



Beyond the joys of youth

For just about all the time I've been writing about wine, the culture of "drink youngest available" (DYA) has prevailed for most white wines.

Twenty or 30 years ago, given the then prevailing winemaking standards, that was probably right – a few noble exceptions such as fine white burgundy apart. Today, things can be very different. The youngest whites at the various tastings I go to are modern, crisp and clean. But too many lack character.

Give them a bit longer – a few months for the simpler ones, several years when the wines are complex and totally conceal their potential – and often they will be far more satisfying. Take, for example, two bottles of pouilly-fumé I sampled recently, 2012 and 2010 vintages. They came from different vineyards, different people, different approaches. But even taking account of that, the 2010 was made so much more enjoyable by a touch of maturity.

It's understandable that wines very frequently reach you, the consumer, too soon, the inevitable result of the economics of the growing and supply chain. But you can call a halt, buy the bottles and stash them somewhere dark and cool for a while. I'm not advocating that you keep a basic pinot grigio for a decade, but better wines, at whatever price level, will reward patience.

And there can be very pleasant surprises in unlikely older wines. Take muscadet, where simpler examples are ideal young and fresh with simple seafood. Go a little upmarket, choose a wine from a wise vigneron, and maturity can be a real delight – I've recently enjoyed vintages going back more than a decade. Other little-regarded regions



■ A range of white wines, and vintages, at Domaine des Deux Roches in Macon, with their maker, Jean-Luc Terrier

can offer similar pleasures, and such fine wines are a fraction of the price of similarly aged burgundy or others where ageing is recognised as important.

The same applies to good rosé. I remember being astonished in deepest Corsica when a very committed vigneron said he refused to release his wine until it was at least three years old. Drinking it, I understood why. But here, even more than with whites, colour is a clue – look for a wine where the purple tinge of extreme youth has faded, but is not yet replaced by the orange/brown of oxidation. So, here are some wines which aren't in the first flush of youth, and are particularly enjoyable.

Tropical edge

From Majestic: Jean Vincent pouilly-fumé 2010 (£12, £10 if you buy two or more), posh but very approachable, with a tropical edge to the fruit and smoky minerality; Domaine Servin chablis 2011 (£13, two-plus £11), precise, nutty, mineral yet with rounded fruit and excellent length; Louis Jadot macon-villages Les Roches Blanches 2011 (£11, two-plus £9), balanced and appealing.

Majestic also has two tempting New World rieslings starting to show the grape's lovely ageing potential – though both will happily develop more: Pegasus Bay Main Divide 2011 and Paulett's 2011 from Clare Valley (both £11 in the current New Zealand and Australia offers).

Waitrose has a very polished high-altitude Spanish godello, Valdesil Sobre Lias 2011, £16; a fine, concentrated soave, Inama Vigneti di Foscarino 2011, £19 (also at Jeroboams, £20.20); and a smart Loire chenin blanc still in its infancy, which will repay keeping, Château de Fesles La Chapelle Vieilles Vignes 2011, £14.

At Stone, Vine & Sun (www.stonevine.co.uk), Domaine Cady Cheninsolite 2011, £13.75, is a slightly oakier style than the Fesles, a serious food wine again with plenty of time ahead. And the current vintage – 2010 – of one of my favourite whites, the fragrant, elegant L'Empreinte from Plaimont Producers in Gascony, is drinking beautifully now. Buy it in Adnams, Bloomsbury, at £13.30. Finally, The Wine Society's list is a treasure trove of whites from 2011 and before.

A Greek odyssey all the way from olives to Metaxa

Hellenic food is far from being our reviewer's favourite cuisine, but a meal at Lemonia was not such a bitter pill for Joseph to swallow

It seems that there are many things I can say to people that are more or less guaranteed to provoke a perfectly stupefied reaction: "I have not been on the Tube since 1976" is one ... "I loathe and detest *Downton Abbey*" – that's another. As is the follow-up: "I am, however, an enormous fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." And here's one more: "I have never been to Lemonia." Oh yes – whenever I say that, you can hear the smack and echo of the jaws of locals hitting the northwest London pavements. I don't know why I never have – it's been on that corner of Regent's Park Road for about 35 years and has become a byword for a good and extremely popular Greek restaurant ... but there it is: never been. Admittedly, Greek is very far from being my favourite cuisine (it can't actually be anyone's

favourite cuisine, can it...? Apart from Greeks, I suppose) but it is nothing to do with that. Lemonia was simply a restaurant I knew was there, and one day would get around to. And that day has finally come: here I am – watch me! I am walking through the door! I am greeted very pleasantly! I am being shown to a rather rotten little table two inches away from another rather rotten little table very close to the bar! I am smilingly requesting a much larger one in the far brighter atrium towards the rear! And now I am sitting there happily, gazing about me.

It's big, Lemonia. And Lemonia, by the way, is not as I had always assumed pronounced Le Moanier, as in *Dad's Army's* Sergeant Wilson John Le Moanier, no no no: the way to say it is Lemon-ya! I live, I learn. Anyway – it's pretty huge: there's the centre bit, and a

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■ Joseph with crime writer Peter Guttridge at Lemonia in Primrose Hill

Picture: Polly Hancock

section off that to this side, and another section over there ... and then through an arch there is the glorious core – a tall and skylit conservatory with Mediterranean bare brick, stucco ... and the most colossal hanging baskets, trailing vine and ivy. Which I trusted were secure, as I was seated directly beneath the very largest of them – and had it come down, I am telling you ... your reviewer would have been rendered into no more than a tableful of the more pinkly lurid sort of taramasalata. The bare tables come with a cheapo paper napkin folded into a teeny-weeny wine glass, and a welcome if unbidden plate of green olives, raw radishes and carrot; also there was pitta bread – which, though unordered, racked up a quid on the bill. And a couple of minutes later, some little Melba toasts with dips, and good little rolls of

smoked salmon: these might have been inspired by the sight of my notebook – I don't think they're standard. So I chomped on those ... and suddenly my guest was here.

Literary circuit

Peter Guttridge is a crime writer, and always extremely busy on the literary circuit, very ably interviewing other writers of every discipline imaginable: he's done me a few times, most recently a couple of months ago at the Oxford Literary Festival. Until five years ago he lived in Belsize, but now divides his time between Oxford and Covent Garden – although at least six times a year he makes the journey to Hampstead, expressly to swim in the ponds. Lately he has been having considerable success with three crime novels collectively entitled *The Brighton Trilogy*,

featuring the rather splendidly named Nick Madrid. "My American publisher said to me, 'When can we expect volumes four and five of this trilogy, then...?' and I said, 'Well it's a trilogy, you know: that's it – it's done'. And then they offered me this money, you see ... so volume four is complete, and I'm working on volume five." And lo, *The Devil's Moon* is just published.

Lemonia has a reputation for being constantly busy, and this Tuesday lunchtime was hardly an exception: lots of happy locals, most of whom I imagine were extracting great value from the daily special two-course meal at £9.75 (including tea or coffee) or the Monday to Friday option of three courses at just £11.50. But we thought we would roam the vastness of the carte: 20 hot and cold starters, 16 mains, 11 grills

and six more for veggies. The wine list is similarly expansive: lots of French, a smattering of New World ... and 20 reds from Greece. Now retsina is vile, as everyone knows – it does take a great deal of perversity, not to say insanity, to add tree sap to wine and still expect it to be drinkable – but there were better things here: the very affable waiter (who said he was a "new boy", having been there only 10 years) suggested a Porto Carras at £21.50, which was fine ... though a little tannic on the swallow: my eyes did bulge a bit.

Octopus salad

Peter ordered octopus salad – and it was very good indeed: tender, chunky cylinders of tentacle, and properly oily leaves. I, like a fool, ordered kalamari: nicely deep fried, but the usual consistency of washer, gasket and widget: I live, why don't I learn? Peter has taught creative writing, and also gives talks on cruises – he's soon off to the Arctic, courtesy of Saga – and in addition to somehow getting the books written, chairs about 80 events a year on the literary circuit. I commend his industry, but he pooh-poohs that: "I am on the committee of the Crime Writers' Association which was founded 60 years ago by John Creasey ... and he published 700 books." OK: a bit of catching up to do, then. Among his interviewees, he remembers Peter Ustinov. "It was the time of the Kosovo bombings ... and that's all he would talk about. Two thousand people had paid to hear his funny voices and anecdotes – I was ready to ask him, 'So what was it like working with Kirk Douglas on *Spartacus*, then...?' A member of the audience said to me afterwards that I looked as if I was going to swallow my knuckles."

Peter ordered kleftiko – basically a braised lamb shank, though with lemon, spices and herbs. This was large, lean and very much enjoyed – though he ignored the accompanying rice. "I'm not into carbs – just don't like them." Which is why he's so annoyingly slim, I suppose. I was having the charmlessly named

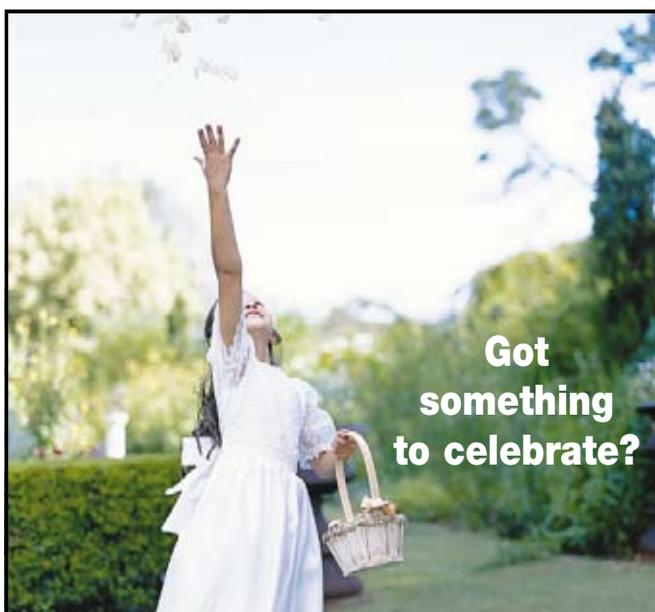
"meat combination" – a mixed grill comprising a lamb chop, cubes of chicken and pork, and minced lamb in a cylindrical carapace. This was a little fatty, but flavoursome enough – the chop was better, though cruelly overdone. The chicken was juicy and tender, and the pork OK. All a bit dry, though a salad helped (though I have never seen so much tomato in a supposedly "green" salad). Roast potatoes were good: carbs are my friend – why I'm so annoyingly un-slim, I suppose. We agreed that our teeth were not up to the sweetness of Greek puddings ... so went for cheese. Hugely disappointing: not Greek, but just small cold triangles of very boring things, no extra exoticism being lent by foil-wrapped bits of butter and Jacob's Cream Crackers. And a brandy to accompany Peter's coffee ...? The waiter said they had two Metaxas, five-star ... and seven-star. And that the five-star was superior. But it turned out they didn't have five-star after all – but did have a Riserva! So ... which is better? "Well ... much of a muchness, really." So Peter had whatever, and it tasted of Greek brandy.

And then three gratis cubes of white-dusted Turkish delight: Lemon-ya!

■ Joseph Connolly's latest novel, *England's Lane*, is published by Quercus as a hardback and ebook. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

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