



# It's time to head for port

**T**his column is about indulgence – for you, but also on my part. Christmas 2013 came very early for me, in May, when I sampled some of the best wines from the vertiginous vineyards along Portugal's Douro Valley.

The question now, in December – peak sales time for port – is which to choose. Comfortingly, the standard, cheapest rubies and faux tawnies apart, is generally consistently high. So my indulgence is to recommend the wines of the port farms (quintas) which so warmly welcomed me.

First, the place where I stayed, the splendidly sited, homely, yet smartly comfortable Quinta de La Rosa. Despite major investment in a new winery as well as in visitor accommodation, it remains very much a family business (it was given to the grandmother of present owner Sophia Bergqvist as a christening present). So production isn't huge, and with only one exception (Waitrose Douro Reserva 2012, £11.50) it's not a name on supermarket shelves.

However, Berry Bros stocks both the quinta's elegant ports and its excellent table wines, from aromatic, structured DouRosa branco 2011 (£11.45) through Berry's St James's Finest Reserve port, a serious, concentrated, grown-up ruby (£15), to La Rosa Reserve 2009, flagship table wine of the estate, made from main port grape varieties and a glorious companion for any beef-centred festive dinner table (£32). Just available is the 2011 Vintage Port (excellent value at £47), which Bergqvist considers La Rosa's best-ever bottling.

Berrys also sells Poeira, the fine red table wine from the personal estate of La Rosa winemaker Jorge Moreira (2009 £34).

Quinta do Noval, owned by



■ The spectacular walled Vale do Inferno vineyard at Quinta de la Rosa

multinational insurance giant AXA, is bigger, a mosaic of manicured vineyards along the valley of one of the Douro's tributaries, with four million litres of port and table wine maturing in its cellars. There's still a very personal feel about it, though, with hands-on leadership from managing director Christian Seely, and the wines – again table wines as well as ports – are exemplary.

## Big-barrel ageing

Noval's tawnies shine especially, with that special nutty, caramel-and-citrus and restrained spirity sensation which only careful blending and long, slow big-barrel ageing create. The adaptable aperitif-to-dessert 10-year-old is on offer at Waitrose until January 1 (£16.50); Berrys' William Pickering 20-year-old (£27) is made by Noval – I've not tasted it, but the 20-year-old bearing the quinta label has superb style and length.

The late bottled vintage ports – opposite end of the port spectrum, with rich dark fruit and a fresh finish – are great, too. Noval LBV 2007 is at Ocado (£15.80), Berrys' Own Selection LBV 2008 is by Noval (£16) and

both also sell the Noval table wine Cedro, where syrah joins Douro Valley varieties to dark, smooth, fruit-led effect (£15-£18).

Biggest of all the top port growers is the Symington family, and across the valley from Noval lies calm, secluded Quinta da Cavadinha, one of the best of the family's estates. In the top years, its grapes – gently trodden by high-tech silicon "feet" – go into the Warre's vintage port; in marginally less regarded vintages the bottles carry the Cavadinha name, proving the excellent value given by single quinta ports. On the Waitrose Christmas list, Warre's Cavadinha 1996 (£28.50) offers a classy, complex and stylish mature port at a bargain price.

And I've a very soft spot indeed for Panascal, one of the flagships of the Fonseca port empire. Tucked up a narrow valley, surrounded by wild flower meadows, the place is peaceful, the wines splendid. Fortnum & Mason has a good choice, including Quinta do Panascal 1998 (£29.50) and Fonseca 20-year-old tawny (£42.50), while the organic Fonseca Terra Prima is another Waitrose offer (£9). Indulge...

## restaurant of the week

# Kosher eatery is full of chitchat and very inviting

Restaurant decor gives cool Fifties canteen feel in vein of the New York *Mad Men* age

**Y**ou know what ...? North London Jewish people, they just seem to love this rhetorical question. I first heard it on things that usually were starring Jennifer Anniston, but it seems to have become a feature over here now – and never so frequently have I heard it as in JW3, the new and groovy Jewish community centre in Finchley Road. I have already in print taken a swipe at the hideousness of its exterior, but mindful of how these days many self-deluded architects will talk of their offensive creations as having "grown organically" (i.e. they are much nicer once you get inside) I thought I'd take a closer look. But then I do nothing if there is not the promise of food and drink built in to the whole business, so how delighted was I to discover that there is a

fully-fledged restaurant within: Zest, it's called – and already it is creating quite a buzz. You know what ...? I thought I'd give it a go. Now then, who shall I invite ...? Oh yes: how about Lord Finkelstein of North Pinner? You know what ...? He'd be perfect.

## Overwhelming

Lord Finkelstein (Danny, to his chums) came early: he gave my name to the receptionist, and was shown to a table. Then I arrived: I gave my name to the receptionist, and was shown to a different table altogether. A couple of minutes later, all this was put right – and throughout, the caring and attention was close to overwhelming: you are coated with love as soon as you walk through the door. And that's okay: I love love. The interior of Zest, I have to say, is very zesty indeed: a

“The tables are packed quite closely together, and this occasions a great deal of eavesdropping and inter-party chitchat. ‘Yes,’ said Danny, ‘you can tell it’s a Jewish place: everyone wants to order for everyone else’”

## M&S marks 40 years of selling wine with case of classic favourites

**I**t's hard to believe there was a time when you couldn't pop into Marks & Spencer for a reliably decent bottle of wine, but 40 years ago that was the case.

When the high street giant launched an alcohol range in October 1973 the selection was tiny: just eight wines, four sherries and a few beers.

This was before tipling tastes had been opened up by the New World and the original selection focused inevitably on French, German, Spanish and Italian staples.

Over the decades, M&S has gone on to champion producers from beyond Europe and today sells almost 1,000 different wines from around the globe.

To mark 40 years of wine at M&S the firm has put together

a special selection of customer favourites and iconic classics.

It includes: The fruity, clean La Chablisienne Chablis, (£10.99), an all-time customer favourite, an unoaked

“Over the decades, M&S has gone on to champion producers from beyond Europe and today sells almost 1,000 different wines from around the globe

chardonnay from a producer with a 30-year partnership with M&S.

Kaituna Hills Reserve sauvignon blanc (£10.99) a modern classic from Marlborough New Zealand, made by Brancott Estates, who have been selling wine to M&S for two decades. It has a small percentage of barrel-aged wine to add richness to its gooseberry overtones.

## Original

La Prendina Estate (£10.99) is a Pino Grigio laden with peach, pineapple and green apple notes from a family owned single estate near Lake Garda in Lombardy that also has a 20 year relationship with the supermarket.

Marques del Romeral (£16.99)

was one of the original wines from the vintage selection, an oaked mature red from Rioja grapes with sour cherry, cinnamon spice and tannin flavours. St Emilion Moueix (£13.99) is a mellow red for claret drinkers who'll love its notes of cedar, plums and leather. Winemaker Christian Moueix, owner of Chateau Petrus, was one of M&S' original winemakers of the world more than twenty years ago.

Finally Hunter Valley Shiraz (£9.99) is made by Australian legends the Tyrrells and M&S' relationship with first Murray now son Bruce endures with this rich robust Shiraz with notes of blackberry, plum and pepper.

Buy them in store or online at [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com).

Bridget Galton



## Joseph Connolly at Zest at JW3



■ Joseph with Daniel Finkelstein at Zest at JW3

Picture: Polly Hancock

wall of glass fronts an enormous space with a well-stocked and glittering bar dividing the café part from the slightly more formal restaurant. The décor is that of a cool canteen in the New York *Mad Men* era – all very light and 1950s, so therefore bang on trend (is nothing new ...? Not really: only the beastly things). So: clean surfaces, touches of chrome, pale yellow Eames-type chairs and the odd little quirk, such as a crate of apples. The tables are packed quite closely together, and this occasions a great deal of eavesdropping and inter-party chitchat. “Yes,” said Danny, “you can tell it’s a Jewish place: everyone wants to order for everyone else”. Danny was created a Conservative peer very recently, and the day following our lunch he was due to deliver his maiden speech in the House.

He told me that therefore he had just had a haircut, and I told him that I just hadn’t. His parents were Jewish immigrants and he was brought up in Hendon, on the site of the Brent Cross Shopping Centre, and went to UCS in Frognal. In his early twenties he unsuccessfully contested an SDP seat. “I was so young,” he said. “My mum drove me everywhere”. Later, he unsuccessfully contested a Conservative seat and then worked for John Major and William Hague before becoming a highly successful and influential journalist: chief leader writer at *The Times*, where he has been for 12 years and is now Executive Editor. “I decided that Murdoch was a better employer than the electorate.” We were chatting so animatedly that the two women at the adjacent table felt obliged to

openly stare, nod encouragingly, and sometimes shake their heads. “So you’ve worked there a long time?” one of them wanted to know. Danny replied politely. “You know what ...? I knew that.”

The menu is both Kosher and meatless ... but filled with enticing things. Here is a proper kitchen, the main chefs being Josh Katz and Eran Tibi, both cordon bleu trained, and both having had great success at Ottolenghi before setting up Made In Camden, a rather good “small plates” restaurant in the Roundhouse, which I have reviewed before. Also on the menu is a flash of deadpan Jewish humour: “They tried to kill us. We survived. Let’s eat.” We weren’t quite ready to order when the charming waiter came calling. “You know what ...? I’ll come back.” So Danny went for

marinated aubergine, crushed walnut and coriander as a starter; and I thought I’d try saffron labneh (a sort of cheesy cream) with anchovy and cucumber. Then Danny said he would like the Zest fish burger with fries, sweet and sour cabbage, harissa aioli, caramelised onion and dill cucumber; I said I’d like oven roasted cod, tomato, okra and caramelised aubergine with fries and a green leaf salad, while the lady at the adjacent table said: “You know what ...? The cauliflower is good. Cauliflower you should have.” Part of JW3’s self-professed intention is to “increase the quality, variety and volume of Jewish conversation in London” – so that part of it is going just fine.

### ‘Magnificent’

How about a drink ...? “In the whole of my life,” said Danny, “the total amount of alcohol I have drunk would not fill a pint glass. I just hate the taste of all of it”. And which of us wouldn’t agree? What he does like the taste of, however, is Diet Coke. Does he get through a lot ...? “That information is classified”. The aubergine he thought “magnificent”. I tasted it: really tremendous, and I don’t really care for aubergine. My starter was beautifully presented, in a whirl – the flavours subtle, though spiked by anchovy. Danny is very well connected (long standing friends are David Cameron and George Osborne) but I asked him who he had met that had given him the greatest thrill. “Oh easy – Paul McCartney.” Yay ...! Because Danny, like me, is an ardent Beatles lover; so we talked about that for a good while – the lady at the adjacent table, amazingly, having nothing to contribute: maybe she prefers the Stones. Danny then received a huge and golden brioche bun, split by a breadcrumb fish fillet (so not a burger in the fishcake sense) and he thought it excellent – as were the fries. I don’t normally like them when the skins have been retained, but these were outstanding: crispy and with a proper potato flavour. My cod was gleamingly fresh and silky, and very beautiful on the plate.

So where does Danny go when not at *The Times* or *The Lords* ...? “Stamford Bridge,” he said immediately. “I have a season ticket”. And eating out? Haute Cuisine? “No. Rather ‘hot’ cuisine, actually. For a real treat I love Singapore Garden.” This restaurant in Fairfax Road is where his wife Nicky, a doctor, and his three children will take him every birthday, if he has his way. And so to pud: I ordered a rosewater malabi with raspberries, sour cherry compote and pistachio praline ... a beautiful sort of pannacotta – cream, topped with pink and scattered very prettily with the nuts and rose petals: quite spectacularly good. Danny liked his hot quince crumble with orange blossom, but could have done with a lot less crunch and a good deal more fruit. He then finished off his fifth bottle of Diet Coke. The lady at the adjacent table said “I’m diabetic. I shouldn’t eat pudding. You know what ...? I’m having one. Who’s to care?”

Danny and I had had a really good talk (and so had the lady at the adjacent table) in a fine and genuinely inviting restaurant. I was made to feel a true part of it – if only maybe because I was wearing my rabbi beard (which I only ever remove at night time). And you know what ...? I loved it.

■ All of Joseph Connolly’s 11 novels, including the latest ENGLAND’S LANE, are now available on Kindle and in paperback. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

### FACTFILE

- ZEST AT JW3  
341-351 Finchley Road, NW3  
Tel: 020 7433 8955
- Open Mon-Thu 8am-11pm,  
Fri 8am-1pm, Sun 9am-11pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆
- Cost: Not at all bad, for the quality. My bill was about £75 – with no alcohol, but quite a lot of Diet Coke.

TO ADVERTISE IN  
THE ETCETERA  
SECTION OF THE  
HAM AND HIGH  
SERIES, PLEASE CALL  
**0207 433 6254**

王府井 Silks & Spice  
**Yum Cha**  
Restaurant, Bar & Karaoke

**FREE DELIVERY**  
020 7428 0565  
FOR ORDERS OVER £15 WITHIN 3 MILES  
DELIVERY FROM 17.30 UNTIL LATE

**50% off  
Dim Sum**

Every Monday, Tuesday  
& Wednesday after 5.30pm

**Yum Cha Silks & Spice**

is an **Oriental restaurant and bar**  
with **4 karaoke rooms**

We specialise in Dim Sum and also Far East Asia cuisines.

**Yum Cha Silks & Spice** 27-28 Chalk Farm Road, London, NW1 8AG.

Table Booking and General Enquiries: **020 7482 2228** Deliveries and Takeaway Orders: **020 7428 0565**

