

wine **Liz Sagues**

# Raising a glass to summer deluge

**I**ntriguing, isn't it, that a potentially catastrophic vintage can be saved by miserable summer weather? That was what happened in Burgundy in 2011.

Frédéric Barnier, chief winemaker at Louis Jadot, one of the region's best-known names in the UK, spelled that situation out very clearly as the London wine trade tasted and assessed samples of the company's near-finished wines in the annual round of en primeur burgundy tastings earlier this month.

Following almost three years of watching, learning and assisting, Barnier stepped into the Jadot top slot late last year, as Jacques Lardière retired after four decades of shaping the range. He's not Burgundian by origin, but Breton – and "very familiar with rain", he told me.

But that which fell over the Côte de Beaune and the Côte de Nuits in summer 2011 wasn't the gentle soaking which Brittany customarily suffers. It came in huge, stormy concentrations, a month's average in a day or so, interspersed with hot, dry weather. The vines didn't enjoy it, but part of the result was that the precocious growth from a warm spring was slowed and the feared overripeness was avoided.

The Burgundians still picked early, and Barnier speaks with satisfaction of a good balance achieved by lower levels of both sweetness and acidity – not the normal way of achieving the wines' characteristic freshness, but one which



■ **Frédéric Barnier, new head winemaker and technical director at Louis Jadot**

works. But, he emphasises, burgundy is very much about place rather than people, about each appellation showing its character irrespective of how vineyards are tended or grapes handled in the cellar, with the long-established hierarchy of appellations continuing to confirm itself whatever each individual vintage brings.

"Our role is to reveal the appellation, to let the vines speak. The process doesn't really matter," Barnier says. And he has, he continues, no intention of attempting to stamp his own mark on Jadot wines, to change the Lardière legacy. "If it were to happen that tomorrow I disappear and someone else takes my place, no one should be any the wiser."

#### Reliable range

But whether Barnier or Lardière or anyone else heads the cellar, a particular interest of Jadot's en primeur tasting is to experience an exceptionally wide and very reliable range of burgundies where the winemaking style is consistent and the difference truly is in the appellation.

I could have spent much of this month with my nose in glasses of white and red 2011 burgundy, but I chose to go to just one other tasting, Lea & Sandeman's. Here, there is a very different consistency – it's the palate of Charles Lea and the L&S team which brings together wines from many

growers into a selection of impressive quality. "Energy, balance and appetising charm," is Lea's apt description of 2011's appeal.

The vintage will be approachable sooner than some of its predecessors, and will give much pleasure. Prices are largely comparable with the 2010s, which make the wines a tempting buy en primeur given the tiny 2012 harvest and the likely price rises that will prompt. Of course, they're babies still, with many not yet even in bottle. So, while you wait, here are some suggestions of wines available now.

Good sources of Jadot wines include [www.slurp.co.uk](http://www.slurp.co.uk), [www.wimbledonwinecellar.com](http://www.wimbledonwinecellar.com) and [www.cellarviewwines.com](http://www.cellarviewwines.com), and among appellations I particularly enjoy are Savigny-lès-Beaune, Chambolle-Musigny, Puligny-Montrachet. Jadot's 2011 cru beaujolais (Morgon and Moulin-à-Vent) are excellent and should be on sale soon.

Among my favourite 2010 wines from L&S ([www.leaandsandeman.co.uk](http://www.leaandsandeman.co.uk)) are Petit Chablis (£13.95) and Chablis 1er Cru Montée de Tonnerre (£22.95) from Domaine Moreau-Naudet, Pouilly Fuissé Vieilles Vignes La Verchère Domaine Barraud (£26.25), Marsannay Champs Perdrix Domaine Huguenot (£25.95) and Mercurey 1er Cru Les Naugues Domaine François Raquillet (£26.95), (case discount of 10 per cent).

**restaurant** Joseph Connolly

# Enjoying the best of Times

**I** think I may safely be said to be a Times man, having taken the paper every single day since a boarding school lad, aged but fifteen short summers. Which was years ago. The Times in those days was truly a thing to behold – The Thunderer! The newspaper of record! Magisterial in appearance ... and only 6d. They had some deal going on with schools (do you think they still do?) whereby the full price was initially paid by all the long-suffering parents – along with such essential extras as tickets to the Oxford Playhouse to see Antigone in the original Greek, cricket pads, sandwiches for nature trails and coach trips to London during which one might, with deftness, skive off the tour of the British Museum and pretend to enjoy vile Pale Ale in a nearby sticky pub. Then, during the hols, parents were reimbursed with half the cost of the papers – the idea being, I suppose, to catch 'em young: and in my case, seducible oaf that I am, clearly it has worked. I still am shocked by its present tabloid format (or 'compact' as they will insist) ... but I do feel very much wedded to the thing – and the crossword (the nearest I get to a morning workout) is still the best of all.

#### Hopes realised

So I always have lots to talk about to my friend and lunch guest Ian Brunskill – number four on the paper, and a more understated, erudite and subtly jovial fellow it would be hard to encounter. He says he lives in Putney with his wife, an art dealer, and children ... but in reality he lives in Wapping, at The Times. It is the very devil to drag him away for lunch – and as he was coming a hell of a way, I thought it only decent to invite him to a restaurant which I thought had a good chance of being worth the while. I never, of course, actively set out to have a bad lunch ... but it amazes me how often my hopes are dashed.

Not, however, on this occasion. Michael Nadra is a chef with pedigree: he has worked at Chez Bruce and under Marcus Wareing at Petrus, opening his own restaurant in Chiswick seven years ago. This Primrose Hill venture is his second, and on the site where used to be Sardo Canale, a rather silly and overpriced place that finally and mercifully died. But the legacy of

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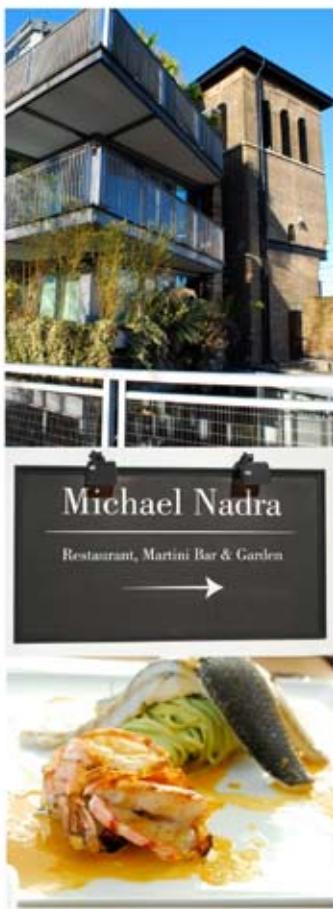
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LOVING LOCAL



■ Michael Nadra in Primrose Hill, with Joseph Connolly and guest Ian Brunskill – captured by Ham&High photographer Polly Hancock

the building lingers on: although it's in a quiet and upmarket location (next to a Melrose & Morgan, opposite the Engineer and posh bathroom suppliers C.P.Hart) the site is a difficult one. Still you go down a darkish ramp as if into an underground car park, and still you have the rather disjointed interior. I went for lunch, so the rather atmospheric tunnel part that abuts the canal (not for the claustrophobic) was closed, and there were predictably no takers at the 'Martini Bar' (I know). So we were seated in the rather brighter bit, overlooking what in the summer will be a pleasant outdoor terrace where there used to be an ancient olive tree, but now is more sensibly filled with tables and chairs.

The slate floor remains, but the seating is better padded these days, and the menus covered in thick brown floppy leather. One sees at once that both food and wine are taken seriously here (you can pay £430 for a 2003 bottle from the Veneto, £200 for 25cl of Tokay). If you travel beyond the a la

carte and tasting menu, you will eventually find – tucked in very discreetly at the rear – the prix fixe: a very reasonable £14 for two courses, £18 for three. And that's what Ian was going for: tempura of baby squid with salsa rosso followed by roasted salmon and crushed new potatoes, green olives and slow roasted tomato in a crab bisque sauce (the descriptions throughout are exhaustive) while I was having, from the carte, roast suckling pig belly with chorizo, capers, raisins and a chicory salad, and then sea bass with grilled tiger prawns, basil tagliolini ... this also with a crab bisque sauce. And although we were both having fish, neither of us has much truck with the white wine convention (unless it's, say, Dover sole) so I plumped for a Fleurie – light, but with a decent bit of fruit to it.

I had also ordered a couple of glasses of Prosecco, and while we waited for those, we munched bread. "This is pretty good," approved Ian. "I love good bread. I make my own. All sorts, but mainly sourdough

– some with walnuts and olives. Make too much, really – but we are never short of croutons". He then whipped out a picture of a recent loaf, and very handsome and professional it looked too. At this point, the chef himself emerged: Michael Nadra. He regretted that the Prosecco "had not been delivered", which went down badly with me: no establishment should ever run out of a non-perishable staple on its list. But then he asked me whether the sauté potatoes which I had ordered as an off-menu side should be a la Lyonnaise ...? I thought not, but it was a stylish offer.

A pleasing amuse bouche: potato sliced on a mandolin, speckles of bacon and warm gooey cheese – unguent and pungent: a sort of mini raclette. My starter was excellent: succulent, unfatty strips of belly with nicely crisped skin, the crunchy chicory and gossamer sausage working extraordinarily well. Ian's tempura – though flavoursome and not over chewy – was not the crackling carapace

one would have expected, and nor did the tomato salsa add much. And as we awaited mains. I prised information out of my very modest guest. Not only is he in charge of such legendary pages on The Times as obituaries, letters and Court & Social, but every four or so Sundays he is in overall charge of the entire Monday edition. He seems remarkably calm on it. Five thousand obits are generally stocked ... and never fewer than five hundred letters are received daily: makes me dizzy just to think about it. "But," he says, "contrary to popular legend – we don't print letters about the first cuckoo of spring. I'm not sure we ever did ..."

#### 'Very good'

The salmon was thick and glossy, Ian pronouncing the whole dish "really very good". I was similarly keen on my sea bass – silky and intense, the three large prawns quite gorgeous and made easy to eat by the spatchcocking of the shells. We both agreed that the crab bisque was just about perfect, and could have done with rather more of it. So no space for pudding, alas – but there were some enticing things: Tarte Tatin and chocolate fondant, both of which involved a twenty minute wait, as indeed they should. I might go back for either or both: yum yum. I chatted briefly to Nadra as I left: he is aware that he has inherited "not good, but bad will" from Sardo Canale, but very soon, I'm sure, he will overcome all of that: he's doing properly good things here. And so – very good lunch, and very good company: all in all, the very best of Times.

■ Joseph Connolly's latest novel, ENGLAND'S LANE, is published by Quercus as a hardback and an ebook. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## FACTFILE

■ MICHAEL NADRA  
42 Gloucester Avenue, NW1  
Tel: 020-7722 2800

■ Open Mon-Fri noon-2.30pm, 6pm-10.30pm. Sat 11am-4pm, 6pm-10.30pm.  
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