

Wine with a guarantee of its foreign origins

HARDLY surprising, is it, in this foodie age that what stay-in-the-UK holidaymakers have missed most is what they might have eaten – and drunk – abroad.

The research to prove the point comes, equally unsurprisingly, from a public relations company promoting European gourmand goodies. Its figures show that the recession caused a third of Londoners to shun travelling abroad this summer and most of those very much regretted not being able to enjoy the best of foreign food and wine.

Of the holidaymakers who did quit UK shores, more than a third are planning to recreate some of

the taste experience back home.

Which is all good news for Discover The Origin, the campaign which promotes wines from Burgundy and the Douro valley, Port and – the food part – Parma ham and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

I'm not usually seduced by PR hype, but this campaign appeals more than most. The wines and foods are tempting and one of the aims is to explain why all these products carry the letters PDO on their labels – it stands for protected designation of origin, intended to guarantee provenance and quality.

To learn more, look at the website www.discoverthe

origin.co.uk. I hope it's been updated a bit over the past few days – but even if some of the happenings are past there are some tempting recipes there and a chance to win tickets for the London Wine Show next month.

Closer to hand, and still with a summer holiday theme, is an opportunity to taste wines from all around the world when Bibendum, in Regent's Park Road, Primrose Hill, holds its B Festival on the evening of September 29.

Like many of Bibendum's events, it promises to be an all-singing, all-dancing affair, with a main stage plus rock, alternative and digestif-themed focus arenas.

There will be more than 150 wines from 85 producers, chart-toppers and names to watch. All that for £15 a ticket – email sales@bibendum-wine.co.uk or call 020-7449 4120. For full details, see www.bibendum-wine.co.uk/retail/news/September/2009.

Bibendum has just been named the International Wine Challenge 2009 Best Specialist Merchant for the USA, so there should be some American stars on stage too.

This is very much the award presentation season. So it's good to be able to report that a wine I recommended earlier this summer has, for the second year

running, carried off the Decanter World Wine Awards trophy for the best Chilean sauvignon blanc under £10.



Castello de Molina 2008 (£6 each if you buy two or more at Majestic – where the minimum purchase now is six bottles rather than 12) is from the cool Elqui Valley, fragrant with elderflowers, tropical fruit, grass and lots more, but with enough body to work well with food as

well as on its own. France, and the Loire especially, has long been the source of wonderful sauvignon blanc, especially for wines which have less of the in-your-face force of New Zealand's offerings, but there are serious new

world challenges now from Chile and South Africa. They tend to fall into a middle ground which, in this instance, is often a happy option.

LIZ SAGUES

I ONCE met a buffalo socially, whose clear intent was to kill me. St Louis, Missouri, it was, in some sort of a wildlife compound – one of a clutch of idiot diversions laid on by the sponsor Budweiser during a press trip centred around the opening game of the 1994 World Cup in Chicago. I know and care absolutely zero about football, and so the editor of The Times thought it wise for me to brave the 100 degree heat and file for the paper some or other nonsense. Anyway, there were a few of us on the open top deck of a sightseeing bus – we had been trundling through an approximation of the Wild West prairie, and now had come to a halt, as the guide continued to be whinily dull. Suddenly I was eye to eye with a buffalo. He had sort of snuck up beside us, quite silently, and was leaning against the bus with an easy nonchalance as if to take the weight off his hooves. I should not have been too surprised had he broken out his Zippo and fired up a Lucky. That eye, though – it was huge, soupy and yellow, but not in a sunshine way. He had the demeanour on that too damn early morning of how most of us in the bus were feeling, press trips being what they are ... and yet I detected no empathy.

I had never before encountered so massive a beast – it was quite the size of one of the lesser villas not quite on the Heath in Hampstead Garden Suburb, with the garish addition of thatching: a vast and rusty Rastafarian mane, not to say horns. My knowledge of these beasts was limited to the occasional glimpse in cowboy films, when the palefaces would assure the Red Indian chief that they would not steal their land, ravish their squaws nor hunt their buffalo to the verge of extinction, whereupon said chief was left with his reservations. Oh and in Little Plum of Beano fame, of course, where the herds tended to rampage en masse rendering all the wigwams into a tatter of

Vengeance is all mine after wild buffalo scare

An encounter with a rampaging beast in the Wild West leaves **Joseph Connolly** running scared. But a final showdown in South End Road ends in a victory to savour and his arch enemy served up on a plate

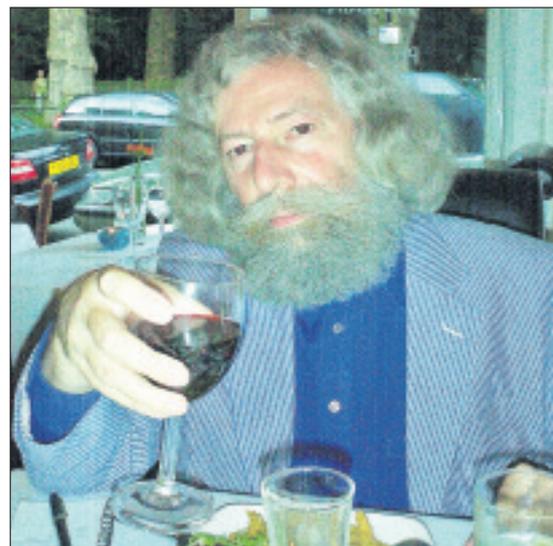
ticker tape. And it was maybe the memory of this that then disturbed me: the great and rheumy eye was full upon me, and now it misted into murderous intent. He buffeted the side of the bus – just the one flirtatious sashay of a hip that nearly had the whole thing over. Being calm and experienced hacks, as one we dementedly shrieked at the driver to for Christ's sake get this bloody bus outta here ...! And eventually – after much parodic trouble with ignition and gear shift – he managed to do just that. A scary moment, never forgotten – and so after all this time I was delighted to be going to a restaurant in Hampstead which specialises in buffalo in all its various guises so that at last I could get my own back on the bugger.

Fratelli La Bufala is on a pleasant stretch of South End Road, near the Ponds, and I had heard much of Mimmo, the proprietor – a larger-than-life presence, a broad and hirsute giant who bullishly fills up a space (remind you of anything?). But, Sod's Law being the only one these days that is unstinting and rigidly applied, he was, according to the amiable waiter, elsewhere (apparently lavishing all of his Latin attentions upon a much-loved Porsche). Well okay: let's eat anyway. I was there with my first cousin's son, which I'm fairly sure makes him my, um – great uncle, and I the blushing

niece. Andrew is a lovely man, despite being something in the world of finance. I have asked him many times quite what it is that he is in the world of finance, and like a trouper he has always endeavoured to tell me until invariably I have to beg him to stop, all such things being so far beyond my comprehension. (He further describes himself as a father of two who spends most of his life on the Jubilee Line; this leads me to wonder whether his involvement in the world of finance stretches to no more than selling tickets on the Underground, while periodically picketing with his soul-mate and mentor, that perfectly delightful Trade Unionist Bob Crow. Possibly this is fantasy).

It was a very muggy evening, and the whole of the frontage was open wide: fine if that's where your table is, but for everyone else the air conditioning was rendered wholly ineffectual. Oh well: no sweat. The menu is enormous: more than 20 pizzas, a dozen pastas, all sorts of ways with the eponymous hairy mammal, a separate menu devoted to fish, and a daily changing blackboard of specials. Initially, one's impression is of a rather poky creamish room with some large black-and-white photographs of the Dolce Vita/ Paparazzo variety, and a pile of pizza boxes for the takeaway side. Up a few stairs, though, is a large and much more welcoming space with a bar, clay oven, a baby grand and the teeniest lavatory in Christendom. The canned music that night was the lush and croony sort, which in Italy reduces unburnt English girls to no more than ricotta in the olive-oily hands of waiters bearing pepper mills.

Andrew was delighted with his Tricolore – the Italian flag made chunky, with generous ropes of tomato, avocado and true mozzarella, its melting texture perfect. I was saving up the buffalo side of things, so went for



Just call me Buffalo Bill ... Joseph at Fratelli La Bufala.

whitebait: exemplary, if unusual. They were larger than you expect, with much of both the flavour and crunch of goujons of sole: add a few frittes, and there's a meal in itself.

Now young Andrew was confronted with Le Tirelle – three very large and thinnish escallops of buffalo – the veal version, really – pan seared with rosemary, rocket, parmesan shavings and a good balsamic reduction: it looked suitably rustic, striped black from the griddle, and tasted divine. Less rare than he had requested, though, while my great hunk of fillet (like a cheeky Cinqucento, although considerably juicier) was the rarer side of medium that I'd wanted. But what meat! Dense in texture, though tender, and a taste that was at base straightforward beefsteak, though crossed with venison with maybe even a topnote of ostrich: big, deep flavour – and a scattering of

decent chips with an al dente broccoli flower. And to drink, a soupçon from Sicily: Nero d'Avola Corbera – extremely warm and comforting, the softest velvet and vanilla, and not at all bad value at £23.90.

Andrew's panna cotta was also much slavered over. Semi Freddo, it said (do you know, I think I was at school with him – a nice lad from one of the lesser villas not quite on the Heath in Hampstead Garden Suburb). The consistency was cool and creamy and just the way you like it. This restaurant really does deserve its many accolades and awards – expensive, it's true, unless you pursue the pizza route, but there is such an authentic local vibe going on here: it's all very seductive, somehow. Here's the very best thing, though: unlike Captain Ahab, I – a vivid reincarnation of the legendary Buffalo Bill – had at last come to vanquish my ancient foe. When

“The great and rheumy eye was full upon me, and now it misted into murderous intent”

finally the chips were down, I had him on a plate.

□ *Joseph Connolly's latest book is **Faber and Faber: Eighty Years of Book Cover Design** (Faber and Faber, £25). All previous restaurant reviews are available to view at www.josephconnolly.co.uk.*

FACTFILE

- **FRATELLI LA BUFALA**
45a South End Road, NW3
Tel: 020-7435 7814
- Open Monday to Friday, noon-3pm, 6pm-11pm, Saturday, noon-11pm, Sunday, noon-10.30pm
- Food: ★★★★★☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆
- Cost: Between £50 and £100 for two with wine, depending on meatiness.

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HOME TIP OF THE WEEK

□ If you have a gas fire, you should have a carbon monoxide detector fitted in that same room. This applies to any gas appliance but it is particularly important with a fire. They don't cost much to buy and can be put up very easily.

www.urbansolutions.co.uk 020-7435 1111