



Portugal showing there is always room for more

Isn't there already more chardonnay, riesling and pinot noir than wine lovers the world over can ever possibly consume? The sensible answer is surely yes – but now I'm not quite so sure. And it's all because of an encounter with wines from all three grapes grown in a location I'd never ever before considered.

Lisboa, the wineland of Portugal's capital, lies between the Atlantic and the Sierra de Sintra hills. Misty mornings and afternoon sea breezes mean that "we grow wines which call to mind the ocean, very fragrant, fresh and balanced, with strong savoury sea notes", says winemaker Jorge Rosa Santos.

The white-grape vines whose fruit he nurtures into the Casal Sta Maria wines almost have their roots in the sea – some lie within 200 metres of the tide-line. The best, from sandy soils, are included in Portugal's smallest appellation, Colares, while those where clay dominates carry the regional label.

Elegant

These wines are very smart indeed, whether fresh and aromatic or made in a serious, age-worthy, slightly oxidative style which must work wonderfully well with rich Portuguese seafood.

Santos says his aim is to display the terroir and the character of the grapes, and he succeeds not only with native varieties but also international ones – his elegant pinot noir is full of red fruit and forest floor scents and flavours.

They are not yet in UK wine shops, but I hope they will be soon



■ Vale da Capucha wines at the London Real Wine Fair

– there was much interest at the recent Wines of Portugal London trade tasting.

There is a salty edge, too, to the wines of Vale da Capucha, even though the vines grow a little further from the roar of the Atlantic waves – and you can buy them here. The bargain, and very appealing, introduction is Fossil 2012 (£8.50 normally, currently £6.40, Asda – available at <http://direct.asda.com>, search "fossil").

For further Capucha choices, contact Les Caves de Pyrene on 01483 554750 for availability and prices.

At Vale da Cupucha, the grape varieties are Portugal's own, and the wines again will be great with seafood. All those I tasted had refreshing minerality and that salty, tasty, engaging finish.

Winemaker Pedro Marques allows the place to speak, through natural-yeast fermentation and patience: "I just work with time."

For the wines from his own estate, Vale das Areias, Marques is more internationally minded.

His syrah 2010 is rightly lauded, a brilliant wine, deep and delicious but sadly not on sale here.

Another elegant, burgundian-style pinot noir is made at Quinta de Sant'Ana, again wafted by the Atlantic breezes. Also, there is a splendidly complex, mineral and long-lasting riesling.

Ann Frost, who owns the property with husband James, is German, which perhaps explains the vine choice – and the wine is exported to both Germany and France. (Sant'Ana 2011 red blend is £7.75 at thewinesociety.com, along with other Lisboa choices).

sdsdfs

Syrah and viognier are the international focus at the organic Quinta do Monte d'Orto, where Sophie Mrejen proves that the lime and slate soils suit both varieties.

The syrah is stylish, and the white Lyrba, where viognier and local arinto are joined by a little marsanne, is a very drinkable blend. These are more wines which should be spotted by UK importers.

Fortunately, the wines made by Sandra Tavares da Silva at her family estate of Quinta de Chocapalha are here. Corney & Barrow's list ranges from 2013 arinto (£10.25), a white refreshingly different from mass marketplace wines, up a quality ladder that includes a smartly classic cabernet sauvignon (£14) and a food-hungry native red blend, Vinha Mãe (£20).

Other accessible sources of Lisboa pleasures include jroboams.co.uk, laithwaites.co.uk and theatreofwine.com, while prestigewinesportugal.com offers a larger choice direct from Portugal.

restaurant of the week

There's no need to fear food that tastes this good

You can end up spending a fortune here – but we left satisfied and unbelievably full

Do you like eating chocolate, cream, butter, meat, cheese, biscuits, cakes and sausages (not necessarily in that order, nor even at the same sitting)? Well if so, the good news as I write is that none of them is bad for you! Yay! Mind you, by the time you get to actually reading this, they all could be demonised again – but earlier this month, leading heart scientist Dr James DiNicolantonio said that all these foodstuffs will help people live longer (you have to live a fair while just to finish pronouncing his name). He further said that research into saturated fats has been flawed since the 1950s, but that the new villains are carbs and sugar. My oh my, sugar is having a terrible press, just lately. Should you be inclined towards a mug of

builder's with three sugars and then possibly a mid-morning Mars bar, you may well not make it into the afternoon. Well look: how many conflicting foodie scares and warnings have you lived through? If you followed every one of them, either your dietary intake will have oscillated so wildly from day to day that you will by now have lost your mind, and are currently languishing in an asylum, strumming your lips – or else you might have decided against the risk of eating altogether, and so now are dead of starvation.

Go nuts

Well you can't, can you? Do all this. You just have to trust your appetites, and not go nuts. But the other week, I thought we might go just a little bit nuts because it was my son's birthday, and his

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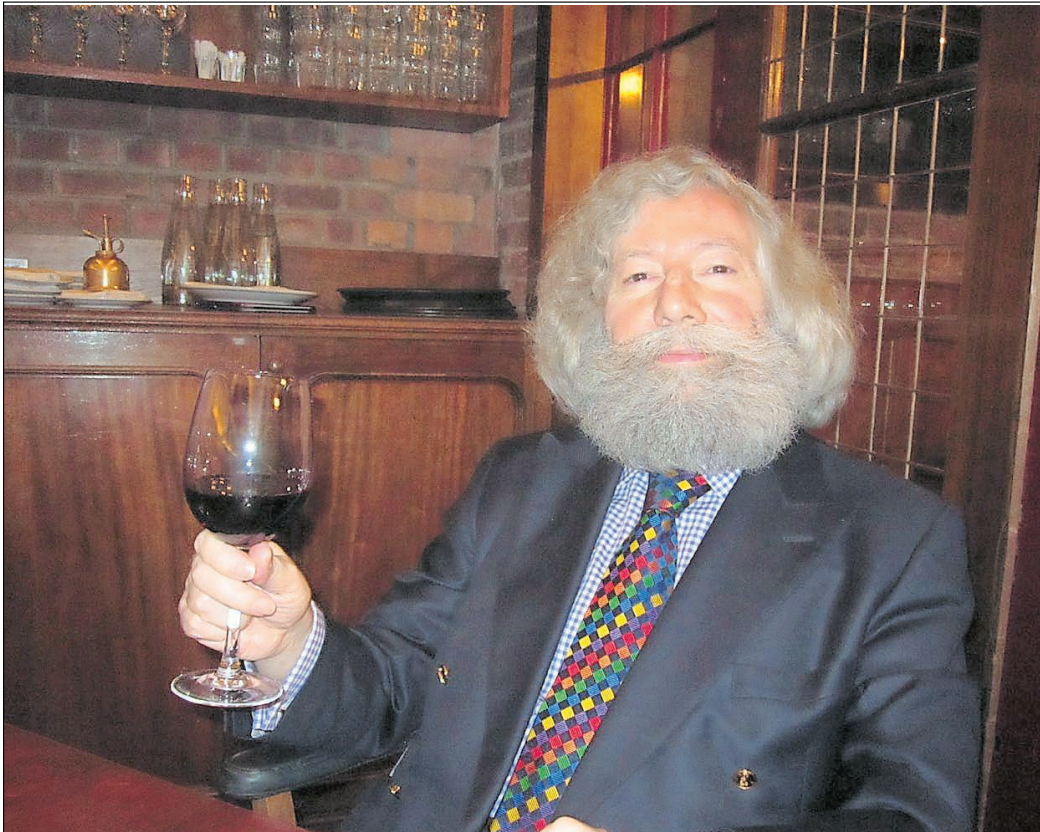
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Joseph Connolly at Hawksmoor Seven Dials



■ Joseph at Hawksmoor Seven Dials in Covent Garden

favourite food is beef (and could well be mine too). So we went with my wife to Hawksmoor Seven Dials in Covent Garden, one of four London outposts of this temple to all things cow. The original is in Spitalfields, and doubtless was named Hawksmoor in honour of the nearby magnificent Christ Church, built by the great architect in the 1720s. A couple of decades earlier he was Wren's clerk, and worked with him on St. Paul's, and later collaborated with Vanbrugh on Blenheim Palace. Hawksmoor created many fine buildings after that, including six great London churches, all in the city. These days, of course, the city can afford proper architects who in a jiffy can throw you up any manner of

towering and stupid steel and glass thing: any shape you like, with the exception of sane.

The restaurant is in a cobbled lane, and opposite the fabled Pineapple dance studio, a Covent Garden feature for the past 35 years. Through a lowish window, you can see all the fit young hoofers vigorously limbering up and wearing all manner of sweats and cuffs and headbands and leg warmers, and I wasn't dressed like that at all. The little vignette put me in mind of *Fame* and *Flashdance*, not to say post-*Barbarella* Jane Fonda (of whom I couldn't have been fonder). I wasn't inclined to join them – so through the tall black double doors of Hawksmoor and down the winding staircase into

this dramatically reimagined warehouse: a long and swish zinc-topped bar with a glittering wall of booze leading to the restaurant, which retains its original rough brick walls and arched roofing, this supported by pleasingly chunky cast iron columns. A pale parquet floor is scattered with generously spaced dark polished tables and blissfully comfortable chairs – a thing I seldom say – these with leather upholstered back and arms. The menu makes it perfectly clear where this restaurant's passion lies, being divided into "Steaks" and "The Rest". It would be defiantly perverse to go for "The Rest" (lobster, bream and chicken), so we didn't. "Be warned", says the menu: "bone-in prime rib,

porterhouse and chateaubriand are BIG". Okay: we are warned. Now normally with starters, I struggle to find one I genuinely crave, but here there were seven I could happily have ordered – and so my wife and I ended up sharing shrimp on toast, which turned out to be unpotted shrimps, really: plentiful, nice and meaty, with an anchovy undertone. My son had smoked salmon – which, as is the fashion these days, was thicker cut than the norm, and generally rawer, like sashimi, and with a not too heavy smokiness.

Revered butcher

As to the steaks themselves ... the menu takes a bit of working out, because some of the steaks (and all are aged Longhorn, from the revered butcher Ginger Pig) are priced "per 100 grams", the weights of that day's available cuts chalked up on a board. When did steaks stop being weighed in ounces, then? How in God's name do I visualise "100 grams"? But we decided that hungry people would require between 300 and 400 grams apiece ... which meant that chateaubriand for two would work out at around £100 ... without chips ... without veg ... and without sauce. Mercy. So my wife and I were sharing a 750 gram in-bone prime rib, while my son was having an in-bone sirloin. They arrived in black iron shallow cocottes, bones present though removed, the steak sliced thickly. We ordered medium rare, though some of the rib was a little rarer than that. The meat was of very high quality with a true depth of flavour, and well seasoned: just peppery enough. Then there was a rather bland Bearnaise, triple cooked chips – flawless, quite perfect – and beef dripping potatoes: sinfully good – crunchy and yummy and, according to our new chum Dr DiNicolantonio, the best thing since fried bread (apart from the carbs side of things). Roast field mushrooms were as meaty as the meat, though heavy on the balsamic, and buttered sprouts ... were just that.

Oh my God ... there was such a lot of food on the table: so we ate it, and with huge enjoyment, a

Syrah/Grenache greatly easing its passage. And then, on good old Dr DiNicolantonio's say-so, we tackled puddings: for the three of us to share, buttermilk pannacotta with poached rhubarb and a banana and bourbon tart. And I couldn't help noticing that if you ordered chocolate and salted caramel tart, fifty pence of the price would go towards Action Against Hunger: laudable, no doubt, though faintly obscene, in context. And I further observed that it cost £8, while all the other puddings were fifty pence less. And then – because of Birthday Boy – we were given a freebie chocolate and hazelnut cheesecake (which he loved, he said, "because it doesn't taste of cheese"). And in addition to more cheese from Neal's Yard (just round the corner) there were nine pages of spirits on offer. Nine pages, yes ... because it's actually a pretty blokey place, this – and although there is a set two course lunch for £23, I suspect that most people end up dropping a fortune here: I know I did. And so – more than satisfied, and unbelievably full – we waddled back out into the Covent Garden sunshine. And still in Pineapple studio all the dancers were leaping about with appalling energy. I felt even less inclined to join them ...

■ Joseph Connolly's latest book is *The A-Z of Eating Out* (Thames & Hudson £16.95). All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

FACTFILE

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