



# Ten crus, one revelation

Beajoulais sales are growing as region sheds its poor reputation

**W**rong time of year, unrecognised grape, poor reputation, dodgy weather. What is ever right about beajoulais? Answer: a great deal – and that can be interpreted in cash as well as quality terms.

First, forget the still-too-popular conceptions and explore a wine that offers much pleasure, at many levels way beyond the faded November frenzy of beajoulais nouveau. The heart of beajoulais is the crus, those 10 areas where the vigneron are allowed to put simply their village name, rather than the “B” word, on the bottle. They are increasingly in demand, with sales rising on the back of better consumer understanding and a run of very good recent vintages.

Each of the 10 is discreetly different, though – as in any of those appellations where the French recognise tiny subtleties of terroir – wine-making style as much as place can differentiate wines. Which is why comparing all 10 crus from the same vintage and from the same producer is such a good experience of terroir-spotting, just like the chablis discovery tour I described four weeks ago. This, then, is the red revelation.

## Distinct character

A few facts first. The grape of red beajoulais is gamay (a tiny quantity of white is produced, from chardonnay), and generally the wine is made by carbonic maceration, in which whole bunches of grapes go into the tank, carbon dioxide is pumped in to replace oxygen and fermentation occurs within each unsquashed berry as well as in the spilt juice also in the tank. This results in a distinct character which, in simpler and very young wines, shows as the scents and flavours of



■ Henry Fessy's winemaker, Laurent Chevalier

bubblegum and bananas.

The cru wines are far more suave and sophisticated, and there is occasional use of barrels in the ageing process – though never to give emphatic oakiness. That's not beajoulais style.

Back then to that 10-cru 2011 line-up. The wines I tasted came from Henry Fessy, a smart and quality-driven producer, unusual in owning vineyards in nine of the crus. The company, now under the Louis Latour umbrella and benefiting from big-company investment, has its sights on very soon completing the list.

Given the youth of the wines – at cru level, it's a fallacy that beajoulais should be quaffed as young as possible – it was hard work to define the differences, but on the palate particularly the flavours are individual.

I loved the perfumed fruit of Regnié, the fresh potential of Chénas, the warmth of Chiroubles and the depth of Côte de Brouilly. Brouilly – Fessy's best seller here – needed more time to settle into its style, and the most robust, Morgon and Moulin à Vent, were definitely far too young to enjoy, though there is pleasure in waiting.

Because of the overall image problem that beajoulais still has among many wine drinkers, prices for the best remain very fair. And even the top cru wines, good as they are with hearty cold-weather food, have a delicacy which makes them appropriate in lighter, warm-weather partnerships. Do serve all but the most robust wines cool, and revel in their affinity with the cold meats and salads of summer.

Stockists of Henry Fessy cru beajoulais include Oddbins (Morgon, Brouilly, Moulin à Vent, Fleurie) and Waitrose/Ocado (Brouilly). Prices range from £10.50 to £13.50, with Fleurie at the top. Winedirect (www.winedirect.co.uk) has special-offer prices until the end of the month on four of the crus, and a tempting tasting six-bottle case containing those plus Beaujolais Villages and the new Fessy premium Fleurie, Chateau de Labourons – alone, that is a bargain at £12.50.

There is plenty more good cru beajoulais around – Berry Bros has a spectacularly good selection, and there's 20 per cent off two or more from Majestic until September.

# Where pleasures of the flesh are perfectly kosher

The menu at Jewish restaurant Reubens is a meat-eater's delight, but lacklustre sides and rather high prices let the side down

**C**an it really be a year since the last Gefiltefest...? Yes indeed – how time does fly when all you ever do with your life is lunch and loaf: some of you, I realise, may well do more than this, achieve great things, but not me matey, oh no. Though what, you might ask, is a Gefiltefest when it's at home in Golders Green? Well it is a rather jolly annual festival of Jewish food, to be held this Sunday, May 19, at Ivy House, home to the London Jewish Cultural Centre. The programme fairly bursts with all sorts of rather amusing events such as the Ashkenazi v Sephardi Cook-Off (“which cuisine will reign supreme?”) and six or seven activities being held simultaneously throughout the day with hourly demonstrations

involving such things as chocolate, challah baking, knife sharpening ... and krauting. I'm telling you – if over the years your once dazzling krauting skills have grown a little rusty, this is the place to be. The garden will be filled with stalls selling things such as falafels and kosher candy (and how they resisted calling it Kosher Candy I shall never know) while as we speak there is frenzied voting going on to discover where to find the very best challah, bagels, falafels, schwarma, cheesecake and strudel.

Not to say the best kosher restaurant – a list of 22 of these are in contention for the coveted title ... though rather unfortunately I came upon this list only after I had visited a kosher restaurant which I had idly spotted in Baker Street: Reubens. There has been

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■ Joseph at Reubens in Baker Street

a Reubens in Baker Street for 40 years, so it can't be bad, I thought – and it came with the Michael Winner seal of approval! But it's not on the list of those who are slugging it out for the championship – and among them are some very un-Jewish sounding places indeed. Such as what? Well – such as Isola Bella, Dolce Vita, La Fiesta (which you would swear were all Roman Catholic, wouldn't you?) and, er ... Yum Yum (who was the Mikado's daughter and one of the three little maids from school, so not much kosher wiggle room there).

Anyway – I went to Reubens. With my chum Max who is driven constantly to travel the world. Just stopping off briefly in London having been to France, Guyana, Chicago ... somewhere else, can't

remember. Then he pushes off back to Canada where he actually lives – but seemingly only for long enough to grab a few fresh clothes before he's off again. I actually asked him how he managed to pack enough stuff for when he's away for six or eight weeks...? I suppose you go to a laundry, do you? Dry cleaners...? "No. I give my clothes to Oxfam. They wash and iron them beautifully, and then I buy them back the next day. It's cheaper." He's joking. I think.

#### All human life

So Reubens: about halfway down the street and slap-bang next to the Arthur Murray School of Dance – which seems to belong to the golden age of Lucy Clayton, Norland Nannies, the Victor Silvester Orchestra ... or even a

Charles Atlas bodybuilding course. So you can swish into Reubens for a lorryload of salt beef and then sashay along to Arthur Murray to work it all off by way of a dedicated hour's worth of foxtrot and quickstep. All human life is in Baker Street – there's even the Sherlock Holmes Museum and the Beatles Store: what more, I ask you, could any man crave?

It's pretty dingy, Reubens. You go in and there's a long glass-fronted and well-stocked deli counter amid the gloom, and then a bank of glum tables to the rear, where it's even gloomier. But if you are after lunch proper, you trundle down a mottled marble spiral staircase to a mottled marble-floored basement which is rather low-ceilinged and humming, so it's not unlike being in the hold of a ship

which has been tricked out with plush crushed velvet chairs and white-clothed tables. The general décor and peachiness is akin to a spare bedroom that isn't used that much – and on the walls is a series of strange little prints of teddy bears, one of which was captioned thus: "Lost in love, walking in life's forest, trying to find my way home." And which one of us isn't?

#### 'Sliced by hand'

The waiter said that they were busy for lunch, less so in the evenings and packed at weekends. Not borne out by this Friday lunchtime – ours was one of only three tables taken. Fresh-ish flowers in a bud vase bearing the word "Reubens" across the Star of David. Which was nice. The menu is a meat-eater's delight: all sorts of steaks, lamb chops and "specialities": salt beef, obviously ("world famous", it said) and Beef Wellington: "steak with chopped liver and shredded mushrooms topped with pastry". Which may or may not be good, but it sure ain't Beef Wellington, sonny – and, at £23.95, not exactly a gift either. It is quite pricey here, actually – £7 for soup, £9 for cheesecake ... and £21.95 for the salt beef that Max ordered (which is "sliced by hand", the menu said – and I was glad, because it's always so very much easier than trying to juggle the knife between both of your feet). He preceded this with chopped liver – chicken or calves, it said, and having satisfied himself that here was no reference to the backs of chickens' legs ... plumped for calves. "Very very good", he said. "Not as creamy as some – and that's a good thing." I wouldn't know: I hate liver. His salt beef he pronounced excellent – and I tasted a bit: hate salt beef – reminds me of Fray Bentos, which I loathed as a child.

So what was I going to eat...? Gefilte fish...? Israeli salad (cucumber, tomato, onion, carrot)...? No – I think I'll have the chicken soup (which they actually bill as "Jewish Penicillin"): it is offered with lockshen (noodles) or kneidlach (dumplings) ... so I had both. And it was great: deep chicken flavour, no trace of fat,

and the dumplings not nearly as pointless as dumplings can be. Then I had Steak Diane. Not that Jewish, maybe – but comfortingly old-fashioned, in a rather Oslo Court sort of a way. In the old days in the better places, the thin steak would be sizzled at your table in a copper pan over a silver burner by a deft head waiter as he sloshed in wine and cognac and ignited it. We had a very different thing here: a large thickish ribeye with a separate boat of wine and mushroom sauce. Rather gloopy and floury, not notably wine-infused, but sort of all right. The steak itself was very good – tender, juicy, all you require: just not Steak Diane, that's all. Sides were OK: spinach, green beans, what were meant to be sauté potatoes – all rather dull and nothing, but just about OK. And we were drinking an Israeli wine! Which was brave. Yarden Mount Hermon – cabernet and merlot, mainly: quite fruity, bit sweet, bit sticky ... Chateau Latour need fear very little.

And then we were done. I didn't sign up for a course with Arthur Murray (for already I put Astaire to shame) but merely took a leaf out of the teddy bear's book and contented myself with walking in life's forest, trying to find my way home.

■ Gefiltefest at Ivy House, 94-96 North End Road, NW11 (020 8457 5000) Sunday, May 19, 9.30am-6pm. Joseph Connolly's latest novel, *England's Lane*, is published by Quercus as hardback and ebook. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## FACTFILE

### ■ REUBENS

79 Baker Street, W1  
Tel: 020 7486 0035

■ Open seven days a week,  
11.30am-4pm, 5.30pm-10pm.

■ Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ Cost: About £120 for three-course meal for two with wine.

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