

**B**ACK in the days when Wyatt Earp was Marshall of Dodge City, I used to ride shotgun on a beautiful red and yellow Wells Fargo stagecoach...! Actually, that's a lie. But certainly in my 11-year-old imaginings, that's surely all I wanted to do. The reason was the rifle. Because it wasn't a shotgun at all that these intrepid defenders used to wield – perilously aloft the rocking coach, huddled in close to the driver who shouted yee-hah and spat out tobacco a good deal as they hurtled joltingly through the dusty rocky deserts. They actually toted the most romantic and attractive gun ever to emerge from the Wild West: not a Colt, not a Derringer – not even Earp's long-barrelled Buntline ... but the Winchester. Yes indeed – a compact and beautiful repeating rifle, the bullets conveyed into the chamber by means of a jerk on the lever hard by the trigger. You've seen it in a thousand films. One film, indeed – Winchester 73, with James Stewart, Rock Hudson and Tony Curtis – was devoted to the thing. The US Cavalry would have been lost without it. Marauding Indians craved it more even than firewater.

I know all this because as a child in Adelaide Road NW3, I used to watch television. Adelaide Road, yes ... hard to believe now what a handsome street it once was: two facing rows of rather grand semi-detached stucco villas with Corinthian columned porticos up a flight of a dozen steps. They were all owned by Eton College who latterly refused to extend the leases by more than a few months at a time, and so the tenants were understandably reluctant to spend on the properties. And so they deteriorated – this eventually being used as an excuse to demolish the whole bloody lot of them. Beautiful curved and cantilevered staircases, tiled grand hallways, finely proportioned rooms – all fell victim to the wrecker's ball. Half of the parallel Fellows Road suffered the same fate – and in their place, the planners threw up those soaring council tower blocks, surrounded by little clusters of rabbit hutches for the private sector which, inexplicably, sold for comically high sums, and continue so to do.

Anyway, in those days television was my closest friend. I didn't get out much. And nearly all of TV was westerns: Hopalong Cassidy, Gun Law, The Cisco Kid, Roy Rogers, The Lone Ranger, Wagon Train, Tenderfoot, Maverick, Rawhide, Bonanza ... oh my God, I spoke cowboy better than I could ever manage English.

# Bradleys comes out all guns blazing

For **Joseph Connolly**, the name Winchester Road is linked with the rifle he was obsessed with as a child. So it is with fond memories that he visits a restaurant there – already in the sights of the Michelin sheriff star awarders



Home on the range ... Joseph Connolly at Bradleys.

Further, the only two local shopping streets my mother ever took me to were called England's Lane ... and Winchester Road. I asked my uncle "Is that where they make all the Winchester rifles, then?". And he said yes. Possibly to shut me up. Possibly because he believed it to be true (because let's face it, he didn't get out much either). So I checked. And no it wasn't. But in Toys Toys Toys in Finchley Road – I got one! Made by Lone Star, and with the all-important lever which I jerked and jerked until I'd single-handedly obliterated the Apaches and the Comanches, while making very fair inroads into the few remaining Sioux. And on day two, that lever, it fell off. I said to my uncle "Can you mend it ...?". He shook his head. "Metal fatigue," he sighed. And yes, he looked pretty weary himself.

Still, though, whenever I go to Winchester Road – as I did last week, to have lunch at Bradleys – all I can think of is that rifle. Pity me. But there's nothing of the Tombstone saloon about Bradleys. Between Christmas and New Year, it underwent a very stylish makeover: all cool grey, muted silver, blonde Biedermeier-type furniture, one pink orchid, and – for summer – there is a nice green garden, above which hovers at the back of the Ham&High building. All tones well with the stylish exterior: trimmed box balls in troughs and a matt charcoal frontage (contrasting fairly hilariously with the lilac and pinkish mini-mart next door called Sugar Cane – the name of Marilyn's character in Some Like It Hot which, in common with so much else here, has nothing to do with anything). The restaurant

has been awarded a Michelin Bib Gourmand – lower than a star, but for very good food and service at moderate prices, which actually sums up Bradleys pretty well. It's a rare award – fewer than 30 in London (including two of my favourites, Market and Galvin Bistrot de Luxe). The 'Bib', by the way, has nothing to do with messy eating, but is a contraction of Bibendum, the famous Michelin fat guy who shines as a model to dedicated trenchermen everywhere.

The welcome is warm and professional – from Jolanta, who runs the place, along with the very able chef patron, Simon: hence Bradleys without an apostrophe – it's a double act. The very enticing menu is extraordinary in its range, but also for the fact that in addition to the carte, there is a set lunch and pre-theatre menu (Bradleys does the catering for

## FACTFILE

- **BRADLEYS**
- 25 Winchester Road
- Swiss Cottage, NW3
- Tel: 020-7722 3457
- Open Monday to Friday noon-3pm, 6pm-11pm, Saturday 6pm-11pm, Sunday noon-3pm
- Food: ★★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★★☆☆
- Cost: Set lunch £10.50, £13.50, £17.50 for one to three courses. Otherwise about £85 for three courses for two, with wine

Hampstead Theatre) as well as a more expensive Prix Fixe. My wife and I mostly stuck with the bargain set lunch – though my starter of pan fried scallops with crispy chicken wings and curried cauliflower puree was from the carte. The three large scallops were very slightly overdone – they're all about texture, and these weren't quite squishy and luscious enough. And although the two boned chicken wings were very flavourful, they sure weren't crispy – and I'm not sure quite why they should be, but that's how they were billed. My wife's twice baked artichoke soufflé with beurre blanc was a lovely light cylindrical puff of pleasure: totally successful, and very much enjoyed. Her main was a bright and lively fish cake – pretty in pink from the salmon that made up the bulk of it – and on a bed of leek with a very well balanced mustard sauce: there could easily have been domination here, but all was complementary. And my main was even better: braised beef with carrots and creamed potatoes – a perfect winter dish, the beef very tender and melty with no trace of fat or beastly bits, the potato a dream. Such a shame, then, that the whole dish was no more than tepid – you really want

piping, with something like this. And I could have done with more of the nicely reduced gravy in which to dip the wonderful bread. They have a selection, but the little parmesan and leek rolls truly are the bee's knees. I had a glass of perfectly decent merlot (their house red – a Vin de Pays) and my wife had a Budvar, the Czech beer. And we shared a bottle of fizzy water ... but it was Hildon: even fizzy water, when it's Hildon, somehow tastes flat. I think that all restaurants ought to offer – in addition to tap, of course – just Evian and Perrier: they really are the best.

And so to pud: I had a slice of pear tart – good and crunchy base, pear just so – and a welcome blob of ice cream. My wife ordered a crème brulee, which is interesting only for the fact that she never orders crème brulee, and I so often do. Anyway, this one came with orange and raspberry at its base – about which I was doubtful. It's so rare these days to come upon a virgin crème brulee – naked and unashamed, as nature intended – and I thought that the addition of not one but two fruits might be, as it were, over-egging the pudding. But the gooyness was excellent and – according to she who was scooping it down – "the combination of raspberry and orange makes it almost like rhubarb: this is one of the best desserts I've had in ages". So there.

Well then: a serious but very relaxed restaurant with many devoted followers, open seven days a week, established for 20 years and run by two very dedicated professionals. And all this in Swiss Cottage ...? Blimey. And after, I was too full and lazy to walk back home – but fortunately, parked directly outside, was a beautiful red and yellow Wells Fargo stagecoach ...! Actually, that's a lie.

□ All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## on top with its 2010 sauvignon blanc wines

What was encouraging, though, was how very good many of the 2010 sauvignons are – after two vintages where bulk somewhat submerged quality.

Also, that diversity is very appealing, irrespective of how sub-regionally specific it might be. More and more wines seem to be shunning in-your-face vegetative pungency in favour of subtle, elegant fruit character.

Don't, however, be surprised to see increasing mention of two main sub-regions, at least: Wairau Valley, with a variety of soil types, and smaller Awatere, a little further south, cooler, drier and with poorer soils.

But let's move to some practical recommendations.

While the more you pay, the more complex the wine is likely to be, there are still temptations below £10 (often UK-bottled for green economy). These, all 2010, are listed in order of my personal preference.

Majestic currently has a particularly good selection, including: Saint Clair Pioneer's Block 19, £16 (two plus, £13), from lower Rapaura in the Wairau Valley, lovely freshness alongside lush tropical fruits; The King's Favour, £13, again fine, fresh and tropical; Craggy Range Te Muna Road, £12.50 (two plus, £10), complex ripe flavours with a lightly chalky edge – this vineyard is in Martinborough on the North Island, just across

the water from Marlborough; Southbank Estate, £8, apple-crisp and enjoyable.

At Waitrose: Craggy Range, Old Renwick Vineyard, £13, from a stony riverbed in Wairau Valley, tropical and mineral; Waitrose in Partnership Villa Maria, £9, mostly from Awatere, with a fresh, honeyed, character; Cowrie Bay, £6 (two for £10 until February 15), predominantly Wairau Valley, gassy and soft.

Other recommended Marlborough sauvignons (some may still be 2009): Spy Mountain £9.50 ([www.bibendum-wine.co.uk](http://www.bibendum-wine.co.uk)); Kuru Kuru (Oddbins, £11, 20 per cent six-bottle case discount); Yealands Estate Clearwater Cove (Sainsbury's,

£10), Saint Clair Wairau Reserve ([www.nzhouseofwine.co.uk](http://www.nzhouseofwine.co.uk), £18.70). And watch out for Churton, coming soon to Berry Bros & Rudd.

A footnote: often, I scribble columns on scrap paper while I'm travelling. For this one, I happened to look on the other side of the sheets I was using. Entirely by chance, I'd picked two which were printed with the most amazingly detailed geological description of a small part of one French vineyard region: sedimentary veneers, distorted bedrock, schist streams, flaky or dense gneiss, clusters of eclogites... All this for a microcosm of muscadet. The new world has a long way still to go.

