taste wines regularly and individually, aside of group tastings, to refresh the palate's memory because it changes with time and the recollection of some wines might fade. I've been told that a wine brings bergamot notes: I have worked in fruit and vegetables and in my opinion it's not possible for a wine to taste like bergamot."



Pedro Mota
OPS Wines, London



"You can't avoid palate fatigue, whatever your experience, age, level of expertise – everyone has their threshold. But you can mitigate the effects by drinking lots of water, using spittoons, sensible ordering and pacing of the wines. One tip – if it's an important trade tasting and you have the time, do the whites and reds on different days, as it's always the reds that suffer. After 40 or so mouthfuls a fine wine can taste like an entry-level quaffer."

Nick Holt
Noah's Goat, Hastings

"I can taste 200+ wines if I speed-taste without making written notes, only mental ones. If no one talks to me, I can actually taste all day without a problem. I usually get bored before I reach palate fatigue! If I stop to make notes, it always slows me down."

Richard Ballantyne MW, Noble Grape, Cowbridge, south Wales



HALLGARTEN & NOVUM WINES

CHAMPAGNE GOSSET
THE OLDEST WINE HOUSE IN CHAMPAGNE: ÄY 1584

Horse and art: Scots indie honours a star

Long before AI-generated artwork became commonplace, Kenneth Vannan of Villeneuve Wines in Peebles commissioned a local artist to create some illustrations for his business. More than 40 years later, they are still an integral part of its branding

There's a wine-drinking donkey, some birds in a glass and a cockerel clutching a joint. They're not the most conventional images for a wine merchant's branding, but they've served Villeneuve Wines remarkably well since the early 1980s.

The illustrations are by Harry Horse, the professional name of Richard Horne, an eccentric English artist whom Kenneth Vannan met while working part-time in a Peebles pub before establishing Villeneuve in 1982.

"He was an absolutely top bloke," Vannan recalls. "If you've ever seen *Withnail and I*, he was very like the Richard E Grant character. The way he dressed, the way he acted. He never did anything normally."

Horse was a man of many talents. He wrote and illustrated acclaimed children's books, became a political cartoonist and played banjo in Swamptrash, a Scottish band whose members pretended to be American southerners, raising money through gigs to buy tickets home. "They fooled the media for ages," says Vannan.

In 1983 or 1984, Vannan commissioned three A4 watercolours, giving Horse complete artistic freedom. The fee was around £25 each, plus a few bottles of inexpensive red wine.

"We used them for business cards and letterheads," Vannan says. "People would look at the business card and go, 'Oh, that's nice,' and keep it on their desk."

Horse also painted a hanging shop sign and produced sketches for Beaujolais Nouveau breakfast invitations.

The artist died tragically in Shetland in 2007, aged 46, but his illustrations remain integral to Villeneuve's identity. They still appear on business cards, social media and even enormous shop doormats.

"Yeah, his his work is visible in our shop all the time. After 40-odd years, I can't think of anything better," says Vannan.

"It's got a story too. It's not AI or computer-designed. It was made by a very interesting character."

He believes other independents could benefit from commissioning original artwork, particularly when AI-generated imagery risks becoming increasingly interchangeable.

Vannan points to craft breweries, which regularly commission artists to decorate limited-run cans, as an example worth following.

"I'm all for that," he says. "It would be great to see artists getting used a bit more."







DUNCAN McLEAN



Northabout

Just answer the question: did you really think that decent wine stops at Thurso?



Holidaymakers don't bring their own fish. They don't need to bring their own booze, either

I enjoyed the interview with James Goodhart in the October issue of *The Wine Merchant*. If I ever make it as far south as North Yorkshire, I'll be sure to visit Cellar 21. I particularly liked the photo of James with his pork pie birthday cake. It reminded me of a small producer we used to have here who made excellent hand-raised pies under the unimprovable name The Porkney Pie Company. Sadly, they have gone the way of all hot-water crust, but local butchers still make traditional Scotch pies with fillings such as haggis and clapshot.

Speaking of haggis, I was sad to read of the death in August of Matthew Jukes, at far too young an age. His enthusiasm for Australian wine made his notes on the subject essential reading. I met Matthew only once, at a 100 Best Australian Wines event in Adelaide. Having recently completed an exhaustive series of tastings with Macsween of Edinburgh to find the perfect wine match for haggis, I took him to task for his recommendation of "broad, luscious new world Chardonnay, or a scented, white Côtes du Rhône at the lighter end. If you want to go over the top, try any Grand Cru Pinot Gris from Alsace, or a Condrieu". All great wines, but in my book nowhere near as good a match for greasy, livery haggis as a medium-bodied, high-acid red. Piemonte Barbera is my top recommendation.

Matthew refused to be swayed, and quite right too: he always trusted his own palate and instincts. I was impressed that someone who was, as David Gleave of Liberty Wines put it, "English home counties to the core" should think to mention haggis at all.

Something else James Goodhart mentioned in his interview made me laugh, though it was a rueful laugh. Speaking of where his customers came from, he said, "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."

"Damn and blast!" I thought. "They could have been buying five or six cases from MY shop, without having it sloshing around in the back of their car as they drove up the tortuously winding A9."

The reality is that we're used to visitors not knowing what to expect when they come to Orkney. They sometimes splash out on a case or two (and a kilo of cheese), but disappointingly often we're told, "we didn't know if there would be any shops in Orkney, so we took all our food with us from Surrey". Lidl in Thurso is also frequently mentioned: the last food shop before crossing the Pentland Firth and the starvation that must surely await on the far side.

A few years ago, one of my trade customers, a small country house hotel by a fishing loch, mentioned that a famously persistent TV interviewer was coming to stay for a week. They were excited, and so was I: surely he would guddle in the upper end of the hotel's wine list! Sadly, no … under the impression that good wine was not available outside the M25, or at least not north of Melsonby, he brought his own supplies to the hotel and insisted on drinking nothing else. The next time I delivered to the hotel, I saw multiple bottles of a non-list wine in the glass bin: Louis Jadot Mâcon-Villages Blanc.

Outside in the car park, as I made to drive off, the interviewer was leaning his lanky frame against the back of an estate car with fishing rods fixed to the roof, barking angrily into his phone. Was he really yelling, "Answer the question!"? I'd like to think so. And I'd also like to think he was tearing a strip off his PA, who'd advised him to carry cases of basic Burgundy all the way to Orkney when he could have been enjoying his freshly caught trout with much more interesting bottles from the hotel's wine supplier. ■

Duncan McLean is proprietor of Kirkness & Gorie, Kirkwall

ROB HOULT



Another Thing

Wine is food's poor relation on screen. So how can it get its Nigella moment?



Food looks flaming good on TV. But all wine looks pretty much the same

Bridget and I recently took two of our younger children – although at 19 and 21, "younger" is a relative term – to the cinema to see the latest *Shaun the Sheep* movie. It was my idea. I'm a big fan of Aardman Animations and the film had garnered rave reviews.

Tuesday is one of the few quiet evenings we get, so it suited us perfectly. I booked tickets at our local Showcase cinema because, at my age, I appreciate a very comfortable seat. When I booked that morning, I noticed I had free rein of the seating plan. Even so, I was surprised to discover that we were the only four people in the cinema. Nobody else turned up. Showcase offers private screenings for a fee, so getting one for free made the Yorkshireman in me very, very happy.

First things first: the film was amazing. Genuinely funny, not too long, and the technical skill involved in putting it on screen was incredible. Secondly, though, why was the cinema so empty? Perhaps *Shaun the Sheep* is seen as a children's movie – although *The Sunday Times* review suggested otherwise. Showcase was the only cinema showing it later than a child-friendly 5pm; we were watching it at a positively naughty 6.40pm.

But that particular Tuesday was also the night the new series of *Bake Off* aired, with a new judge in the shape of Nigella Lawson (damehood incoming, surely). I couldn't help thinking this was a factor in the low ticket sales, as most of the nation's over-45 men sat glued to the box, earnestly insisting that they "have always been big fans of baking", and that they'd watched every previous series on catch-up, actually, you just hadn't noticed. The Nigella factor in full flow.

It got me thinking about the difference between food and wine on television and, to a lesser extent, in the cinema. Food plays such an important role on screen, from the lame mid-80s erotica of *Nine and a Half Weeks*, with Mickey Rourke, Kim Basinger and the entire contents of a fridge, to the over-hammy "performative eating as acting" that crops up in so many films. Its absolute nadir, for me, was *Julie & Julia,* featuring a man eating cake so horribly that I nearly walked out of the cinema. (Why do actors have to eat so noisily? It's a visual medium. We can chuffing see it!)

But that's the thing: food is so visual. It's a riot of colour and shape. We can't taste or smell it on screen, yet the images stimulate our minds and make us feel as though we know exactly what it tastes like. A customer of mine was once a *MasterChef* contestant and told me that most of his food was tasted cold because filming took so long.

We viewers see a plate move from pass to judge in mere seconds, apparently to be tasted straight from the pan. We can't see temperature, and as long as the judges heap on the praise, we believe the food is every bit as lovely as it looks.

This is where wine, in its visual form, falls down. The first amateur cook to be booted off *MasterChef* may have served something resembling roadkill rather than haute cuisine. A Michelin-starred chef on

Whenever wine is discussed on television or radio, or written about, it always seems to be in glowing terms

Great British Menu, meanwhile, will have rustled up something that looks like a film set, contains 128 ingredients and has you drooling from miles away. Alas, a glass of Aldi claret and a glass of Château Le Pin are visually pretty much indistinguishable. No matter how many delightful word pictures you conjure up, it still looks like red liquid in a glass.

So how does wine get its Nigella moment? How does it move from print and radio to the big screen? I think wine needs to take a leaf out of food's book. After tasting a handshake-worthy cake, Paul Hollywood doesn't spit it out, so why should we do that with wine?

Yes, I know cake doesn't get you drunk, but a sugar rush and a few extra inches around the waist aren't exactly positives. Getting gazeboed* on telly might be the only way to convey the true wonder of wine. A couple of glasses in, the guard comes down, and you'd certainly know what people really thought of the wines. And why not have some negative opinions for a change? Whenever wine is discussed on television or radio, or written about, it always seems to be in glowing terms. That doesn't tally with my own wine-tasting experience.

A riotous 60 minutes of wine drinking, accompanied by increasingly ebullient waffle, might finally make the telly chiefs take wine seriously. We could move beyond recommending only wines that would suit Terry and June. There's also the play-along-at-home option, which would make the show more immersive – something TV executives seem to crave – while boosting wine sales across the land. A full-on 4D experience.

It wouldn't even need to be one of those "get better as the episodes progress" shows, like *Strictly* or *Bake Off*. It could be a game show, with celebrities – proper ones, too. The bigger the name, the more fun it would be to watch them get sozzled. I've got the perfect title: *Blanquette y Blanc*. I'll get my coat.

** I didn't think I'd be allowed to use the more technical term, "wankered".*

Rob Hoult owns Hoults Wine Merchants in Huddersfield

BOOK REVIEW

WINE LIBERATED:
THE ECOLOGICAL REVOLUTION & THE VINTNERS INSPIRING CHANGE

BY ADAM L HUSS

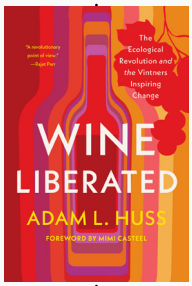
CHELSEA GREEN
£18.95

The best way to convey what Adam Huss achieves in *Wine Liberated* is to compare my notes on its opening and closing sections. After the first 16 pages, I'd scribbled "deeply cynical opening" and "unnecessarily strident in its tone". I was getting bogged down in every line, challenging every argument and growing more contrarian with each sentence.

Some 150 pages later, my notes consisted almost entirely of quotations. Not because I was exhausted, or because the book had changed dramatically, but because I'd lowered a guard I hadn't realised was up. I'd allowed Huss to speak uninterrupted. In his words, I'd been liberated.

He hadn't won me over with revolutionary ideas. Wine enthusiasts will be familiar with the damage caused by monoculture, the merits of hybrids and the argument for growing vines only where they can thrive without intensive intervention. Nor is his criticism of the modern wine trade especially novel. The book's impact comes instead from its philosophical foundations and Huss's heartfelt commitment to his cause.

That emotional intensity is both its greatest strength and its principal weakness. Huss is most persuasive when discussing ecology and our relationship with the natural world. His practical knowledge and personal experience lend weight to arguments enriched by moments of genuine philosophical insight.



"If wine can be an art form, an embodiment of our potential to create beauty, even a sacrament, it will become all the more important in reminding us of our reasons for facing inevitable crises with courage and hope." For Huss, that means reconnecting wine with its origins. "A bottle of wine itself cannot be a form of art. The bottle is merely the signature on the painting; the end result of a culture built of systems that grow from the earth."

His arguments become less convincing when he turns to what he calls "vinifera culture". Here, the philosopher sometimes gives way to something closer to a conspiracy theorist, and his passion begins to sound desperate rather than moving.

Some criticisms are persuasive. Huss rightly questions the logic of planting disease-susceptible vinifera in unsuitable environments, then depending on synthetic spraying to keep vines alive at the expense of surrounding ecosystems. Why not plant hybrids, he asks, especially when the option to plant hybrids – or simply not plant at all – exists?

Elsewhere, his analogies strain credibility. He compares the dominance of vinifera, a species encompassing thousands of cultivars, to the Dutch colonising the world and imposing salted liquorice as the only available sweet.

More bizarre is his claim that "vinifera culture uses wines of pure vinifera to create and enforce status and class distinctions among drinkers". This overlooks how the global spread and standardisation of vinifera, whatever their drawbacks, have made a wider range of wines accessible to more people, challenging rather than reinforcing some traditional barriers.

Yet *Wine Liberated* achieves something rare for a wine book: it's genuinely moving. Huss doesn't simply impart information. He provokes questions, challenges assumptions and leaves room for disagreement. Early on, I repeatedly asked myself: "Liberation to what end?" By the final pages, I felt he had answered that question – and several others.

Jacob Stokes

Favourite Things



Dan Leak
The Bishop's Cave, St Albans

Favourite wine on my list
Going into the autumn and winter I'd pick our Bodegas Lleiroso Ribera del Duero Crianza.

Favourite wine and food match
It has to be cheese and wine. Recently I loved a pairing I did at a Portuguese tasting putting Quinta da Casaboa Homenagem with an aged cheese from the Azores called Sao Jorge. The salty, umami flavour with the big, rich, red was just amazing.

Favourite wine trip
Navarra. It was a really pure "discovery" trip for me. It ended up with me importing my first wine directly from a vineyard there – Castillo de Monjardin. We experienced wonderful hospitality and food in an amazing landscape.

Favourite wine trade person
I'm going to say Stuart Bowman-Hood from Frederick's who we've been buying from for a long time. He's a top all-round chap who really cares about what he is importing and never lets you down on a delivery, to the point that he'll drive the missing cases over to me from his personal stash if something goes awry.

Favourite wine shop
La Cave de Bruno in East Dulwich. I visited this shop in 2014 when they first opened and will always have a soft spot for it as they were part of the inspiration for me getting into the industry.

Own-label Tesco Champagne is £12

Bottles of £12 Champagne are back as grocers begin their festive price cuts.

Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons have opened their pre-Christmas Champagne push with 25%-off six-bottle deals. Entry-level own-label prices have already slipped below £12.

Tesco was first out of the blocks on October 14, pairing single-bottle offers with 25% off for Clubcard holders buying six bottles or more. Taittinger and GH Mumm both have £10 single-bottle discounts, down to £34 and £30 a bottle respectively, falling further to £25.50 and £22.50 on the six-bottle deal.

Tesco's cheapest Champagne, Gartissier, is priced at £16 before the six-bottle discount brings it down to just £12.

The Drinks Business, October 26



Down to £22.50 on a six-bottle deal

Cheap Tignanello could be stolen

Seven masked thieves have stolen around 30,000 bottles of wine worth €5m from a Marchesi Antinori warehouse in Tuscany.

The gang disabled alarm and surveillance systems at the Cortona facility before using forklifts to load two trucks with wines including Solaia, Tignanello and Guado al Tasso. Between 8,000 and 10,000 bottles of Solaia alone were taken.

Antinori, which described the operation as highly organised, has warned customers around the world to be wary of suspicious offers through unofficial sales channels.

Reuters, October 9

• ***Margaux has overtaken Chardonnay*** *as Britain's most popular wine-related baby name, according to an analysis of three decades of birth registrations. The Drinks Business examined almost 40,000 names registered in England and Wales between 1996 and 2025, looking for those borrowed from grape varieties, regions, wine styles and famous labels.*

The Drinks Business, October 12



Updates from the supply chain

• **Container freight rates are edging up again.** Drewry's World Container Index reached $4,585 per 40ft container on October 22, up 2% in a week. Shipping schedules remain patchy, with 44 planned sailings on major east-west routes cancelled between October 19 and November 22. *(Drewry)*

• October saw a record number of **attacks on commercial shipping** in the Strait of Hormuz, keeping insurance and fuel costs high. *(Reuters)*

• **European wholesale gas prices** recently touched €100/MWh, adding pressure to glassmaking, warehousing and transport. *(Reuters)*

• **Low water on the Rhine** is disrupting barge traffic. At Kaub, water levels fell to around 10cm in mid-October, well below the level at which barges can carry normal loads, so surcharges and delays remain in place and some freight is being shifted to road or rail. *(Wine & Spirits Shippers Association)*

Surrey special agent is honoured



A Surrey wine has acquired an extraordinary connection with a British wartime agent who parachuted into a vineyard in Bordeaux.

Greyfriars Vineyard named its Yvonne cuvée after Yvonne Cormeau, an SOE radio operator who was dropped into occupied France in 1943 and worked with the Resistance.

The link emerged after one of Cormeau's descendants visited Greyfriars and explained that her grandmother had trained nearby before being sent behind enemy lines.

The Drinks Business, October 13

• *A 90-year collection of* ***Château Haut-Brion*** *has fetched €3.4m at auction in Paris. The Sotheby's sale included vintages dating back to 1935. A five-litre jeroboam of Haut-Brion 1989 sold for €62,500, setting a record for the format.*

Decanter, October 5

Solar panel shade is good for vines

Researchers in southern Italy have found that vines grown beneath solar panels can produce substantially heavier bunches than those grown in full sunshine.

A trial on Primitivo vines in Puglia found that shading from photovoltaic panels more than doubled shoot growth and increased bunch weight, while slowing the accumulation of sugar and preserving acidity.

The system, known as agrivoltaics, allows the same land to be used for grape growing and electricity generation, although researchers caution that the results will depend on variety and climate.

Vinetur, October 7

• ***A robot dog*** *is patrolling Spanish vineyards. A four-legged machine called Agrhound is being tested among Tempranillo vines in Ribera del Duero. Equipped with cameras, sensors and AI, it is designed to walk across steep or uneven vineyard terrain that presents problems for wheeled robots.*

Global Agriculture, October 26

M&S claims a cloudy wine first

Cloudy wine is moving further into the mainstream, with Marks & Spencer introducing what is claimed to be the first cloudy still wine sold by a major British supermarket.



Trouble is an organic rosé left deliberately hazy by avoiding the fining and filtration processes normally used to clarify wine.

The trend follows the growing popularity of pét nat and other minimally processed wines, although deliberately cloudy styles are far from a new winemaking invention.

The Guardian, October 15

• *Moët Hennessy, Analog Devices and UC Davis are working on machine-learning technology capable of recognising chemical signatures in grapes and wine. Its first target is Fresh Mushroom Aroma, a fault that can be difficult to detect conventionally.*

Electronics World, October 27

A wine blended for business class

United Airlines has developed a wine by conducting blending trials at 35,000 feet.

Winemaker Jesse Katz of California's Aperture Cellars tasted nine potential blends during a flight after finding that dry cabin air muted aromas and fruit while accentuating acidity, tannin and texture.

The resulting Air and Vine 2024 Sonoma red is 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, with Malbec, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc, and is due to be served in United's Polaris business class from 2028.

Decanter, October 26



Jesse Katz conducted trials at 35,000 feet



The story so far

Robert Wattie's career in food and beverages has taken him all over the world, including a stint sniffing out criminality at a London hotel. Those experiences, and his 11 years running Fairview Wines, have given him plenty of inspiration for a novel.

Graham Holter pays a visit when Robert is focused on his equally interesting day job

My conversation with Robert Wattie is interrupted a couple of times by customers, including a couple keen to buy another bottle of The Mentors Petit Verdot 2019 – a wine so popular it's now sold out.

Robert greets them like old friends and enthusiastically steers them through some alternatives. A Bordeaux blend from Veneto; an appassimento from the Languedoc; a Carmenère from Chile. The chosen wines are boxed up and after more chit-chat and pleasantries the couple leave happy, promising to return soon.

"Regular customers?" I ask.

"I don't think I've ever met them before," Robert smiles back. But then he smiles almost all of the time: big, generous smiles that regularly give way to laughter, often at his own expense. Here is a man who clearly adores being part of the wine trade and has no intention of hiding it.



Fairview Wines is based in the heart of Midhurst, an old market town in a moneyed corner of north west Sussex, just up the road from Cowdray Park polo club. It's a good place for a wine shop to be, but even here retailing is a challenge. Importing and wholesaling are a vital part of the mix, and if you come on the right night you'll find the place transformed into a venue for small gigs. That, and the novel he's writing, keep Robert pretty busy.

How did you come to take on the shop?

I was walking home from the pub and saw this place sitting empty. I only had a warehouse then, not a shop, and I thought, "this would be a great wine shop". There wasn't a proper To Let sign, just a business card in the bottom corner of the window.

I phoned on Monday morning and the landlord said, "I've already got five people ahead of you". Then he asked what I wanted to do with it. I said, "turn it into a wine shop". He said, "go and get the keys *now*". His family's wine shop had been here about 200 years ago.

Later it was Pescod's and then Wine Rack. After that the British Heart Foundation took it over and gutted it. The listed building status had been lifted, but the second I took it on they put the listing back. That's my luck.

Did you know how you wanted it to look?

I had an idea, but once I had agreed to take the place I did think, "how are you going to do this, Rob?" I looked at other wine shops, but so many bottles were lined up row after row. You and I can glance at a label and often tell which country it comes from before we have read anything. But if you don't know much about wine, that wall of bottles can be intimidating.

The idea here was that people could step back and then be drawn towards a label. Lighting is important to me; that comes from my time in hotels. One of my best friends is a very talented carpenter, so we sat down over a couple of nights. He said, "tell me what you want and I'll make it fit". We measured the whole place and built it.

One of my first two pallets was faulty. I got a credit for it and sold it as mulled wine

The inspiration, really, is a library.

You do have to keep it full. The cost of filling a wine shop is insane, but what you see here is perhaps a tenth of the stock. Downstairs is enormous. The cellar extends underneath next door and I can fit about 35 pallets. I still use bond, but having all that storage here has transformed the business.

Fairview began as a wholesale business, didn't it?

Yes. I had worked in hotels and food and beverage for years. When I decided to leave that world, the original plan was actually to investigate staff theft in hotels, because it was something I had become rather good at. That contract disappeared when the hotel company involved was bought.

I was sitting at a bar in London and overheard two Italian men saying they needed to find a UK importer for their wine. I said, "I might be interested". I still work with them; I've just ordered four pallets.

Did you know how you were going to sell it?

Absolutely not. I was getting divorced, broke and my job was in the shit, so obviously I thought, "let's start a wine business". A friend told me it would cost about £250,000 to establish one properly. He wasn't far wrong, although you can grow it gradually, which is what I did.

My best friend helped me buy the first two pallets. One was faulty, but I got a credit for it, turned the wine into mulled wine and sold it at a market. That paid for another pallet. My first customer was a friend in the club world in London. The second was a care home. I don't know how that happened, but I thought, great. It was random and I just kept building.

I used London City Bond and worked from a house in Fernhurst. The front room was storage and the top room was my ▶

office. Then this place came along.

How does the business divide now?
About 60% to 65% is trade. I use the shop as a hub for local customers, because every time you can avoid putting stock into bond you save booking-in charges, storage and delivery charges. I still keep wine in bond so I can supply nationally, and I have customers all over. There's one in Gloucester that I drive to once a month. He has been with me for years.

We're small and nimble. It's mainly me, with a couple of part-timers who cover the shop. At the moment we import perhaps 40% to 45% of the range ourselves. I want to get that to 60%, with the rest bought domestically.

The direct imports might give me about five points more margin. My rough target at retail is 37.5% to 40%, but on wine bought domestically it is probably more like 32.5%, because customers can compare prices. The wines I import myself give me a better margin and make the range more distinctive.

What kinds of things are you looking for when you buy direct?
I'm constantly trying to find a great example of what a region is trying to produce, at the best price I can get it for.

Then I throw in a few oddities. The Italians are the best for that. You ask, "what did Grandpa make?" and they say, "he made *this*". I bought one of those odd bottles from Piedmont recently and sold the case in a week. One customer tried a bottle and came back for the lot.

That probably happens because I can't contain my enthusiasm. I like saying, "Here's Canadian ratafia – go figure.

I learnt about relationships with producers from Jeremy Hunt and I try to emulate that. We don't have contracts



Robert mainly works alone but has some part-time employees who help at the shop

Why not?" I always tell producers: give me something people know and give me something different.

Some merchants are nervous about buying too much of that kind of stuff because it requires an awful lot of hand-selling.
Hand-selling is what I enjoy most. I understand why merchants worry they will be lumbered with something nobody asks for, and that selling every bottle will become a chore.

Sometimes I get it wrong. There have been wines that I've ended up taking home and drinking myself. You just think, "fine, got *that* one wrong". It happens.

But when it works, you help people move slightly beyond what they already know. If somebody likes a ripe, fruit-forward Petit Verdot or Primitivo, you might show them a French appassimento-style wine with the same generous fruit and soft tannins. Then perhaps you add a Carmenère with a more savoury, green-pepper note. It branches out a little without asking them to leap into something completely alien.

How do you find new producers to work with?
I go to trade fairs and I travel, but a lot of it comes through word of mouth. Somebody will say, "you should meet my friend".

That is how I found Château Carpe Diem [in Provence]. Someone put me in touch with Albéric [Philipon] just after I started the company. He was flying through Heathrow, so we met at Caffè Nero and tasted the wine out of coffee cups. Classic. I've been working with them for eight years.

If I'm looking for something specific from a particular region, I'll phone the producers I already know. I might say, "I'm really loving the rosés you do, but I'm looking for someone in Bandol or Cassis. Do you know anybody?" They say, "try my mate", and a conversation begins. The wines aren't always what I'm looking for, but every now and then it works. I try to visit most producers, although I can't get to everyone.

I've never asked any of them for exclusivity. I'm a small independent, and they are businesses; I hope we respect each other enough to treat each other well.

I learned about relationships from [Thorman Hunt founder] Jeremy Hunt and the way he works with his vineyards, and I try to emulate that. Albéric and his wife are like family. We don't have a contract and we have never even discussed one. We know each other, respect each other and pay each other. They do what they say they will do. It is a great working relationship.

Canadian wine has become a Fairview speciality. Was that always part of the plan?
Yes. I'm British-Canadian and was born in Canada, so it was natural for me to lean into it when I started the company. The name Fairview comes from the Fairview Slopes in Vancouver, where I lived for quite a while. It has nothing to do with the South African producer, although I met them in Düsseldorf and we had a good laugh about it. I stock their wines too.

Canadian wine works well for a small importer because the producers cannot make vast quantities. There isn't the pressure on me to put it everywhere.

The online business is predominantly Canadian. People travel there, discover a winery and search for the wine when they come home. If they are looking for Canadian wine, we are going to appear. I also wholesale quite a lot of it to other independents.

Ice wine does particularly well in winter, but I have table wines from British Columbia, Ontario and Prince Edward County, as well as sparkling wine. Canada is a good talking point at the moment, but the wines stand up.

I also co-import with other wine shops. Smaller merchants may not import themselves, so we sit down and look at the gaps in their range. I bring the wine in, store it and deliver it to them. That collaborative side is something I enjoy.

Where did your own enthusiasm for wine begin?

Jeremy Hunt got me into the wine trade. In my early 20s I was on a traineeship at the Savoy and doing room service. One day they sent me to the wine cellar. I knew nothing about wine, but the attitude was: "You're going to learn."

I tell customers that their lists should be 80% what the customer expects and 20% should be their own identity

We used Thorman Hunt a lot, and Jeremy said, "Rob, I'm taking you to France. It's time you learned something about wine." I spent four days around Carcassonne with him, and I think that is where I fell in love with it. The first vineyard I ever visited was a Corbières property whose wine I still stock through Thorman Hunt.

I learned a lot from Jeremy. He is an amazing guy. I still use Thorman Hunt and the quality is fantastic. If you buy one of their wines without tasting it, you don't worry.

More importantly, I learned about relationships from him: the way he works with his vineyards and the genuine affection there.

How do you approach wine lists for your trade customers?

My hotel and food-and-beverage background makes that side feel natural. A lot of pub wine lists are almost interchangeable: Chilean Sauvignon, Pinot Grigio, New Zealand Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot – eight whites, eight reds, two rosés and two sparkling wines. You can practically write the list blind.

I tell customers that 80% should be what their customer expects and 20% should be their own identity. Put in a few brilliant things that are different and slightly aspirational. Imagine two people sitting down for dinner. One of them knows a bit about wine and spots a 12% Malbec from the Loire. "What the hell is that? Let's try it." The bottle becomes the part of the meal they remember.

You don't necessarily need a completely obscure grape. It can be a familiar





The bespoke racking system was inspired more by a library than by traditional wine shops

variety from an unfamiliar place: Canadian Cabernet, Loire Côt or a Mencía. Suddenly the list has a life and looks unique. There are limits. I once had a César from Burgundy that I could sell in the shop, but I wouldn't put it on a pub list because even most wine enthusiasts have never heard of it.

Yes, the staff need training, but you should be doing that whenever you create a new list. Make it fun and give them a few anecdotal facts they can pull out of their hat. They don't need a lecture. Usually it is just one line explaining why that bottle is interesting.

At a food-led pub, the menu and the service are theatre. The waiter, the host and the chef are part of it, and the wine list should be too. At a wet-led pub, somebody generally walks in and asks for a glass of Pinot Grigio without looking at a list. Then the job is simply to find the best wine you can at the price, without compromising more than you have to.

What does the typical shop customer spend?

The sweet spot for still wine is about £15 to £24. We have house wines near the entrance at £10 or £11, and they need to be solid. Sometimes a customer says, "I've got a house full of late teenagers. Can you drop off 24 bottles of Pinot Grigio? That's all they're going to drink." Fine. I'll give them 10% off 12 bottles and deliver locally. It is nice that they still come to us instead of the supermarket.

Do customers mainly arrive knowing what they want?

We have lots of regulars, plus people visiting Midhurst. Refill wine is popular: bring your own bottle and fill it for £6.75. Saturday from 9.30am to 11am can be the busiest part of the week. People are going to the butcher or buying a newspaper and remember they need wine for the weekend. That is why the advice to open from 11am until 8pm doesn't work here. Midhurst is not really a late-evening town.

People come because they want recommendations. That is what an independent should be. Somebody asks for a wine that has sold out, and you don't say, "no, sorry". That is your opportunity. You ask what they liked about it and find a route to something else.

Why is independent wine retailing so resilient and so loved, do you think?

Because it gives people a personal experience that is being stripped out of the rest of life. AI and supermarkets are homogenising so much: the way we shop, work, interact and even write. Working life is go, go, go. Don't stop and talk to anybody or you will fall behind. In our free time, I think we will increasingly want the opposite.

Going to a wine shop isn't simply paying £2 or £3 more for a bottle. You enjoy yourself, learn something and have a conversation. On a Saturday I open bottles

and people come in; by the end you can have half the town here. I love that. It becomes part of people's leisure time rather than a chore.

That is why I think independents will have a renaissance. We give people discovery and human contact. If we don't do that, their palates don't change and wine loses its feel. Look at what happened with craft beer: people learned styles, became curious and started asking for particular things. Wine is moving a little in that direction too.

But resilience also comes from being prepared to adapt. Nobody is immune from the problems on the high street. An independent has to buy, sell, deliver, do the accounts, manage people and solve whatever has gone wrong that day. You keep pushing and find another way. For Fairview that might mean more tastings, live music or allowing people to sit down for a glass. The bottle matters, but the reason to visit is the experience around it.

You mentioned AI. How do you use it in the business?

It is genuinely useful, as long as you train it in the way you want it to work. I have set up the AI I use so it understands my verbiage, how I write and what I am looking for.

It is particularly good for tasting notes and for gathering anecdotal information. A job that might otherwise take me an hour can be done much more quickly. I have trained it to rank the information it finds: give most credit to the producer, then to the wine writers I trust, and work outwards from there.

The notes are useful for subscription boxes and the wine lists I create. I'm also trying to improve the newsletters, which take much more time than people imagine, and AI should make that easier. It doesn't replace the tasting or my judgement. It helps organise the information and express it in my voice. You still have to train it, check it and know what you want to say.

Tell us about the gigs in the shop. How do those work?

I love music and I like musicians. We clear the displays, put in benches and have the artist at one end with lights behind them. I charge a fixed ticket price that includes the wine. This place is like my home; I don't want somebody having to come up in the middle and ask, "can I get a glass of wine?" and then be charged another fiver.

I don't make money from it. Most of the ticket income goes to the artist. We recently had a musician from Newfoundland, and there's another coming from Cornwall.

The only difficulty is persuading some of them to stop. You put them on at seven and at 10 o'clock you are saying, "James, we all loved it, but we've got work tomorrow."

Could you put in tables and chairs and make it a wine bar too?

I'm thinking about a hybrid element. People keep saying it would be lovely to sit here on a Saturday afternoon, drink some wine and have charcuterie. A few tables and chairs would need only a small redesign. I'd like Fairview to become still more experience-based: a tasting room and wine bar mixed with the shop.

Is Midhurst protected from the problems affecting other high streets?

I don't think anywhere is immune. Running a one-shop independent takes a lot of skills. You are HR, the accountant, buyer, stock person, delivery driver and salesperson. There isn't a job you don't do. Technology can do some work for you, but it doesn't remove the mental load because it won't do the thinking.

Towns have to entertain. The big supermarkets are moving out of town towards the American model: drive there and buy everything. If we want people on high streets, let us open them up, have some al fresco dining and use spaces such as Midhurst's market square. Make people feel part of the fabric of the wine shop and make the shop a community hub.

Working life is go, go, go. Don't stop and talk to anybody or you will fall behind. In our free time, I think we will increasingly want the opposite

My advice is to speak to the district council and find out what grants are coming and how it might help. I have discussed my ideas with the council and the response was, "when you have a plan, let us know and we'll see whether we can match-fund some of it". You don't ask, you don't get. Merchants often contact councils only when permission has been refused or a parking restriction appears. If you approach them with something that improves the community and retains jobs, they can be very supportive.

Tell us about the novel you're writing.

It is a crime novel set in the wine world. George Lenez is a world-class sommelier who falls from grace and becomes involved in investigating a wine heist. It is set in 1998 and 1999, when I started at the Savoy. People's names may have been changed to protect the not-so-innocent, because none of them were.

I want people to learn about wine through osmosis while enjoying a thriller. Phylloxera and grafting are part of the plot, for example.

I'm extremely dyslexic and didn't read a book until I was 22. Then I was given tinted glasses and read *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks. It blew my hair back. I fell in love with the way books create worlds.

Jeremy Hunt appears in mine, in his own way. He has been immortalised.

Are you on speed or something? Where does all this energy come from?

I think I've always been this way. Hospitality was the perfect place for me. I left home very young – I was 15, just about to turn 16 – and I've always had that energy. It's simply how I am.

Do you ever feel that you're burning out?

Sometimes, yes. About once a month I'll have a day when I don't pick up the phone or look at it. I just need complete







darkness and to switch off. I am a hyper person, but I get a lot from the things I'm passionate about. I love doing them.

Looking back, would you do anything differently?

I would have had a slightly larger war chest. I didn't have money; I borrowed for the first pallets and have built and funded it gradually. We work in pennies much of the time in wine.

You need a mathematical brain, a love of wine and a willingness to deal with paperwork. You also have to stay calm when the trade goes wrong, because it goes spectacularly wrong. A shipment gets stuck because somebody else on the container hasn't completed their paperwork, and you need the wine for an event next week. You ask, "can I come and get mine?" No. Those moments are stressful, but most of the time it is pretty good.

I've been doing it for 11 years and loved the journey. The thing I love about wine is that however long I stay in it, I'll never know everything.

Where would you like Fairview to be in five years?

Perhaps there will be one or two more shops and something with a stronger tasting-room or wine-bar element. This shop will remain the anchor. I love it – and trying to move all this shelving would finish me off.

More than anything, I'd like enthusiastic staff to come in, learn here and stay in the trade. Jeremy gave me that enthusiasm and showed me how much fun wine could be. I'd like to pass it on.

In five years, I would love customers with children old enough to work to say, "go and work for Robert. It's a solid business, it has been there for years and you'll learn a lot".

I want the business to be respected by customers, trade clients and competitors. If you start a wine business to make millions, you are in the wrong business. But slowly, almost without noticing, life improves. My daughter has riding lessons now, and the business manages to pay for those. That will do.



PATIENCE PERFECTED, HERITAGE HONORED

Crafted in the Heart of the Côte des Bar

champagne-devaux.com

A living legacy

With more than 400 years of history, Cartuxa is one of Portugal's most celebrated wine estates. Its distinctive Alentejo wines also sustain a charitable foundation with deep roots in the region



The spectacular vaulted cellars

Cartuxa, based in Évora in Portugal's Alentejo region, has a history spanning more than 400 years. Its wines reflect the character of one of the country's most dynamic wine regions.

Adega Cartuxa occupies one of Portugal's oldest vineyard sites. Vines have been cultivated at Quinta de Valbom since 1517, when the Jesuits established the vineyards.

The order also helped found the University of Évora, Portugal's second-oldest university. Nearby, the Carthusians built the Cartuxa monastery between 1587 and 1598.

After both religious orders were expelled from Portugal, the vineyards and monastery were seized by the state and fell into neglect. The Eugénio de Almeida family acquired the properties in 1871 and began their restoration. The family subsequently expanded the vineyards, and Cartuxa now works with 1,050 hectares across four estates: 650 hectares owned and 400 leased long-term.

In 1963, fourth-generation family member Vasco Maria Eugénio de Almeida established the Fundação Eugénio de Almeida, a charitable foundation supporting the social, cultural, educational and spiritual development of the region.

He also restored the winery and monastery and welcomed back the Jesuits and Carthusian monks. The latter remained at the monastery until 2019. Although Vasco Maria died in 1975, his foundation continues its work, funded by 100% of the winery's profits.

Cartuxa's vineyards lie in the Évora sub-region of Alentejo, where hot, dry conditions and varied non-calcareous Mediterranean soils produce wines typically characterised by depth, complexity and balanced acidity.



The area's winemaking reputation stretches back centuries. Its historic wines were known as Pêra-Manca, a name derived from the "pedras mancas", or fallen stones, scattered across the landscape. They were mentioned in a letter from Évora town council to King João II in 1488 and reportedly travelled aboard Pedro Álvares Cabral's ship when he reached Brazil in 1500. According to legend, barrels of Pêra-Manca were stored in the hold as ballast.

The Pêra-Manca name was first registered in the 1870s, and its red wines subsequently won gold medals in Bordeaux. Political upheaval, phylloxera and the vineyard owner's death in 1920 brought production to an end. Cartuxa revived the label in 1990 for its flagship wines, made from native grape varieties. Pêra-Manca has since acquired a cult following in Portugal and internationally.

The Fundação Eugénio de Almeida also cultivates 400 hectares of olive groves, producing cold-extracted extra virgin olive oils with acidity below 0.2%. EA Olive Oil blends Cobrançosa, Picual, Arbequina, Koroneiki and Galega, with fruity, spicy notes of green tomato leaf. Cartuxa Olive Oil combines Cobrançosa, Picual and Arbequina, offering fresh, complex flavours and a bitter-almond finish.

In association with Mentzendorff

For more information about Cartuxa, visit mentzendorff.co.uk



A conversation starter

Sustainability is a talking point that can give indies the edge over supermarkets, argues ***Jacob Stokes***

For an industry that talks so much about sustainability, the wine trade's consumers are still largely sheltered from the conversation – and from the environmental, social and economic realities behind it.

That shouldn't come as a surprise, given that more than 80% of off-trade wine purchases in the UK are still made in supermarkets, where the transfer of information rarely extends beyond the bare bones of region, variety, brand and, ultimately, price. There's little room for conversation in supermarkets, let alone a nuanced discussion about sustainability.

Instead, the subject is often reduced to certification logos and seals. These might be national schemes, such as New Zealand's SWNZ – Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand – or South Africa's Integrity & Sustainability Certified seal, or international certifications such as organic or biodynamic.

It is precisely the lack of engagement at the point of sale that makes such logos necessary. But without any explanation, they are unlikely even to be noticed, let alone explored in a meaningful way. And so the cycle continues.

Independent merchants are the outlets most likely to break that information deadlock. They already provide context for almost every other aspect of wine, many of which are naturally intertwined with sustainability.

Wine on tap, a concept embraced by many indies, illustrates how successfully merchants can engage consumers by sharing sustainability goals. It can provide a route to premiumisation, as consumers become more willing to invest in sustainable products, while also helping merchants distinguish themselves from the multiples by placing people, provenance and values at the heart of the sale.

Of course, not every consumer will want to engage with sustainability, and neither will every merchant. As the wider debate becomes increasingly fragmented under economic and political pressures, the benefits of championing sustainability need to make financial sense more than ever.

For merchants, integrating sustainability into the way they buy and sell wine can be more than a worthy brand value: it can offer a genuine point of difference.


LAWSON'S DRY HILLS
MARLBOROUGH
Certified B Corporation
TOITŪ CARBON ZERO ISO 14064-1 ORGANISATION
Telarc. Registered Environment ISO 14001
SUSTAINABLE NEW ZEALAND WINEGROWING
"Amps Wine Merchants have been working with Lawson Dry Hills for the past 15 years. The quality of the wines is top draw and service and support first class."
Philip Amps
LAWSON'S DRY HILLS
MARLBOROUGH
SAUVIGNON BLANC
Certified Sustainable & Carbon Zero
WINE of NEW ZEALAND
Proudly estate grown, made and bottled by us
Available from regional wholesalers all over the UK!
Email belinda@lawsonsdryhills.co.nz for more information.
Plus Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir & our Reserve wines


LITTLE FIVE
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
SHIRAZ
MERLOT
CHENIN BLANC
CHENIN BLANC SAUVIGNON BLANC
FAIRTRADE & ORGANIC
FAIRTRADE, ORGANIC & VEGAN
ehrmanns
www.ehrmannswines.co.uk
Contact: marketing@ehrmanns.co.uk

The vineyard

Talking about vineyards to customers is a balancing act. Information about pests, disease control, soil compaction and root penetration is unlikely to persuade most people to spend more, nor are lengthy geological explanations about rock formations – tempting though they may be for some of us.

But vineyard life is a different matter. Sheep, ducks and chickens grazing among cover crops; biodiversity encouraged through vineyard management; beehives; indigenous flora and fauna … these are tangible examples that consumers can readily understand. The preservation and encouragement of life is something people can get behind and, potentially, be willing to pay more for.

Water is another important part of the story. Wine production is a thirsty business, and climate change is making water stewardship increasingly significant. Regions and producers that manage water carefully therefore have a story worth telling, particularly when contrasted with heavily irrigated regions such as Australia's Riverland.

Dry farming and old vines can carry plenty of romance, while still linking back to the preservation of resources. Rainwater harvesting and wastewater recycling may sound rather less evocative, but they are no less important.

The winery

The workings of a winery do not always translate glamorously to the point of sale. What is the most exciting thing you tell your customers about a winery? Gravity flow? An old basket press? Indigenous yeasts? Temperature control? For what it's worth, my answer would be Natte Valleij's appassimento of Cinsault stems.

But what about sustainability? Again, the stories may lack some of the romance of the vineyard, involving as they often do pomace, wastewater and solar panels.

Yet the idea of circularity is a powerful one. Grape skins, seeds, stems and lees can be composted, distilled, used for energy or repurposed into cosmetics. Winery wastewater can be recovered and used for irrigation. Solar panels can allow producers to generate much of their own energy and, in some cases, operate largely off grid.

Being transparent about these measures, however small they may seem, is another way of distinguishing independent merchants' wines from supermarket products, which often reach the shelf with little traceability or context. Combined with the other services and expertise that merchants provide, such stories might encourage consumers who alternate between supermarkets and independents to think twice about where they buy.



Consumers don't think much about winery design – but may be interested in the green credentials of the facility

Some easy wins for indies

Sustainability doesn't have to mean costly infrastructure projects. Lanchester Wines CEO Tony Cleary MBE explains how smaller investments can deliver commercial benefits for independent merchants – and why he believes the trade needs to fight back against EPR charges

When it comes to sustainability, Lanchester Wines practises what it preaches. Done properly, it argues, sustainability can reduce risk, cut costs, build resilience and future-proof a business. Its experience suggests that environmental commitments need not come at the expense of commercial performance.

Over their 25-year lifespan, its three wind turbines are expected to negate approximately 25 million kilograms of CO_2 emissions compared with grid electricity – equivalent to the annual emissions of around 2,500 people in the UK. In what the company describes as a first for a UK business, its geothermal heat pump system draws heat from disused mine water, reducing the carbon footprint of its space heating by 80%.

Yet despite these large-scale investments, Tony Cleary, co-founder and CEO of the Lanchester Group, believes smaller, more achievable measures are just as important – and encourages independent merchants to explore them.

"Indies aren't going to be able to put a wind turbine up, but there are lots of small wins available that add up and help," says Cleary. "We bought three electric vans three months ago. They were silly money. But we're going to pay for those vans in 14 months, purely from the savings of running them on electricity rather than diesel."

He adds: "Of course, we have our wind and solar power, and we also do a lot of miles, so we get payback reasonably quickly. But even for indies charging overnight on cheap tariffs and only doing local deliveries, it's still worth it in the long run."



300g bottles save 12p on EPR per case of six



25 million tonnes of carbon negated

Cleary is particularly outspoken on extended producer responsibility (EPR). "We need to start talking to each other and fight back. Every new tax brought in is clobbering our industry," he says. "Indies are being taxed twice: they're being charged once for having their recycling taken away and then for EPR."

He believes merchants should challenge what he calls the "badly written" rules. Wine bottles supplied to hospitality are generally treated as household packaging for EPR purposes. But primary packaging may be classified as non-household where it's supplied to a business that provides the product to the end user with all packaging removed.

"If indies pour wine by the glass they don't pay EPR, but if they put the bottle on the table, they do, and it goes in the same bin. So, if indies insist on pouring bottles for customers, like they do behind the bar, I'd argue there's no difference. And I'd ask someone to prove otherwise," says Cleary.

He also points to lightweight packaging as a way of reducing costs. "90% of Lanchester Wines' UK packed brands are in a lightweight 300g bottle. It's a 12p EPR saving per case of six compared to the average bottle, which is around 400g. Now, I know it doesn't sound a lot, but indies sell a lot of cases of wine. It adds up."

The environmental case for lighter bottles has traditionally centred on lower transport emissions, a benefit Cleary continues to emphasise. But financial sustainability is becoming equally important. "All the government is going to do is keep putting that price up and up, and businesses will be paying more and more and they simply won't survive. That's why I think it's so important," he says.

Perhaps Cleary's most pertinent point for independent merchants and the wider trade is not about turbines, vans or bottles – or even EPR – but about the expectations of the next generation of wine drinkers.

"When I speak to businesses, I try to get them to understand that young people care about sustainability, and they're going to be the business's main market for the next 20 years," he says. "Recently, people have wanted me to speak more and more about money and costs. Businesses are always asking, 'what's this going to cost me?' and 'what am I going to save?' rather than 'why should I do it?'" For Cleary, the answer to that last question is straightforward: the next generation.

In association with Lanchester Wines



Tony Cleary: EPR rules are "badly written"

The bottle

It goes without saying that there are different levels to how far merchants take their commitment to sustainability. For some, especially those focused on natural wine, it can underpin an entire range. For others with more diverse offerings, it might mean stocking a handful of producers with particularly strong sustainability credentials. In many cases it may barely enter the buying equation.

But whether sustainability is an explicit consideration or not, where merchants place their money and endorsement matters. Although many supply-chain decisions may seem beyond an individual merchant's sphere of influence, we see time and again that independents, often among the industry's earliest adopters, can help set wider trends and changes in thinking in motion.

One area where indies have generally chosen continuity rather than innovation is the glass bottle. There are sound reasons for this. Leaving aside any national pride in the fact that the transportable glass bottle was invented on these shores, the bigger issue is the importance of presenting wine as a premium product. For many consumers, the optics of wine in a can, box or keg still work against that perception.

If widespread adoption of alternative formats remains unlikely, the argument therefore shifts to how the glass bottle itself can become more sustainable.

The simplest first step is reducing bottle weight. Given that a significant share of wine's carbon footprint comes from the production and distribution of 75cl glass bottles, choosing unnecessarily heavy glass is increasingly difficult to justify.

I ran the numbers on one of the heaviest bottles I can remember handling, from a biodynamic producer in the south of France. Weighing 1,774g when full, the empty bottle alone comes in at just over a kilogram.

Production that year was 15,970 bottles. Had the producer instead used a 360g lightweight Bordeaux bottle, more than 10,000kg of glass could have been removed from the supply chain for that vintage alone – roughly the weight of eight Ford Focus hatchbacks. Multiply decisions like that across a portfolio, region or country and the impact quickly becomes substantial.

For consumers accustomed to associating heavy bottles with prestige, merchants have an important role in explaining that bottle weight has little to do with wine quality – but a great deal to do with the carbon generated in producing and transporting it.

There are also important discussions to be had about bulk shipping and glass colour, though these involve more complicated commercial considerations than simply choosing a lighter bottle. For that reason, bottle weight remains one of the most obvious and readily achievable ways for the wine trade to reduce its environmental impact.

The bigger picture

As an agricultural product, wine naturally encourages us to focus on environmental sustainability. But there is a danger in doing so at the expense of the economic pressures facing the industry and the wider world.

Environmental measures can only endure if they are financially viable. On paper, the ideas discussed here can all appear entirely rational. But if those measures are achieved while someone along the chain – whether a grape picker or a UK merchant – cannot make a proper living, then the arrangement is not sustainable in any meaningful sense.

That is where premiumisation and sustainability can go hand in hand. After around 30 years of steady growth in wine exports and value, from the 1990s into the early 2020s, repeated races to the bottom arguably helped undermine wine's perceived value. Whether through intensive farming regimes based on routine spraying or relentless discounting in the multiples, there have been times when the industry has seemed in danger of losing respect for its own product.

The current decline in wine volumes can also be viewed as an opportunity to reconsider that model. If some of the consumers leaving the category were retained only through ever-lower prices, perhaps the industry now has an opportunity to reshape itself around the things independent merchants have always argued wine should represent: provenance, quality, craft and story.

The fact that supermarkets have experienced sharper volume declines than independent merchants, while also attempting to premiumise and diversify their ranges, suggests that some of this shift may already be under way.

If we want a more environmentally sustainable trade, in which producers can afford to implement and maintain the measures we consider sensible, we have to work backwards from the point of sale. That means reinforcing wine's position as a drink with an unusually rich story and sense of place – and creating enough value throughout the chain to support it.

And if any part of the wine trade is well placed to communicate that story directly to consumers, it is independent retail.





ASK Phoebe

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

What's the cure for lacklustre, lunatic staff?

Dear Phoebe

Twenty-two years I've had this shop. I held on through the Lehman Brothers, through Brexit and the pandemic and the council's "temporary" bollards. I have The Cure on repeat. I don't make eye contact. It works. The problem is my staff. My manager wanged on about lunar cycles for 40 minutes over the weekend to a customer who wanted a Rioja for a shepherd's pie. The part-timer won't answer the phone because it "crosses a boundary". How do I get these people to just sell some wine?
Keith, Keith

Dear Keith

I don't know about you, but I rarely trust people who "have staff". Nor do I trust people who play The Cure, apart from *Lovecats*. That was them, wasn't it? And they did that version of that Craig David song. Not my favourite cover, and I know a few things about covers! Mainly *Lilac Wine* (Buckley) and *Perhaps Perhaps Perhaps* (Cake, but not their *I Will Survive*). Leave biodynamics alone, you ex-Oddbins prick.

Hope that Helps! Phoebe



Fine with Rioja, less so with moon talk

Somebody think of the educators

Dear Phoebe

I am the Senior Wine Educator (unaccredited) of our wine shop. I'm four years into the Diploma, and can name every soil in Alsace. The owner calls our range of Lambrusco my "silly little crusade" and my part-timer just sold a mousey, flat pét-nat to a Fine Wine Regular because it had a picture of a goose in a jacuzzi on it. Is integrity dead, or is it me?
Sylvan, Keith

Dear Sylvan

I rarely trust people with qualifications, but I can trust you because you like Lambrusco. Have you tried M&S's? They just don't get it! Have you also tried their Gigantic Daddy Pistachio Bar? They just don't get it! When Tony was in hospital with his bunions of the imagination I bought their Exceedingly Chocolatey Custard Creams which they had covered in the wrong type of chocolate. They just don't get it! Not to be trusted!

HTH, Phoebe

Higher-ups are getting me down

Dear Phoebe

I do seven hours a week at a bottle shop to fund my mosaic zine and flat full of mice. The vibes are not it. The manager is always one sigh from tears. A man asked them for a Chablis and got 15 minutes on climate change and soil erosion. They keep asking me to answer the landline. Why would I speak to a stranger? There's an Instagram. The owner told me to show initiative, so I ordered all the bottles by label colour, and now they've told me to just stand by the till. Is it all retail or just wine retail that loves suffering?
Forest, Keith

Dear Forest

I rarely trust conversations over the phone, nor mosaics. I am never sure whether either really exists. So I can see your problem! I saw a documentary (*How It's Made*) once about a factory making the bits for mosaics and it made my stomach turn. The same is true of the voices through the wires, although *How It's Made* has not covered this in any significant depth. Bottle filing by label colour coming soon to this humble establishment!

HTH, Phoebe

WINES UNDER £15.00



Abigail Connolly is a big fan of Masi Modello – an "all-day red" that she sells for £14.85.

Read about some of her other sub-£15 recommendations – and those of other indies and suppliers – in the following pages

1276 WINES BACCHUS 2024
HEREFORDSHIRE, UK
RRP £14.99

Bacchus uniquely captures the essence of the English countryside. Almost an "English garrigue", our 2024 Bacchus is redolent of freshly mown lawns, cottage herb gardens and wild hedgerows, bursting with elderflower, blackberry leaf, nettle and mint.



A touch of malolactic fermentation and generous batonnage has given a richer and more generous mouth feel and softer, riper acidity than is often associated with this variety – almost a "Bacchus Sur Lie".

Enjoy with fresh seafood, sushi and creamy, herby pasta dishes.

1276 WINES PINOT NOIR PRÉCOCE 2023
HEREFORDSHIRE, UK
RRP £14.99

Pinot Noir Précoce has become a flagship English variety, offering medium bodied red wines with an often surprising level of depth, complexity and potential.

Our 2023 vintage has really hit its stride after a couple of years in bottle. A core of ripe dark plum, dried strawberry and black cherry, overlaid with thyme, black pepper, spiced black tea and truffle.



A versatile food wine, it makes a great match for game, pork and roasted root vegetables.

Based on the site of a 13th century vineyard, 1276 Wines produces a range of award-winning still and sparkling wines at our Herefordshire vineyard and winery. Every bottle is made exclusively with our own sustainably grown and selectively hand-harvested fruit, and with traditional winemaking methods. We allow the fruit to take centre stage, ensuring that our wines are a true expression of our vineyard and the unique signature of each vintage.
For trade enquiries, please contact rob.yeatman@1276wines.co.uk


Head winemaker Laurence Cocking

OJOS DEL SUR PINOT NOIR
PATAGONIA, ARGENTINA
RRP £14.99

A classic expression of Patagonian Pinot Noir, combining bright red cherry and strawberry fruit with delicate spice and subtle vanilla notes. Fresh, elegant and beautifully balanced, it offers vibrant acidity, silky tannins and a refined finish.



Reflecting Patagonia's cool-climate character, Ojos del Sur delivers purity of fruit, finesse and an appealing freshness that makes it both distinctive and effortlessly approachable. Certified sustainable.

FAMILIA TRAVERSA VIÑA SALORT ALBARIÑO
CANELONES, URUGUAY
RRP £13.99

A distinctive expression of Albariño from Canelones, where Atlantic influences help shape the grape's naturally fresh, aromatic style. Zesty citrus, crisp stone fruit and delicate floral notes combine with bright acidity and a subtle saline edge.



Elegant, refreshing and beautifully balanced, this captures Albariño's affinity with coastal climates, delivering purity of fruit, finesse and a crisp, moreish finish. Certified sustainable.

ANT MOORE A+ PINOT GRIS
MARLBOROUGH, NEW ZEALAND
RRP £13.99

A lovely example of New Zealand Pinot Gris, combining ripe pear and juicy stone fruit with delicate floral notes and a hint of spice. Generous yet refreshing, it balances a rounded, textured palate with lively acidity and a clean, persistent finish.



Approachable and versatile, Ant Moore a+ captures the variety's signature fruit-forward character while retaining the freshness and vibrancy that make New Zealand whites so appealing. Certified sustainable.

Abigail Connolly

Connolly's, Birmingham

I've always thought of wines under £15 as weekday wines. Not because they're lesser wines, but because they're such an important part of how people actually buy and drink.

£15 is an interesting threshold: high enough to expect something good, but low enough to take a punt. Customers might try an unfamiliar grape, explore a new region or simply trust a recommendation. Yet it's still more than they're likely to spend in a supermarket, so the wine has to overdeliver – particularly in an independent shop.

For a first-time visitor, £15 is a relatively low-risk entry into a world that can feel intimidating. A £40 bottle is a decision; a £13 bottle is an invitation.

It's crucial to offer plenty of variety and some banging wines below £15. A great bottle at that price doesn't just brighten someone's evening; it can make them curious about the rest of the shop. They might come back for a dinner-party bottle, something special for an anniversary or a gift for the ever-discerning in-laws.

Those weekday wines may be everyday purchases, but they set the tone.

Abi's absolutely fabulous recommendations

Familia Traversa Viña Salort Albariño, Uruguay (Condor Wines)
People know the grape, but not necessarily the region. It really showcases the savoury side of Albariño. The Viña Salort Tannat is an absolute banger too! *£14.50*

Masi Modello Trevenezie IGT Rosso (Berkmann Wine Cellars)
Light, fresh and fruit-forward. Chill it down, or don't. It's an all-day red. *£14.85*

In Situ Reserva Pinot Noir, Aconcagua Valley (Delibo Wine Agencies)
A really good example of Pinot Noir at a fraction of the price. *£13*

Jack Young

Charlie's Drinks Store, north London

There's an interesting contradiction in wine at the moment. In some ways, it has never been more accessible: with a swipe of a finger, you can seek out cult natural-wine producers from the Jura, old vintages of Cornas and rare Burgundies – or scoff at aggregated Vivino reviews.

Yet wine is becoming less affordable. It's all very well being able to track down rare bottles, but what's the point if only dusty chino-wearing collectors can buy them? Even former midweek staples now often cost upwards of £20. There are reasons, of course – inflation, rising costs, scarcity and all the rest – but to us, access is fundamental.

Wine is meant to be enjoyed, whatever the occasion or budget. A strong selection of thoughtfully made wines below £15 means that, even when you're feeling the pinch at the end of the month, you can still pick up a tangy Roditis or a crunchy, fruit-driven red to enjoy with midweek football and pizza.

Jack's juicy bargains

Quinta de Santiago Assinatura de Família (Festa)
A benchmark Vinho Verde: a bright little rascal bursting with freshly squeezed citrus and green apple, plus a hint of summery spritz. A great expression of the style. *£14.50*

Wildeberg Paarl Vine Garden Red Field Blend (Boutinot)
A sustainably farmed field blend of young-vine Grenache, Carignan and Cinsault from Paarl. Picked early, it's pale and just 11.5% abv, with redcurrant and raspberry fruit and savoury notes that keep it from being pure glou-glou. Delicious, and exactly the sort of wine that belongs under £15. *£14.50*

Les Vignerons d'Estézargues Côtes du Rhône Cuvée des Galets Rouge (Delibo Wine Agencies)
A fabulous organic, unfiltered Côtes du Rhône from a forward-thinking co-operative. Everything a Côtes du Rhône should be: bright, juicy, plush and velvety, with Grenache-led ripe berry fruit and a lick of pepper. *£14.80*



Jack Young's got customers covered for midweek football and pizza nights

CASTILLO DE ARESAN CHARDONNAY 2025

VINO DE LA TIERRA DE CASTILLA LA MANCHA, SPAIN

RRP £13

Part of GCF's international portfolio since 2017, Castillo de Aresan highlights the exceptional potential of La Mancha, with 172 hectares of organic vineyards in Villarrobledo. The estate's Chardonnay is harvested at night and fermented in stainless steel to preserve freshness. Ageing on fine lees adds texture to produce an expressive style, with aromas of peach, apricot, ripe pear and citrus notes. Fresh and balanced, with juicy, tropical fruit and a long, vibrant, citrussy finish.



LA GRANGE CHÂTEAU DES MIRAN 2025

ORGANIC CÔTES DU RHÔNE, FRANCE

RRP £14.99

Located South of Valence, the estate's vineyards date back to the 17th century and are almost totally surrounded by a stone wall which protects them from the harsh Mistral winds.

Organic since 2014 and with a gravity-fed winery, the wine beautifully expresses the local terroir. Great concentration and freshness, notes of small black fruits, spice and aromatic woody herbs provide complexity. The tannins are round, leading to a fine long and warm finish.



L'ESQUISSE MALBEC MAISON RIGAL 2025

CAHORS, FRANCE

RRP £14

Since 1755 Maison Rigal has been a leading winemaker and grower in the Cahors AOP, birthplace of "vin noir", which flourishes in the Lot Valley. L'Esquisse is made from 100% Malbec, selected from vineyards on the limestone plateau, aged in concrete and stainless-steel tanks for six months to promote aromas and a modern, fruit-forward style.

Cassis, blackberry and peppery spicy notes lead to a palate with supple and elegant tannins typical of the terroir.



Faye Buckle

Carouse Wines, Bristol

Like everyone, we're constantly on the lookout for balanced, well-made wines under £15.

Our range is smaller than we'd like, but it brings people through the door and keeps them coming back. We try to offer a diversity of styles and grape varieties that our next-door neighbours, Tesco Express, can't match.

Our sales reps are really helpful, regularly introducing us to affordable wines that fit our ethos of low-intervention, sustainable and organic winemaking.

Delibo supplies several of our bestsellers in this category. We also look to importers' own labels, such as Vins-Clairs and Modal. Made with trusted producers, these wines offer consistently good value while supporting the wineries directly.



You can't find these in Tesco Express

Faye's fantastic four

Château Burgozone Côte du Danube Viognier, Bulgaria
(Delibo Wine Agencies)
A Carouse staple that flies out by the glass. From a passionate, family-run winery overlooking the Danube towards Romania, working with native and international varieties. *£14.50*

Réserve de Fleur, Côtes du Rhône
(Delibo Wine Agencies)
A no-frills, organic, unoaked Côtes du Rhône, created by Delibo and Denis Deschamps. Juicy, fresh and typical of the region. *£13.95*

Vins-Clairs Claudine, Côtes de Gascogne (Vins-Clairs)
Looks pretty on the shelf and tastes delicious. An organically grown own-label wine from Vins-Clairs. *£14.50*

Adega da Borba Convento da Vila Tinto, Alentejo (Graft Wine Co)
From an Alentejo co-operative focused on sustainably-grown native Portuguese varieties. Spicy and herbaceous. *£14.75*

PATUSCO VINHO VERDE ROSÉ
PORTUGAL
RRP £10.50

Portugal is used to big waves, especially in Nazaré, and in wine terms, Vinho Verde is the swell that is yet to break. Patusco Rosé is a pink, semi-sparkling Vinho Verde from Calçada Wines, which follows the successful launch of a white version. As the name and label suggest, it's bright and fun: a patusco is someone who never turns down a good time. Light salmon in colour, with a lively fizz and super-fresh acidity, it is packed with wild strawberry and raspberry fruit. At 11% abv, it is a fridge or BTG essential for when the impromptu festive drinks parties roll in.



ODULÍN FRIULANO
FRIULI, ITALY
RRP £13.50

Friuli has serious white wine pedigree and Odulín, a new range from The Wine People, shows why.

The region's native grape varieties take centre stage, and this Friulano spends time on lees with a portion in barrique to build texture. This puts it at the fuller end of the spectrum, with satisfying palate weight.

Expect notes of Mediterranean heathland herbs, wild rose and orange blossom, then citrus, peach and apricot, finishing with a spicy lift.



SAAM FAIRTRADE GRENACHE BLANC
PAARL, SOUTH AFRICA
RRP £13.50

SAAM means "together" in Afrikaans, and this Fairtrade-certified range of ethical wines supports local grape-producing farm families and workers in the Paarl region. It helps fund projects such as a creche and youth programme at Eenzaamheid Farm. Sourced from dry-land bush vines, which rely solely on natural rainfall, this Grenache Blanc delivers concentrated fruit with a distinct minerality. It's balanced and versatile, with ripe peach, gooseberry, green fig and a high-energy finish.



OXTE CÉZANNE GARNACHA
SIERRA DE ALGAIRÉN, SPAIN
RRP £14

Bodem Bodegas is a family-owned sustainable winery based in Cariñena.

This is Garnacha country and their Oxte Cézanne expression is sourced from Sierra de Algairén, the grape's birthplace. Cold pre-fermentation maceration and three months on lees make this a juicy, supple red.

It leans gently towards the lighter, brighter end of the Garnacha spectrum and can even be served lightly chilled. Cézanne is easy on the eye, palate and wallet.



MINA MESA ZINFANDEL
PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA
RRP £12

Big, ripe and unapologetically Californian, Mina Mesa is produced by Scheid Family Wines using sustainably farmed fruit in a winery run entirely on wind power.

Zinfandel leads the blend, with cameos from Petite Sirah, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Dense fruit flavours range from ripe plum to raspberry and redcurrant, with notes of vanilla from a lick of new oak. It's full-bodied, vegan and ready to go.



DEEN VAT DURIF
AUSTRALIA
RRP £14

Durif is the rich, inky crossbreed of Syrah and Peloursin that started life in France before successfully emigrating to Australia.

To keep the fruit lively, De Bortoli matures 15% of the final blend in tank, while the rest spends 12 months in American and French oak. Layers of blueberry and plum give way to liquorice and chocolate. Christmas cake, even.

Deen Vat is all about enjoyment without a fuss, and this will keep hearty red drinkers happy.



Nouveau riches

The third Thursday of November is almost upon us, and for a growing number of independent wine merchants that means it's time to celebrate the first Beaujolais wines of 2026 – and with good reason

By ***Jacob Stokes***

In some ways, Beaujolais Nouveau today is very different from the wine of 30 years ago.

In production terms, selected yeasts and intensive carbonic maceration have increasingly given way to native yeasts, gentler extraction and slower fermentations – a marked departure from the fizzy, fruit-sweet styles of the 1990s and early 2000s. The wines are generally better quality now, and producers are understandably asking higher prices.

The wider Beaujolais category has changed too, emerging from Nouveau's long shadow and demonstrating its potential to produce world-class wines, particularly in its 10 crus. As expectations of Beaujolais have risen in terms of style, quality and value for money, Nouveau has also upped its game.

But, crucially, one thing hasn't changed. Beaujolais Nouveau is still an excuse for a party: an opportunity to celebrate another vintage, a chance to connect with each other and, for merchants, a lucrative way to get people through the door. Le Beaujolais Nouveau est (nearly) arrivé, so we checked in with a couple of indies to see how they're welcoming the 2026 vintage.

Charles Cornelius

Barks Wine Shop, Sheffield

We did a very low-key Beaujolais Nouveau last year. We just got some in, and I made a video pairing Beaujolais with a Greggs steak bake. We weren't really expecting much, but it was actually extremely popular. So this year we've decided to take it up a level.

I've placed a big order with four importers, and we're stocking Beaujolais Nouveau from four different producers this time. They're fairly reasonably priced: the cheapest is £21, from Yapp Brothers. The others are from smaller, low-intervention wineries supplied by Alpine, The Modest Merchant and Wines Under the Bonnet. The most expensive is around £28.

We're teaming up with two other wine bars in the city centre to do a little Beaujolais crawl. Well, I say a crawl – we're only about five minutes away from each other. We'll have nine wines on show between us, and if you have a glass at each bar, you'll get a limited-edition poster print, a collaboration between our designers.

We meet with the other two wine bars regularly to talk and make sure we aren't stepping on each other's toes. Sheffield is a small city with a growing wine scene, so we always talk. We all said how popular Beaujolais was, so we wanted to make more of an event of it. November, and the whole pre-Christmas period, can be tough, and this will really kick-start the festive season.



There are all these reports about Gen Z drinking less, but we've seen a massive uptick in 25- to 30-year-olds going out and drinking. I think they just want to have fun with it, and Beaujolais Nouveau is a great way to do that, especially going into Christmas, when everything can feel quite serious. The wine takes a back seat – it's the backdrop to people having a good night.

Chilled reds in general are performing so well. Even going into the colder weather, we'll keep a chilled red on by the glass. I think people, not just younger drinkers, aren't as afraid of fruit as



Prestafood & Co

they used to be. It's not about being stuffy or all about oak; people are embracing fruit and juiciness. Chilled reds are often our best-selling wines by the glass each week. On the retail side, we also have what I call a chilled red shelf, and we're constantly replenishing those wines.

We plan to host three big parties every year: our birthday in April, our summer party and now, I'm hoping, Beaujolais Nouveau as the third. Even though last year's event was small, people were asking what we were doing this year. So I think it's going to become a big feature in people's wine calendars.

In Sheffield, we're trying to grow as a northern powerhouse of wine, and I think it's great that not just our three bars but lots of neighbourhood bars are getting involved and making a big song and dance about it.

Gregory Andrews

D Vine Cellars, Clapham, south London



When we first started doing Beaujolais Nouveau, back in 2012, I've got to be honest: it was like pulling teeth. We had about half a dozen people, a couple of berets and a few French flags. It was almost so naff it was unique.

My first staff member's dad was one of these idiots who used to drive across to France on the Wednesday, chuck as much wine into a Porsche Carrera as possible and do a cannonball run back to London. So I think, because of that, we felt a commitment to it and just ploughed on.

It's definitely evolved, and we see a lot of momentum now. Last year was quite funny, actually. We had a customer book an entire sitting, and they rang me two weeks beforehand to reschedule. I was like, "You can't reschedule Christmas, mate." Anyway, we did, and we still filled the second session almost a week later.

This year we're offering two sittings again. We're going to do a tasting flight of five Beaujolais Nouveau wines, a French-inspired cheese and charcuterie menu and a few Beaujolais cru wines for people who want to crack on. Generally, around 50 customers will do the flight of five.

More interestingly, though, last year we also did a mixed six-pack of wines, and we ended up selling more than 240 bottles, mainly through retail. I think the last bottle was sold in the second week of December, and people were still asking for it into Christmas.

The suppliers we're using for our five wines this year are Flint, Les Caves de Pyrene, Alpine, Roberson and Uncharted.

The quality of the wine has improved, no question. I do think it's largely because of climate change. Compared with 12 years ago, they're harvesting three weeks earlier, and that gives the wines another three weeks of fermentation time, so they're more complete and less prone to poor winemaking. They're not conservative wines by any stretch, but they're proper wines. You rarely get that lolly-water style any more.

Beaujolais Nouveau is a traditional wine festival, but I think it works brilliantly today and should be embraced. It's not elitist; it's just fun. And that needs to be championed right now.

When we first started doing Beaujolais Nouveau, back in 2012, it was like pulling teeth. We had about half a dozen people, a couple of berets and a few French flags

Swansea goes nuts for Nouveau

'The biggest day of the year'

For many Swansea locals, Beaujolais Nouveau trumps Christmas as the biggest day of the year.

Hairdressers and beauty salons open before daybreak, while extra emergency services stand by and local journalists and photographers prepare for crowds to flood into the city centre from midday until late into the night.

The phenomenon traces its roots to former Wales rugby union captain Clem Thomas, who began bringing Beaujolais Nouveau back from France in the 1960s to uncork at the No Sign Wine Bar, which he once owned. The bar remains at the heart of the celebrations some 60 years later.

Many people take the day off to make the most of the events. "Beaujolais Day is a bit like being on holiday," says Swansea Business Improvement District manager Andrew Douglas, "and when you're on holiday it's acceptable to have a beer at 10 o'clock in the morning."

As a wine merchant in what owner Nick John describes as the "Beaujolais Nouveau capital of the world", ND John is naturally getting involved, but framing its celebrations as a civilised alternative to the chaos that can engulf the city centre.

Already sold out well in advance, ND John's event features two sittings, each offering a tasting of Beaujolais Nouveau and a selection of cheeses. "If anything was going to kill it, it was Covid, but it's just kept going and is never going to stop. Some restaurants we supply are fully booked for the following year by the end of the day," says Nick.

Nicolas Dormont



Justine Nerini



Jules Travet



A RUNNING THEME

The Marathon du Médoc isn't for everyone. But a more modest circuit ending up at your favourite wine shop for a convivial glass? Now we're talking. Claire Harries puts on her trainers and catches up with indies who have started their own running clubs



Every week one of the Bottle Chop runners wins a raffle prize. All club members get 20% off a drink when they finish the run

BOTTLE CHOP LEEDS

Bottle Chop's location in the residential suburb of Far Headingley is well-placed for a neighbourhood running club.

"I head up the Leeds Winos Run Club, which has been going for over two years," says James Moorhouse. "One evening I was sitting in our window with the owners, Gemma and Elis, and we were watching customers running past.

"We were sat there for a while just waving at lots of our regulars, and we thought: why not start our own running club? We had nothing to lose, and we haven't looked back.

"We run every Tuesday evening, with group sizes ranging from 60 in gorgeous weather to 40, even in terrible weather. The route changes weekly and is open to people of all abilities and ages.

"Every runner is entered into our weekly wine raffle, with a lucky winner taking home a bottle of natural wine, or a hamper at special events. Runners also receive 20% off their drink when they get back. Our next themed run is going to be in November to celebrate Beaujolais Nouveau, with cheese and wine on every lap of the 5km route."



MOUSE & GRAPE
PINNER

Passing the baton from Bottle Chop to Mouse & Grape, owner Jessica Summer says she was inspired by Winos Run Club.

“I’m not really a big runner, but a friend of mine from Leeds was running with Bottle Chop. She told me how brilliant it was and how she found it a really good way to get into running, and that she’d met some lovely people.”

Since Jessica started the running club in the summer, it’s proved very popular and she’s confident that it will continue to grow.

“I think it’s a nice way to create more of a community, and also to start moving a bit more myself,” she says. “People come back for drinks and cheese afterwards. We do 20% off your first purchase, whether you want to stay and have a glass of wine or buy a bottle to take away.

“We were running in the local park, which is about 5km if you run around it four times, and it meant people could do as many laps as they liked. Now it’s getting darker, we have adjusted to a well-lit circular route along the roads. We have runners of all abilities, and you run at your own pace.

“The whole point is that you’re showing up for yourself and doing a bit of exercise before you come and have a drink.”

Jessica Summer: “It’s a nice way to create more of a community”





BASIL'S REIGATE



A healthy Tuesday night in Surrey

For the past 18 months, owner Tom Drew has been working with Run to Wine, the running community founded by wine writer and runner Katie Brook.

"Before we opened, I messaged Katie asking her if she'd be interested in hosting one of her events here," he explains. "She was living in London at the time, and she's since moved down here, so it all came together quite nicely. It's very much a joint venture, with our space, our wines and our local area for the run, plus her wine knowledge and running passion combo."

Katie selects wines from Tom's list, adding a few of her own sourced elsewhere, and presents a wine tasting session after the run. She also handles ticket sales via her website and Eventbrite.

"She's got two or three routes of 5km that she mapped out on her first visit. I think the summer is better because you can go a bit further afield where you don't need things to be well lit. But running in a group offers that safety element, so we do get good numbers in the winter for that reason.

"We can get between 10 and 20 participants, but there is a bigger picture for me. We do it on a Tuesday night, which is traditionally quieter, so it doesn't impact trade on other evenings. We've had quite a few people who discovered us through Run to Wine and then became regulars. Katie has quite a big following on social media, so there's some good cross-pollination."



The best view in Bristol

CAROUSE WINES BRISTOL

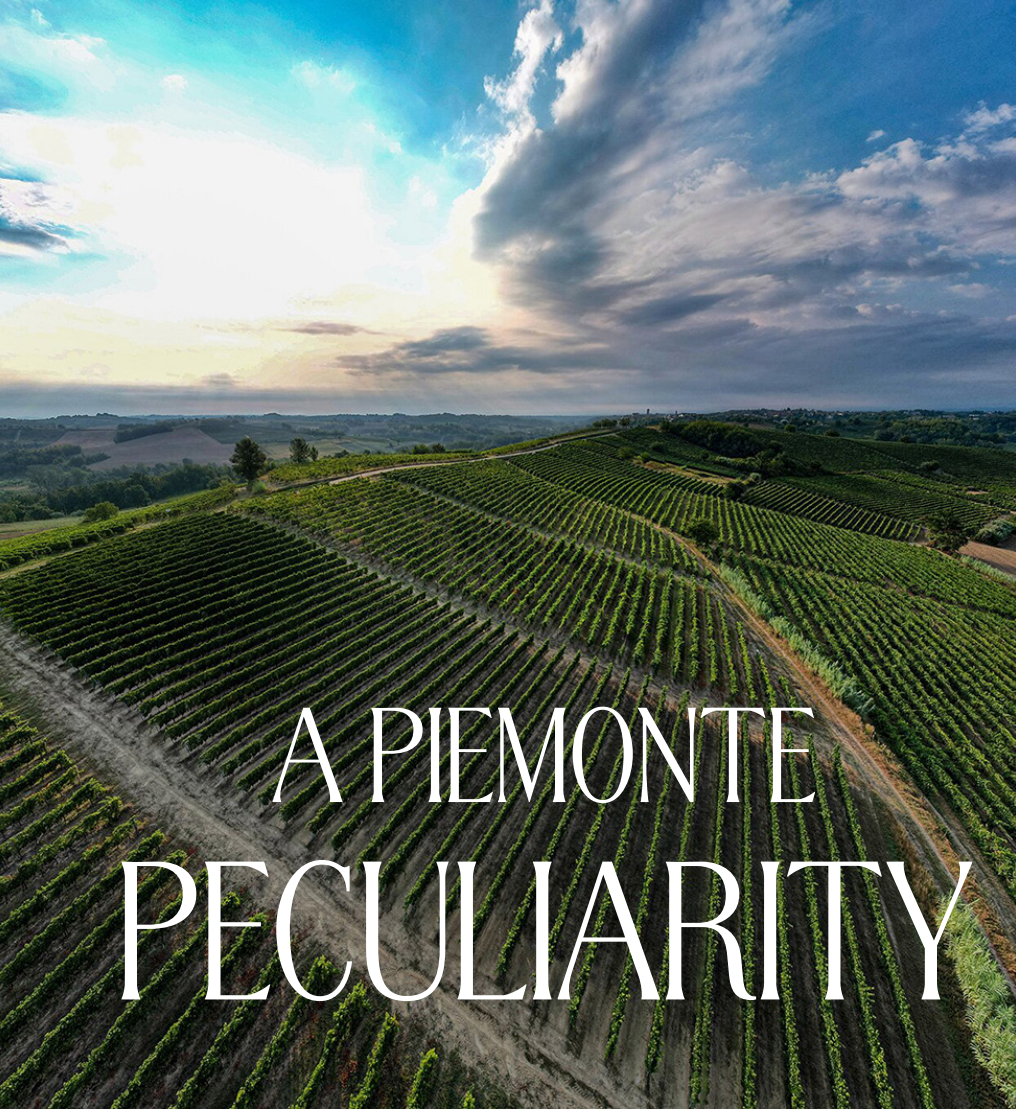
"Run clubs are quite prevalent in Bristol," says owner Faye Buckle. "There was nothing around this specific area, so I thought it'd be a nice opportunity to start one. I'm a big advocate for work-life, drinking and socialising balance. It's important to be healthy and be able to enjoy yourself.

"We started it at the beginning of February – it was pretty dark and wet and horrible, so it definitely took a little while to get people interested. Most people started coming as individuals rather than in groups, and everyone has met and found new friends through this club. It also just makes the run feel less painful when you're chatting the whole way round.

"We usually all stay and have a drink together afterwards, and then some people will meet other friends here and have a couple of drinks with them."

Bristol is known for its hills, and Faye admits that while they try to stick to flatter routes, sometimes they throw in a wild card.

"Perrett Park has got the best view in Bristol, but it is pretty hilly, so we tend to put that in as a surprise. If you say we're going to do a hilly one, people might pull out, but when we're actually doing it together – and we're all different standards – it feels so good, and once it's done, it's done."



A PIEMONTE PECULIARITY

Ferraris Agricola has more than one string to its bow. But there's no doubt that its calling card is Ruchè, a little-known aromatic variety that makes amazingly versatile red wines. As our London masterclass demonstrated, they are a very good fit for independents

When Michael Palij MW first encountered Ruchè, the Winetraders UK founder knew he had discovered something special. The problem was persuading himself that anyone in the UK would buy it.

"I love what you're doing," he told Luca Ferraris, whose family estate in north west Italy was enthusiastically vinifying the variety. "The wines are amazing, but there's no hope of me ever buying them."

Several years and numerous tastings later, Palij relented. He offered to take a shipment into his UK warehouse, on the understanding that he would only pay when he needed to reorder. The wines sold considerably faster than he anticipated.

Five years into the relationship, Ferraris has become an important part of the Winetraders portfolio, and Palij has become evangelical about Ruchè, a red grape grown in a tiny corner of Piemonte that most wine drinkers have never heard of.

The grape produces intensely perfumed wines, with rose petals, red fruit and spice among its defining characteristics.

The Ferraris story is almost as improbable as that of the grape itself. In the early 20th century, Luca's great-grandfather emigrated to America, discovered gold and sent the proceeds home to his wife, instructing her to buy a house, a cellar and a vineyard.

She did exactly that, acquiring a property in Castagnole Monferrato in 1921. But her husband died in the mines before he could return, leaving her to establish the wine business with their young son.

Two generations later, Luca's father abandoned the difficult, unprofitable business of farming for a government job in Turin. Luca, however, had spent his childhood holidays with his grandparents in the vineyards and was determined to return. He took charge of the estate in 2001, aged just 19.

His decision to concentrate on Ruchè was considered eccentric locally. So was his adoption of green harvesting, which scandalised older growers who couldn't understand why anyone would deliberately throw away perfectly good grapes.

But the gamble worked. Ferraris now owns around 60 hectares, with further plantings planned, and exports its wines internationally.

The priest who saved Ruchè

Ruchè's origins remain mysterious. Its presence around Castagnole Monferrato was documented in the 18th century, but nobody knows exactly how it arrived. Traditionally grown among Barbera and Grignolino, it was sometimes made into sweet wine for domestic consumption.

Its modern revival owes much to a local priest, Don Giacomo Cauda, who arrived in the parish in the 1960s.

Cauda was initially convinced that Ruchè was spoiling his wine. He separated the unfamiliar grapes from his other varieties, intending to prove his point. But when he accidentally served the resulting wine to a visiting bishop, it was enthusiastically received.

Cauda became Ruchè's greatest champion, planting a vineyard entirely with the variety in 1964 and producing a dry varietal wine. He subsequently campaigned for official recognition, achieved with DOC status in 1987. DOCG recognition followed in 2010.

Today the denomination covers seven communes centred on Castagnole Monferrato. As well as being highly aromatic, Ruchè is also naturally rich in sugar, meaning alcohol levels can be surprisingly high. But as the Ferraris tasting demonstrated, Ruchè has more than enough personality to carry it.

A sparkler, a Viognier and then on to the Ruchè

Indies at the London masterclass work their way through the Ferraris line-up



Chiara Ferraris in London

The tasting begins with a departure from Ruchè: **2021 Tenuta Santa Chiara Alta Langa DOCG Brut** (RRP £31; 12.5% abv).

The sparkling wine project began when Luca and Chiara drove through the hills of Alta Langa to collect their children from summer camp. Impressed by the landscape, Chiara agreed that it would be an ideal place to make traditional-method sparkling wine. By the following weekend, Luca had bought the land.

The wine, named after Chiara, is two-thirds Pinot Nero and one-third Chardonnay, grown at around 550 metres. It spends about 30 months on lees, with a dosage of seven to eight grams per litre.

The result is generous and approachable, with attractive fruit, creamy texture and a striking saline freshness. Chiara deliberately avoids the austere, bone-dry style increasingly fashionable in Alta Langa.

"We're young and fun people," she says. "We don't want it too formal."

Next comes **2025 Piemonte Viognier DOC Sensazioni** (RRP £23.50; 12.5% abv). Ferraris planted its first Viognier in 2006, having sourced vines from Condrieu. It was an unusual choice for Monferrato, but a logical companion to Ruchè: an aromatic white for customers who appreciated aromatic reds.

Today the estate produces around 40,000 bottles annually. Fermented and matured in stainless steel, Sensazioni is deliberately uncomplicated in its production, but not in its character.

It's fresh, lightly floral and restrained for Viognier, without the weight or excessive perfume that can make some examples rather exhausting. Chiara says experiments with oak and extended ageing were abandoned in favour of this brighter, more immediate style.

The first Ruchè we try is **2025 Sant'Eufemia** (RRP £23.50; 13.5% abv), the estate's most approachable expression.

Fermented and aged in stainless steel, it bursts with rose petals, strawberries and sweet spices. The tannins are gentle and the finish fresh, with a little residual sugar helping to round out the palate.

Chiara calls this the estate's "summer Ruchè", recommending it lightly chilled, even with sushi or delicate fish dishes.

It's an inspired introduction to the variety: exuberant without being heavy, and sufficiently versatile to interest consumers who might normally choose Pinot Noir.

2024 Clàsic (RRP £25.50; 14.5% abv) takes things in a more serious direction. This is the original Ferraris style, fermented in stainless steel but matured in large oak casks. The unusually wet 2024 vintage brought some welcome freshness to a grape that can struggle with excessive sugar accumulation.

The result is beautifully balanced, with floral aromas giving way to ripe red fruit, savoury complexity and finely judged acidity. Despite its alcohol, nothing feels exaggerated or out of balance.

It's easy to understand why this has been one of Ferraris' most decorated wines. At £25.50, it also makes a persuasive case for Ruchè as an alternative to pricy Pinot Noir.

Then comes **2024 Vigna del Parroco** (RRP £33.50; 15% abv), arguably the most historically significant wine in the range.

Ferraris acquired Don Cauda's original vineyard in 2016. Its vines, planted in 1964, represent a direct link to Ruchè's modern resurrection and include a different clone from that used in most of the estate's other vineyards.

Winemaking follows the priest's traditional approach, with 80% of the wine matured in stainless steel and 20% in 500-litre oak tonneaux.

There's considerable concentration, with dark cherries, dried flowers and a subtle balsamic quality. Yet the alcohol is remarkably well integrated, supported by freshness and supple tannins.

Chiara recommends mushrooms and truffles as ideal companions, pointing out that much of the prized white truffle associated with Alba is actually found in Monferrato.



Finally, **2022 Opera Prima Riserva** (RRP £45; 15.5% abv) demonstrates just how far Ruchè can be taken. First produced experimentally in 2007, it was conceived as a challenge to the assumption that this aromatic variety was only suitable for relatively youthful drinking.

Grapes from a naturally ▶



Chiara Ferraris in Alta Langa

low-yielding vineyard undergo a slow fermentation with an extended submerged-cap maceration, followed by 24 to 36 months in 500-litre oak tonneaux.

The result is quite unlike the exuberant Sant'Eufemia. The overt floral character has retreated, replaced by earth, spice, concentrated fruit and considerable savoury depth.

It's powerful, certainly, but also composed and impressively structured. Chiara reports that bottles from 2010 and 2011 are still drinking beautifully.



Luca Ferraris doing some quality control

Liam Plowman

Wild+Lees, Herne Hill, south London

This was my first experience of Ruchè and it was very easy to like. Lots of gentle red fruit but also a keynote floral character, with violet and roses to the fore. Quaffable but interesting.

I don't think any of our customers would've heard of it, but most of them are up for exploration. The way in for us would be as a by-the-glass offering on our list. We usually introduce more obscure wines this way and it's a great way to spread the word.

The Clàsic stood out for me. It had some pleasing complexity but I could really drink it all evening, with or without food.



Liam Plowman

Aldo Giuliani

Symposium London, east London

I've tried a few Ruchè wines before, and I was genuinely impressed by how versatile and varied this variety can be when handled well.

I think open-minded consumers who are keen to explore something new could be drawn in quite easily. You get fresh, supple styles with intriguing, distinctive rose aromas and great drinkability, alongside more mature expressions. It may take some time and effort, of course, since you can't rely on a well-known appellation or grape variety, but I'm confident people can really enjoy it.

For a merchant, I'd say the real opportunity is on-trade and by-the-glass: it's a wine that sells itself at the table once you pour a taste. Its food versatility – and the fact that it sits outside the usual price comparisons – makes it a good way to differentiate the offer and protect margin, rather than compete on labels everyone already stocks.

Personally, I really enjoyed the Sant'Eufemia and the Vigna del Parroco, for exactly the reasons I mentioned. Two very different expressions – one easy and refreshing, the other more complex and layered – but both modern and vibrant.

Nish Patel

Shenfield Wine Co, Essex

Ruchè offers much of the aromatic complexity and elegance of Nebbiolo, but with an added dimension of floral exuberance, freshness and peppery spice. Where Nebbiolo is known for structure, tannic grip and longevity, Ruchè charms through its aroma, vibrancy and an incredible aromatic intensity.

I know my customers would love to explore Ruchè. How could they be persuaded? *"How often do you discover a grape variety that genuinely surprises you? Ruchè is one of Piemonte's best-kept secrets: beautifully aromatic, fresh, floral and spicy, with real character and, at the right price, remarkable value. I love it and you should try it."*

All four Ruchè wines were beautifully made, balanced and showed a clear progression in depth, complexity and seriousness. I particularly liked the Vigna del Parroco. Medium-bodied, fresh and full of juicy fruit, it had a good level of energy, finishing long and savoury. It was the wine that stayed with me most.

However, when I consider the range as a whole, I keep coming back to the Clàsic. At £25.50 it is a wonderfully satisfying glass of wine that delivers far beyond its price point. It has the charm, aromatic lift, freshness and character that makes Ruchè so appealing, without needing the extra weight or complexity of the more ambitious bottlings.

In association with importer Winetraders UK
For more information visit winetradersuk.co.uk or call 01993 882440

Will indie tills jingle all the way?

New research from Hallgarten suggests consumers are prepared to spend more on wine this Christmas, with premium bottles particularly appealing. But independent merchants still face stiff competition from supermarkets

Hallgarten & Novum Wines' *Festive Trends Report 2026* offers some useful insights for independent merchants preparing for Christmas.

The survey of 500 wine consumers – all of whom had bought wine for themselves or their household in the previous four weeks – found that 67% expect to spend more on wine for drinking at home than they did last year.

Inflation is an obvious factor. Yet there are signs of an appetite for trading up: 54% say they would spend £26 or more, while 77% of 18 to 34-year-olds expect to spend more than last year.

Volumes may also rise, with 44% expecting to buy more bottles than in 2025. In all, 85% anticipate buying the same number or more.

For key celebrations, £26 to £40 is the most popular price bracket, chosen by 33% of respondents. A further 21% intend to spend £41 or more per bottle, including 8% who plan to spend at least £75.

Less encouraging, though familiar, are the figures for where people expect to shop. Asked to name their two most likely outlets, 78% chose supermarkets, compared with just 30% who selected specialist wine merchants.

The gap narrows among premium wine consumers – defined as those who typically spend £15 or more per bottle – with supermarkets chosen by 66% and specialist merchants by 46%. This suggests independents have more to gain from emphasising their difference than from trying to compete directly with supermarkets. Only 3.8% of consumers are unwilling to trade up, suggesting scope for merchants to encourage a higher spend once customers are through the door.



77% of 18 to 34-year-olds expect to spend more on wine than they did last Christmas

As for countries on consumers' Christmas lists, England/UK leads with 39% of responses, followed by France on 36% and Italy on 35%. Champagne remains the preferred sparkling wine, ahead of Prosecco, although English sparkling wine overtakes Prosecco among 18 to 34-year-olds.

Preferences for still reds are more predictable. Some 72% favour one of three categories: bold and rich, smooth and medium-bodied, or classic European reds. Familiar styles, it seems, remain firmly on the festive shopping list.

Nearly half of respondents intend to serve white wine with their main festive meal. Tastes are more varied here: 36% favour crisp, refreshing styles, while 28% prefer rich, oaky whites. Just 7.8% opt for mineral, high-acid styles – a reminder that the wines generating the most discussion in the trade aren't necessarily those consumers favour.

Moderation remains part of the picture. The leading approach is to drink less but better, while 29% plan to include alcohol-free days over the festive period. Some 35% believe the low- and no-alcohol category has improved, and 15% intend to buy alternatives this year. Meanwhile, 17% have no plans to moderate, offering a certain reassurance that some festive traditions endure.

VIN: A French Wine Tasting

More than 40 French producers, importers and distributors will present wines from across France, including producers seeking UK representation.

There will also be sparkling and no- and low-alcohol sections, wine walks with Tom Surgey and the French Champion Awards with Matt Walls.

Register/contact: pandora.mistry@businessfrance.fr.

Thursday, January 7
Hyatt Regency London – The Churchill
30 Portman Square
London W1H 7BH

Charles Taylor Burgundy En Primeur Tasting

Winemakers will present wines from the 2025 Burgundy vintage. Attendance is by invitation only.

Register/contact: office@charlestaylorwines.com.

Thursday, January 7
Central London venue to be confirmed

Flint Wines Burgundy En Primeur Tasting

Taste wines from more than 50 producers, highlighting the 2025 vintage in Burgundy.

Contact orders@flintwines.com for registration.

Tuesday, January 12
Fishmongers' Hall
110 London Bridge
London EC4R 9EL



Beaune up on the 2025 vintage in London in January

Alliance Wine Burgundy En Primeur Tasting

The tasting will feature Albert Bichot, newly added to the Alliance Wine/H2Vin portfolio, alongside other Burgundy producers.

Register/contact: events@alliancewine.com.

Wednesday, January 13
Shooting Gallery, Haymarket Hotel
1 Suffolk Place
London SW1Y 4HX

Liberty Wines Burgundy & Beaujolais Tasting

Producers will pour wines from Liberty's Burgundy and Beaujolais portfolios.

Register/contact: events@libertywines.co.uk.

Wednesday, January 13
Central London venue to be confirmed

Ripley Wines Burgundy En Primeur Tasting

Around 20 growers will present the 2025 vintage, including Domaine Fourrier, Benjamin Leroux, Domaine de l'Arlot and Domaine Joseph Drouhin.

Register/contact: info@ripleywines.com.

Wednesday, January 13
Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London W1G 0RN

Etna DOC & Barolo DOCG Tasting

Fifteen Barolo producers and 20 from Etna will take part. Christine Marsiglio MW will lead masterclasses on Etna's volcanic terroirs and the expression of Nebbiolo in Barolo.

Register/contact: aloisel@hopscotch.one.

Monday, January 18
Central London venue to be confirmed

Maltby & Greek Annual Portfolio Tasting

Wines from more than 30 Greek producers will be joined by spirits and talks, including a winemaker masterclass.

Contact: clare@island-media.co.uk.

Monday, January 18
Mare Street Market
2 Lewis Cubitt Walk
London N1C 4DY

Liberty Wines Annual Portfolio Tasting

Around 850 wines and 200 winery representatives are expected at Liberty's annual tasting.

Register/contact: events@libertywines.co.uk.

Tuesday, January 19
The Kia Oval
London SE11 5SS

Hatch Mansfield Portfolio Tasting

Hatch Mansfield will present wines from across its portfolio, with many representatives from its producer partners attending.

The Hatch range includes names such as Taittinger, Louis Jadot, M Chapoutier, Gaja, Esporão, CVNE, Domaine Carneros and Errazuriz.

Domaine Evremond's latest release will also be on taste.

Register/contact: events@hatch.co.uk.

Monday, January 25
116 Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5ED

Borsa Vini Italiani: Italian Trade Tasting

The Italian Trade Agency will once again bring together producers from across the world's most diverse wine nation.

Register/contact: c.povero.ext@ice.it.

Tuesday, January 26
IET London: Savoy Place
2 Savoy Place
London WC2R 0BL

The Premier League of Spanish Wines

The third edition will feature more than 225 wines from over 20 Spanish wineries, covering regions including Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Toro and Navarra.

Register/contact: drinks@canddwines.co.uk.

Tuesday, January 26
Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Gate,
London SW1E 6BS

ZONIN1821 Portfolio Tasting

The Italian wine producer and supplier expects to show more than 250 wines, including those from Castello di Albola in Chianti Classico, Tenuta Oltrenero in Oltrepò Pavese, Feudo Principi di Butera in Sicily and Ca' Bolani in Friuli. Winemakers will attend.

Register/contact: eventsuk@zonin1821.com.

Wednesday, January 27
Barts North Wing
St Bartholomew's Hospital
West Smithfield
London EC1A 7BE



Unbottling

with Rachel Gibson MBACP

Seeing red

Are you an angry person? I'm not talking about the kind of anger one feels when your elegant Alsace bottles won't fit in your carefully-measured shelves. This type of frustrated fury dissipates shortly after some careful rejigging. Equally, I'm not talking about the kind of reactive anger that pops up unexpectedly and results in a verbal tirade, perhaps at unsympathetic credit controllers.

I'm referring to the kind of anger that not only makes us boil over with rage, but that we relentlessly hold inside us, buried deep down, whilst it quietly eats away at our core being. Anger emerges when we feel that something has blocked the way of a desired outcome, or when we believe there's a violation of the way things should be. When we feel anger, we often feel that someone else is to blame for an unfair or unjust situation, and that something should be done to resolve it. We may feel unheard or misunderstood.

Anger is not just a feeling. Holding onto it can have a physical reaction within our bodies. We may carry it as tension and stress, affecting our posture, our digestive system, our concentration and our self-esteem. Anger may translate into the way we think of ourselves, through our inner dialogue. We may think "I'm angry with myself", "I'm disappointed and hurt" or "I feel vulnerable and scared". Finding ways to regulate ourselves and cope with these feelings are vital for the health of our brains and our bodies.

In therapy we may use the analogy of the Anger Iceberg to look at the emotions that are visible to others (above the water) and those that are hidden below and out of sight (beneath the water). Anger is rarely an emotion that is felt in isolation, and exploring those complex, submerged feelings can help to understand and unravel that corrosive, and potentially explosive, sense of rage.

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

ALIVINI

Alivini Company Ltd
Units 2-3, 199 Eade Road
London N4 1DN

020 8880 2526

london@alivini.com

Scan to discover our useful links and more!

alivini Since 1975

Distributing Italian Excellence to the UK since 1975



AWIN BARRATT SIEGEL WINE AGENCIES

28 Recreation Ground Road
Stamford
Lincolnshire PE9 1EW
01780 755810

orders@abs.wine
www.abs.wine

@ABSWines

ABS AWIN BARRATT SIEGEL WINE AGENCIES



SCHENK FAMILY UK

Unit 5, The E Centre
Easthampstead Road
Bracknell RG12 1NF

01753 521336

www.schenkfamily-wine.co.uk

@schenkfamilyuk

UNITED KINGDOM
Schenk family



RICHMOND WINE AGENCIES

The Links, Popham Close
Hanworth TW13 6JE
020 8744 5550

Mark Isham, head of RWA:
mark@richmondwineagencies.com

Tim Hawtin, south west & London:
tim@richmondwineagencies.com

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

Monika Kent, north of UK and other regions
monika@richmondwineagencies.com

Certified B Corporation
RWA
RICHMOND WINE AGENCIES
Carbon Neutral Organisation

With Christmas fast approaching, check out our gorgeous Ribera del Duero from Bodegas Cepa 21 with glass pack at two different price points.

For more information, please contact your account manager.



Tempranillo Hito, Ribera del Duero
Cepa 21 2024
(+ glass, in gift box)
Case size: 1 x 75cl
Promo RRP: 25.95 (30% GP)



Tempranillo, Ribera del Duero
Cepa 21 2021
(+ glass, in gift box)
Case size: 1 x 75cl
Promo RRP: 34.95 (31% GP)

HATCH MANSFIELD

New Bank House
1 Brockenhurst Road
Ascot SL5 9DL
01344 871800

info@hatch.co.uk
www.hatchmansfield.com

Hatch Mansfield

hatchmansfield

Certified B Corporation

Carbon Neutral Organisation

HATCH MANSFIELD
Wines for the Independent Specialist

Your ticket includes a glass of CHAMPAGNE TAITTINGER *on arrival*

THE DRINKS TRUST EST. 1886

Join us for the Laser Clay Wine Shoot
in support of The Drinks Trust

14TH JANUARY 2027

10.30am start | Rudding Park, Harrogate

Book a team of five or join individually for a day of laser clay shooting, a three-course lunch and a raffle featuring exceptional wines, dining experiences, hotel stays and winery tours.

All proceeds go directly to The Drinks Trust.

Scan to book

HATCH MANSFIELD

Every indie. Every month.

The Wine Merchant is the only publication devoted entirely to the independent trade.

If your wines deserve to be part of what we write about, contact sarah@winemerchantmag.com



FELLS

Fells House, Station Road
Kings Langley WD4 8LH

01442 870 900

For more details about these wines and other wines from our award-winning portfolio from some of the world's leading wine-producing families contact:

info@fells.co.uk www.fells.co.uk

@FellsWine

je_fells

fells
FINE WINES SINCE 1858



LIBERTY WINES

020 7720 5350

order@libertywines.co.uk
www.libertywines.co.uk

@liberty_wines

LIBERTY WINES

Carbon Neutral Organisation

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Silver



HALLGARTEN WINES

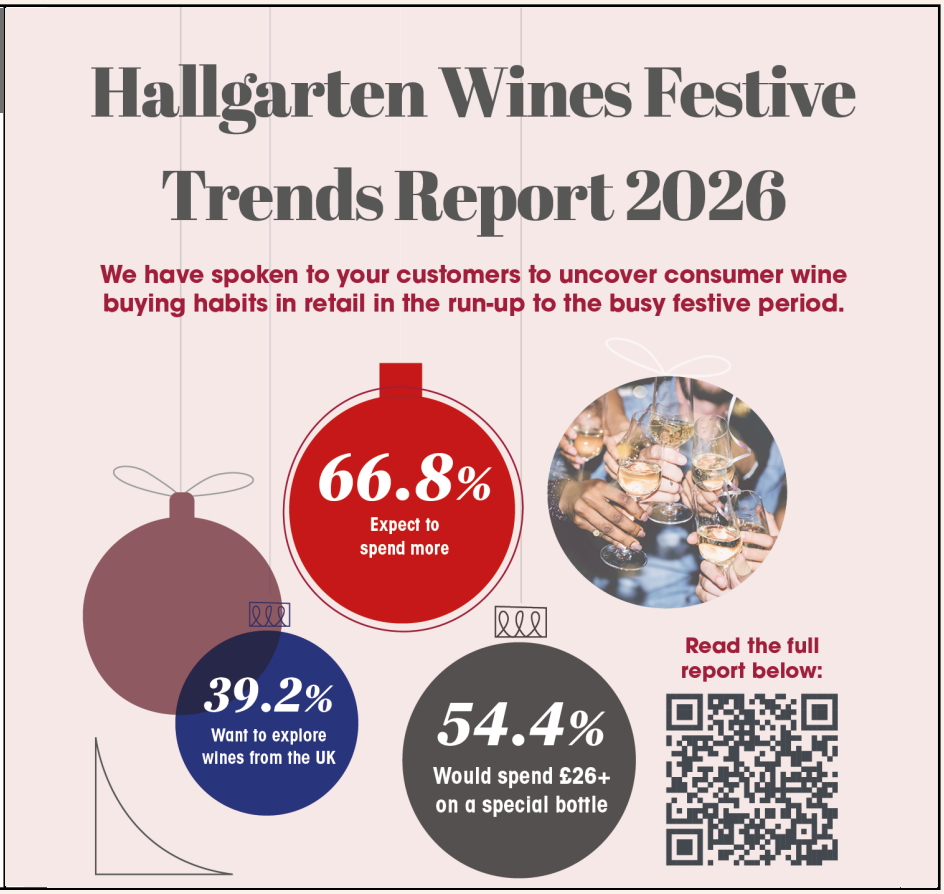
Mulberry House
Parkland Square
750 Capability Green
Luton LU1 3LU

01582 722 538

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

@hnwines

HALLGARTEN & NOVUM WINES



MENTZENDORFF

The Woolyard
52 Bermondsey Street
London SE1 3UD

020 7840 3600

info@mentzendorff.co.uk

www.mentzendorff.co.uk

MENTZENDORFF
wine shippers since 1858



Q&A

"I don't worry about things beyond my control, which means pretty much everything"

Mark Savage MW
Savage Selection

Born in Kampala in 1949, Mark was president of Oxford University Wine Circle and a member of the winning OU Varsity Match tasting team with Oz Clarke and Charles Metcalfe in 1970. He became an MW in 1980, shortly before he sold Windrush Wines. In 1988 he set up Savage Selection, the importing and wholesaling business working with small, family-owned wine estates.

What is the first wine you remember drinking?
La Gratitude, a decent white wine produced by Stellenbosch Wine Farmers, which had found its way up to Kenya. That was about as close as any wine got to Uganda, where I lived for the first 10 years of my life. Good as it was, I do not think it was responsible for my catching the wine bug.

What job would you be doing if you weren't in the wine trade?
Had you asked that question when I was six years old, I would probably have said that I was aiming for the Diplomatic Service. My father was an expert in the tribal languages of Uganda, so I might just have managed to inherit some of his wider linguistic skills as well as a suitable temperament.

How do you relax?
When not working at my desk or in some vineyard, I am more than likely to be found on a tennis court, most frequently a real tennis court. I was sadly over 60 by the time I caught that particular bug, but I have so far managed to play on about 24 different courts – most of those in the UK, but also some in Australia and France.

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



When the Dog Speaks, the Philosopher Listens by Nigel McGilchrist is unquestionably the most interesting book that I have discovered this year. I have never seen a review, but it is brilliant. I read every paragraph at least three times and I never want to get to the end.

Give us a TV recommendation.
I would much rather read a book or walk the dog than look at a screen.

Do you have any sporting loyalties?
The great Rhône wine expert John Livingstone-Learmonth and I both share a peculiar devotion to a famous steeplechaser called Flyingbolt, stablemate of the immortal Arkle back in the 1960s, and we have even been known to hold a dinner at home during Cheltenham Festival week as an excuse to remember the horse's exploits while cracking open a bottle or two of old Côte-Rôtie or Cornas.

Who's your favourite music artist?
On my desert island, I would want to hear the voice of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and listen to Alfred Brendel playing the piano.

Any superstitions?
I do my best not to worry about things beyond my control, which means pretty much everything.

Who's your favourite wine critic?
I once told Hugh Johnson that it was his fault that I had not pursued a more important career. I have always regarded him as the most inspiring writer on wine in my lifetime, and it was his initial book, *Wine*, published in 1966, which fired my own enthusiasm and curiosity.

What's your most treasured possession?
I would prefer not to have to contemplate life without my wife, daughters and faithful lurcher Bert.

What's your proudest moment?
I do recall being surprised beyond belief at receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from *The Drinks Business*, the sort of prize that suggests that you should be hanging up your boots.

Who's your hero?
Of the many people I have been lucky to work with, two stand out. David Lett planted Pinots at his Eyrie Vineyard in 1966, following his own judgement rather than the discouragement of UC Davis, and thus giving the fledgling Oregon wine industry its proper sense of direction. Jan "Boland" Coetzee, a legend in the history of Springbok rugby, went on to become a legend in Cape winemaking too when establishing his Vriesenhof estate at Stellenbosch in 1980. He remained a profoundly humble man, an ego-free zone. Such humility is a hallmark of the greatest winegrowers. I miss both of them greatly.

Any hidden talents?
At my age, it is far too late to expect any to be revealed.

What's your favourite place in the UK?
My home of these past 47 years, in a corner of the Cotswolds that has managed to escape the attention of tourists and celebrity incomers, where I can still walk for two hours on a Saturday morning without seeing a soul or a moving vehicle.

If we could grant you one wish ...
Ataraxia.

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
Liberté
Égalité
Fraternité

Taste France™

Uncork new opportunities at the UK's leading French wine trade tasting

VIN

10am – 5pm | 7 January 2027
Hyatt London, 30 Portman Square

Scan to register or email pandora.mistry@businessfrance.fr for more info

Business France