



■ Manzanar vineyard, source of Errazuriz Aconcagua Costa single vineyard sauvignon blanc

## Something to savour as the weather turns cooler

Vineyard close to the Pacific Ocean produces a lovely wine that is a combination of tropical fruit and greenish herbal notes

With a summer like this one, rather a lot of the empty bottles that have gone into the recycling bin contained white wine rather than red – but those I'm going to focus on now will carry their pleasure into much cooler moments, as will the red suggestions.

First, a couple of Chile thoughts, from this long, thin, sea-fringed country where vine plantings are becoming more adventurous and the resulting wines increasingly interesting.

The Manzanar vineyard, where the grapes for Errazuriz Aconcagua Costa single vineyard sauvignon blanc are grown, lies 12 kilometres from the Pacific, with cool morning fogs and afternoon breezes keeping summer temperatures down to a sauvignon-friendly level.

That said, 2012 was warmer than the recent norm – but the result is a lovely wine, combining tropical fruit and greenish herbal notes in a way that more than challenges New Zealand's style.

There's minerality too – the vineyard soil is clay over schist – and a lovely freshness. Buy it

“A classic example of how the best Australian semillons age, with far too many elements to describe here

at Waitrose, £12 (on offer until September 10, £9.60, and while current stock may be the 2011 vintage that should still be a tempting buy).

Cabernet franc isn't a grape I've ever associated with Chile but there are plantings in the Loncomilla Valley, a sub-region of the much better-known Maule Valley.

Bordeaux's most popular grapes flourish here, so adding cabernet franc alongside cabernet sauvignon and merlot makes sense.

Carta Vieja Limited Release 2011 is fragrant and full, a much denser style than most Loire examples. From [www.fromvineyardsdirect.com](http://www.fromvineyardsdirect.com) at £8.95, it's excellent value.

### Characterful

If you want to mix your free-delivery FVD 12-bottle case and share loyalties between new world and old, Château de Ciffre Saint-Chinian 2012 has soft, ripe sweet fruit and a tasty finish.

And still with cabernet franc, organic Figure Libre from Domaine Gayda in the Languedoc is an intriguing, characterful, exotic mouthful – a splendid discovery (£15, [www.lsfnewines.co.uk](http://www.lsfnewines.co.uk)).

Back to whites, and a trio of distinctive tall, thin, tapered bottles. Zull grüner veltliner 2011 (£11, Wine Rack) is a tempting, sensibly-priced example of Austria's point-of-difference white grape, aromatic and with complex flavours – an adaptable food wine.

Jean-Luc Colombo's La Redonne Côtes du Rhône 2011 smartly blends classic northern Rhône white grapes: rich, peachy

viognier and waxy, weighty marsanne. It's big but also elegant and balanced (£13, Waitrose).

The pinot gris reserve from Cave de Beblenheim in Alsace is a wine I've liked for ages, and now I've been impressed by its easy, enjoyable riesling Grafenreben companion (both £10, Waitrose). They're good introductory examples of Alsace style.

Northern Spain's albariños from Rías Baixas are often in those same tall tapered bottles, within what must be the most extraordinary bottle-shape diversity of any appellation.

The Wine Society's new Exhibition example comes in a slim shouldered style – discreet packaging for a wine which bursts with heady scents and concentrated flavours (£13).

Labels, of course, are another influence on buyers, and those of two new ranges from Domaines Paul Mas could hardly be more different. The Sud de France red and white in Aldi's Exquisite Collection (£6) are sedate; the Côté Mas (red and white at Majestic, £8) are colourful Mediterranean inter-war poster style. And the wines behind them? Happily drinkable in both instances.

To finish, two pleasures from Australia: flower-filled, thirst-quenching The Gum semillon/sauvignon blanc 2012 (£10, M&S) and the wonderful Tyrell's Vat 1 Hunter semillon (£27.50, The Wine Society), the wine whose flavours have lingered longest on my palate and in my memory all summer. It's a classic example of how the best Australian semillons age, with far too many elements to describe here. Not an easy wine on first encounter, but an experience to treasure.

## restaurant of the week

# Newcomer is trying too hard to be different

Wacky combinations let down an Italian restaurant that otherwise has the makings of a welcome addition to Hampstead scene

The other day I was telling a bunch of Frenchmen about the excellence of the London restaurant scene – always, rather gratifyingly, a thing they rather hate. Whenever the supremacy of Paris is challenged, the look upon their faces is truly a sight to behold: the fractured expression is somewhere between the sort of reaction you might expect had you quite out of the blue slapped them about both cheeks in the manner of a would-be duellist with a bone to pick – the shock of this, blended with a sort of wide-eyed wonder at the gullibility and simple-mindedness of the Englishman who could ever believe such a thing ... and even this is tempered by pity, for every Frenchman knows that no one English is even in possession of a palate. How can we be, existing solely as we do on

le fry-up and le binge-drinking?

We were in England's Lane – which is not at all coincidentally the title of my latest novel, for here was a five-man film crew doing a thing about me for French TV. We talked in the rain, I walked up the Lane, down the Lane, we retook the whole thing, did the long shots, the close-ups, then retreated to the Washington for a further meaty session. The pub had actually closed for all of this palaver – and you should have seen the irate faces through the windows: tapping impatiently, and patently in urgent need of sustaining ale. But it's true, what I said to my clutch of captive Frenchmen: London, in terms of food, is booming – and all this bounty is nicely in tune with the 'optimism' we all are apparently experiencing in the light of the decent summer weather, all the sporting victories, and the birth of

“Restaurant names no longer faze me: do you know, in Bicester, where loonies flock to buy cut-price designer labels, there is a new restaurant called Trinity Cabbages and Condoms: truly, I am not kidding.

## Why a visit to a farmers' market

Is there any better time to visit a local farmers' market? I think not.

In the markets at Swiss Cottage and Parliament Hill, the last of the soft fruit is still to be found, but who wants summer berries now when we can bite into crunchy apples and have the juice of ripe pears running through our fingers? And what about the plums – all those varieties, flushed lavender pink Victorias, translucent greengages and purple Marjories?

Comice and Beurre Hardy sit side-by-side with bags of Conference pears, and there are several varieties of apples that would have been familiar to our grandparents, including the delicious and versatile James Grieve. Use this one both in cooking and as a dessert apple to serve with a plate



■ English tomatoes

of English cheeses. Add some Kentish cobnuts and you have a feast, especially with a glass of port.

It is a great treat to find home-grown cobnuts, which were in danger of dying out some years ago with the diminishing of the English hedgerow. A few years ago, the first Kentish cobnut oil to be produced commercially, at



## Joseph Connolly at Quest in Heath Street



■ Our reviewer ponders why he has just eaten salmon with strawberries

Prince George. A choice of name, incidentally, I was very happy with because as everybody knows John was a bad king, there has never been a King Paul, and Ringo, frankly, was never going to be more than an extremely long shot.

But lately, for me, the restaurant scene has tipped in the direction of Italian: the new, cool breed of modern Italian restaurant that seems to be enjoying something of a 'moment'. I went to one that is very new and already highly fashionable: Zucca, in Bermondsey Street. Did you hear what I said ...? Have you quite registered this ...?

Bermondsey Street: yes indeed – I actually crossed the river. Had my jabs, sorted out the visa, and duly went abroad (a thing I only ever do in pursuit of a restaurant). Zucca has the vibe: beautiful Italian staff and extremely good modern Italian food: quite expensive, and always full. Then I learned that something claiming to be similar had just opened at the summit of Hampstead Village – a place that requires of me neither passport nor inoculation – so that had to be the next on the list. After the England's Lane interview (and I had protested to the French that

the rain was the first we had had in simply weeks, though they didn't believe me: they know it always rains in England) I splattered my way up to Quest, to meet my wife for lunch. Being an Italian restaurant, I thought I might have misheard and the place was actually called Questo ... but no: it's Quest. Restaurant names no longer faze me: do you know, in Bicester, where loonies flock to buy cut-price designer labels, there is a new restaurant called Trinity Cabbages and Condoms: truly, I am not kidding.

Quest is on that rather weird

elongated triangular site close to the top of Heath Street. Over the decades, there must have been thirty or forty different restaurants here – the last one was Portuguese fish, I think: it came, it went, and I didn't even have time to visit. Quest is grey outside – mandatory with new openings, these days – and bright and surprisingly spacious within: despite the wall of glass fronting eternally traffic-ridden Heath Street, it isn't noisy. Comfortable upholstered chairs, colourful paintings. The waiter, from the start, was just all over us – as were later the proprietor and then the chef: I'm not sure if they knew I was me – I think it was more the extreme eagerness of the newcomer to please. On a huge rococo-framed blackboard was chalked "Happy Birthday Jessie! xxxxx". My wife suggested that 'Jessie' might be the Italian pronunciation of 'J.C', and therefore in my honour: sweet thought ... but they were months out with the date.

### Linguistic manglings

Tucked away at the end of the menu is the bargain set lunch: starter, main and glass of wine for £14.50 – and a lot of choices too. We went a la carte – which is full of not just delightful linguistic manglings ("mix grilled fish for two peoples", "steamed France beans") but some extraordinary combinations. A few of which we risked: parcel of smoked salmon filled with marinated strawberries ... and king prawns in filo pastry with sweet and sour peppers – both of which seemed brave and un-Italian in equal measure. So: six good prawns in individual pastry cones arranged like a starfish, amid said sweet and sour stuff. Far too much, but my wife enjoyed the prawns, and, to a degree, the rest of it ... but they really didn't go. My smoked salmon came as a vast cube, deftly assembled: again, far too much, and the salmon had been poorly trimmed (i.e. not trimmed, with plenty of hard skin) though was good in itself. Within was a mountain of sweet and squishy strawberries. You could not eat the two things together: I had some salmon, I

had some strawberry ... and then I thought why in hell am I eating strawberries with salmon, actually ...? My wife's main was chicken supreme ... filled with apple: individually, she liked both very much ... but not really together. I had very good home-made papardelle with a juicy porcini sauce ... though this was for some reason served within a carapace of crunchy filo pastry, rather like a hat worn at Ascot by a woman quite determined to be photographed.

Similar story with the pud: gelato al forno, baked meringa and sponge with vanilla, chocolate and pistachio ice cream: it looked like a triangular sandwich, and was not at all bad ... just too many ingredients. Also on offer were profiteroles ... with mascarpone and lemon and chocolate sauce...! All the staff are very personable, authentically Italian and there is a good chef here, but he's got to look again at some of these wacky combinations. The proprietor is earnest, professional, and clearly wishes to create a fine Hampstead restaurant: I think he might, if he doesn't try quite so hard to be 'different'. Novel fusions and new taste ideas are always to be encouraged in a creative kitchen ... but they really must be proved to work before they go on the menu. But we do have here the makings of a very good local modern Italian restaurant: when and if they get it absolutely right, Quest might well be a welcome addition to the Hampstead scene, as well as one more in the eye for the Frenchmen.

## FACTFILE

### ■ QUEST

108 Heath Street, NW3  
Tel: 020 7435 0000

■ Open noon-11pm daily (though closed on Mondays until September).

■ Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆ (though really far too eager)

■ The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ Cost: Set two-course lunch with glass of wine, £14.50. Otherwise about £80 for three-course meal for two with wine.

## will bear fruit for lovers of familiar and the unusual

Hurstwood Farm, won the overall champions' award at the Great Taste Awards.

But there is much more produce at the market that our parents, let alone grandparents, would have had a hard time recognising as English vegetables – sweet corn, aubergines, red and green peppers, courgettes, bok choy, mizuna and a range of fiery chillies. And they would have been astonished at the variety of multi-coloured tomatoes at the Wild Country Organics stall in Swiss Cottage.

It is somewhat puzzling though, in the Parliament Hill market, at a stall which features "rare breeds" in its name, that those selling the meat are unable to tell you which breed of lamb, beef or pork you are buying. Some of the produce stalls are the same; a shrug when asked the variety of strawberry

or plum.

For a main course, whether you want to make an oriental stir fry, with some of Mike Belcher's Old Spot pork fillet from March House Farm or accompany a char-grill of his butterflied shoulder of Masham lamb with ratatouille, all the vegetables you need are right there in the Swiss Cottage market.

Carrots and cauliflower are there for the traditional Sunday roast. And if you love fish and chips, buy a piece of pollock or cod from Vicky's Channel Fish stall and make chips with those wonderful Lincolnshire potatoes.

Marzipan-stuffed plums, plum crumble, vanilla baked pears, apple and pear tart, poached pears with chocolate sauce, pear and cobnut crumble are just some of the desserts you might consider.

Frances Bissell

## RECIPE

### ■ Pear sorbet

Six very ripe pears, peeled, sliced and frozen.

Two tablespoons of elderflower syrup.

Simply put the pears and syrup in a food processor and process until smooth.

This can be done just before serving, and the sorbet will be exactly the right texture.

Otherwise, keep the sorbet in the freezer until required, remembering to ripen it in the fridge before serving.

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## Voices on the Hill The Hampstead Community Choir

Do you love singing and need an outlet for that voice?

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Led by the wonderful Rachel Bennett (of "Rale" fame), we sing a repertoire of contemporary songs from 70's soul to 00's pop and perform occasionally to the public.

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