

I DON'T quite remember the very first time I was taken to Kenwood House as a child, but I do know that I was immediately taken with it – so much so that I wanted to live there. I asked my mother why she didn't buy it – it was so obviously better than our house in every imaginable way, so why on earth couldn't she just buy it? "I don't think it's for sale," she told me patiently. "And even if it was, it would be very expensive." I was struggling to understand. "What – you mean ... pounds?" She nodded. "Yes. Pounds. Quite a few, I should think." Well I had only thruppence on me, so obviously couldn't afford it – but one day I would be able to, surely? If I put the thruppence in the Post Office and started saving up right this second ...?

Well I'm not there yet – a couple of quid shy, I should think – but still the house's attraction remains undiminished. Its charms reclaimed me as I stood on the gravel avenue one sunny afternoon a week ago, looking up with love at the Heathside façade – its very restrained and elegant pilasters alive with typically Adam motifs the total height of the plasterwork, and adorning the pediment. It needs a fair bit of work though, as I am sure the custodians are only too horribly aware – the paintwork is peeling and flaking badly, and there's a network of cracks. Upkeep, I suppose, must be an unending task and anxiety. The interior, though, seems fine – and has the same quiet dignity and serenity as always: just wandering about the place is very calming. My favourite picture as a child was the Frans Hals portrait of a gentleman in a ruff, which at the time I was wrongly and repeatedly informed was The Laughing Cavalier. It isn't – that's in The Wallace Collection. Kenwood's is a lovely picture, however – though maybe not quite so arresting as the Rembrandt self portrait, weighty and utterly satisfying in all its potatoey Rumpolness. And I adore the Gainsborough of Countess Howe in her pink silk, cream lace, straw hat and hauteur ... along with so many others: Vermeer's Guitar Player, the light and shadow of the Joseph Wright of Derby, the Romneys, the little Van Dyck in Lady Mansfield's dressing room (right next to the breakfast room, which has to be odd). And

A glimpse served up of my dream home

Joseph Connolly still can't fulfil a boyhood ambition to live at Kenwood – but he can afford to dine there



a lovely small Boucher that I'd never before noticed, lurking almost unseen in a shadowy corner. The major paintings are each surmounted by individual brass lights, though none of them was on – so most of the spaces were murky, frankly. But not the library – one of London's most beautiful rooms, the dazzling pastels and gilt always aglow with natural light: a very bright and happy place, unlike many formal libraries, and proof positive that the Georgians with taste (and money) did so love bright colours. It was only late this century that

'taste' became associated with beige, taupe and ecru, the stronger pastels and primaries becoming relegated to kiddies' rooms and commercial art. Colour is life! Face it: there's none of it when you're dead. Another great space that is flooded with light from the ceiling height windows is the orangery – once home to Stubbs's enormous painting of Whistlejacket, a prize racehorse, though now quite empty and forlorn, save for four very sickly ficus plants, mourning in pots.

But man cannot sustain himself by culture alone. Nor woman,

FACTFILE

☐ BREW HOUSE CAFÉ
Kenwood House,
Hampstead Lane, NW3
Tel: 020-8341 5384
☐ Open every day from 9am
☐ Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆
☐ Service: self service, but the staff are helpful and friendly
☐ Cost: Two people could have a jolly two-course lunch with a drink for about £28.

my wife reminded me – and so we sloped off to the Brew House Café for a spot of lunch. I've eaten here before from time to time, but only because I had to: where else in the middle of the Heath are you actually going to go? And so my expectations were low, to be honest. I also had remembered a rather dingy basement area in front of the lavatories, which was fairly depressing. Well this still does exist – though why people should choose to eat here on a sunny day when just around the corner there is the most enchanting tea garden, I simply cannot understand. It's really very jolly out there – good quality and generously spaced Chinese Chippendale teak tables and chairs, large cream canvas umbrellas, clipped box hedge, fuchsias and a sculpture of a grumpy old owl atop a plinth: very good.

The café too is much more appealing than I remembered it, the soaring walls perfectly decorated with trompe l'oeil classical panels and plaques. The intended accent is upon the freshness and plenty of an English country kitchen, and they pull it off rather well. There is a daily changing menu of four or five hot dishes – I went for two huge Lincolnshire

sausages (the standard portion) with a very decent selection of fresh and crunchy vegetables: cabbage, kale, courgettes and new season peas (a sort of anglicised pak choi). Did I want chutney? No – but is there any gravy? No. Dryish, then – but damn good bangers. My wife had baked chicken thighs with a mint yoghurt – rather spicy in the Indian style, if you like that sort of thing: she did, very much – with more of the same veg. You have to shuffle in a queue sliding along your plastic tray – and I didn't even mind doing that, which is extraordinary in itself. The garden was full of youngish mums, temporarily off the hook and flushed with gratitude, and older people who appeared to be regulars. The spinach soup and crusty bread seemed to be a popular (and economical) choice – but generally the food and drink here is extremely reasonably priced. They've got all sorts of rather unusual drinks such as elderflower cordial and Pellegrino fizzy orange in the cute little bottle shaped like an Indian club. My wife went for a wheat beer called Meantime, which she rather enjoyed. I read on the back of the label that although it was made in Greenwich, it was in the Munich style and of a genuine Bavarian yeast strain. It further said that it had undertones of banana, toffee and cloves. "Are you," I asked her, "experiencing undertones of banana, toffee and cloves?" She sipped. "Banana ...? I don't think so. There's no toffee, no. And definitely not cloves. It's actually rather cidery". So make of that what you like.

She had previously observed the ranks of home made cakes, and needed no reminding of them now. There were also puddings and fresh fruit such as strawberries and – unusually –

watermelon. "For the sake of the review," she said, "if you have fruit or a pudding, I'll have cake." "Uh-huh," I responded. "And if I have cake ...?" She blinked. "Then I'll have cake too". There was a great-looking chocolate fudge cake – but you never can tell by the look of them, can you? Could be heaven, could be stodge. The white chocolate blueberry muffins were also a temptation ... but in the end she made a dive for a pecan, walnut and almond tart, and this she loved. It looked to me like a pastry base with a crown of one great gnarled and glossy cluster of nuts, bound together by toffee. "Yes ..." she agreed: "toffee. Definitely." It maybe tasted of wheat beer, I don't know. And I had something I didn't expect to see: a vodka and strawberry trifle! I know. And it was really good: spongy, boozy base, sweet berries and cool and silky custard. The aerosol cream on top was maybe wanting, but it did add a rather pretty flourish. All in all, this little lunch was a very welcome and unexpected treat – great news for visitors to the Heath throughout the summer.

But oh Lord ... I still do want the house. I wouldn't be a popular incumbent, though: the concerts would have to go for starters: far too noisy. And I would apply for a shotgun licence and spend the long hot afternoons clearing the lawns of picnickers. But I wouldn't worry too much: Kenwood House is not for sale. I checked. And even if it was, it would cost pounds. Quite a few of them, I should think.

☐ *Summer Things (Faber and Faber, £7.99) is a summery and fairly cheeky novel by Joseph Connolly. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.*

Get in touch with Burgundy's feminine side

LOOK through a kaleidoscope, and there's a profusion of colour and shape, organised yet confusing. That's a fitting parallel with Burgundy, region of 100-plus appellations and a myriad of terroirs within each one. For a wine-drinker, the pleasures can be intense, the disappointments profound.

After four days in the region, courtesy of the EU-funded Discover the Origin project, which encourages consumers to understand how and why burgundy (and some other tempting wines and food) has a special sense of place, how much better can I lead you towards the first and away from the second? Not as much as I'd like: it needs more time, more expertise.

I've confirmed my enthusiasm for whites from the Maconnais, which represent some of the best value for money in Burgundy,



and there will be more on those in a future column. And I've experienced some very fine wines from the classic appellations further to the north. But driving mile after mile, through a flat sea of vines below the prized cru slopes, I've also realised why the "b" word shouldn't always be revered.

But let's forget the mundane and experience the special. Deep in the cellar of Herve and Anne Sigaut, it's cool – just the right temperature to appreciate the

silky, perfumed finesse of their red wines, the characteristics which have gained Chambolle-Musigny the title of the most feminine appellation in the Cote de Nuits.

Outside, the July sun burns down, repairing the damage of a cold, wet start to the growing year. But what was initially bad has left a happy legacy. The damage at flowering has meant fewer grapes on each bunch, opening them all to sun and wind, avoiding mildew and rot, encouraging ripening. It's a sign, the Sigauts hope, of a fine vintage to come.

Their domaine is a microcosm of Burgundy. They have seven hectares of vines, the largest plot covering barely three-quarters of a hectare – "decent for Burgundy", they say. Herve is the fourth generation in charge, but his family's vine roots dig back to Napoleonic times. They farm

organically, but haven't sought formal certification. Like many other vigneron, they can't face the loss of a year's crop if nature is too capricious, and they refuse to cheat the rules. The whole commune avoids insecticides, however.

The particular finesse of Chambolle-Musigny, they explain, is due to the deep valley which cuts back into the hillside, but even so, terroir is crucial, with two grand cru areas and a host of premier crus, of which Domaine Sigaut's Les Chatelots, Les Fuees, Les Noirots and Les Sentiers demonstrate the subtle differences.

Some of their pinot noir vines are 50 years old and the youngest are demoted to simple Chambolle-Musigny until judged mature enough to express their premier cru terroir.

Fruit is hand-picked into small cases and selected again

on arrival at the winery. Inside, grapes, juice and wine move through by gravity and there is no aroma-stifling filtration. All the way, from pruning to bottling (following the lunar calendar), the attention to detail is meticulous.

The wines reflect that care, generously fragrant yet restrained, pure and elegant. Even those from

the difficult 2008 vintage succeed splendidly.

UK importer Armit (www.armit.co.uk, 020-7908 0655) currently has 2005 and 2006 vintages (£405 to £517 a 12-bottle case), with detailed tasting notes on the website. Read, buy, enjoy.

LIZ SAGUES

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HOME TIP OF THE WEEK

☐ When choosing a tile adhesive, your choice will depend on the background to which you are fixing and whether or not this is a wet or dry area. Use waterproof adhesive for around baths and showers and a flexible adhesive for areas that may move, such as a bath panel or floor. Ready mixed adhesives will save time but will be more expensive.

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