



# Get set for the festivities

**W**ine writers should be people with principles – and it goes very firmly against mine to mention that nine-letter word beginning with a capital C before December dawns. But I'm breaking that self-imposed rule three days early simply because there are wines very suited for the coming festivities that aren't on supermarket shelves or in local high-street merchants.

You'll need to order these, and it's best to do so soon, before stocks run out or anything happens to disrupt deliveries.

First, two recommended white burgundies whose unfamiliar names help to keep their prices at temptingly sensible levels. Both come from the comprehensive choice offered by Louis Jadot, but the first is something quite out of the ordinary. Bouzeron is one of only two communes in Burgundy allowed to put their names on white wines which come from grapes other than chardonnay. Its wines must be made from aligoté.

Aligoté doesn't often win plaudits in basic bourgogne blanc, but in the 2011 Bouzeron from Jadot's Domaine Gagney it shows a splendid character and complexity – attractive scents of flowers and spice, concentrated flavours with a touch of honey balanced by appealing acidity and lengthy minerality, all of which makes it a versatile food partner. At £13, it's excellent value at Cambridge Wine Merchants – ring 01223 309309 rather than logging on to www.cambridgewine.com as stocks are quite low.

Wine number two is a more classic white burgundy, the rich and toasty yet fresh-finishing Ladoix Le Clou d'Orge premier cru 2011 (£20 at www.



■ Inside the Louis Jadot winery

cambridgewine.com, £15 on offer at www.winedirect.co.uk). Ladoix sits at the junction of the Côte de Beaune and the Côte de Nuits, but misses much of the renown of its neighbours on the hill of Corton, hence its appeal on price as well as quality.

Seasonal choices at The Wine Society are legion, but let's start with a bargain-priced and happy homage to Bacchus. Baccolo 2012 is an appassimento parziale, a wine made from partly dried grapes. Usually, this flavour-concentrating technique is seen in costly amarone; here it's in a £5.95 regional red from the same part of Italy, close to Verona. Don't anticipate the depth and distinction of a fine amarone, but there is attractive firm cherry fruit with a gently bitter edge – a very decent wine for pizzas and tomato-sauced pasta as well as to pour at parties.

## Italian delights

There are plenty more Italian delights on the society's list, including another bargain with hints of posher, pricier origins: the dolcetto-nebbiolo blend Bricco Rosso Suagna 2008 from Piedmont (£7.25). It already has a silky maturity alongside its bright fruit, but will keep for next year's festive dining, if you can resist its current temptations.

I'll spare the adjectives on some other favourites, but all

these are strongly recommended: Blind Spot 2012 semillon-sauvignon blanc, Margaret River, £7.95; Maison Roche de Bellène Bourgogne Blanc Cuvée Spéciale 2011, £10.95; Toni Jost Bacharach Hahn dry riesling 2011, £13.50; Château Rouquette-sur-Mer La Clape rouge 2011, £10.50; Initiales de Diven Montpeyroux 2011, £15; Cayetano del Pino palo cortado solera sherry, £13.50.

Stone, Vine and Sun (www.stonevine.co.uk) is another source of delights. Great-value reds include Alasia Barbera 2011, £6.25, Bodegas Antonio Arraez Vivir Sin Dormir Jumilla 2012, £8.75, and Domaine du Jancier l'O Côtes du Rhône 2012, £9.75, while Domaine Fontanel Rivesaltes Ambré 2000, £15.50, is a sublime sweet experience.

And here are just a few more on-line suppliers who choose with care and enthusiasm: www.ten-acre.com (including classy muscadet and quirky delights from Jérémie Mourat), www.tanners-wines.co.uk (a broad choice of André Clouet's fine champagnes in a world-ranging list), www.bigredwine.co.uk (excellent Rhône offers and modern, well-priced Piedmont bottles), www.fromvineyardsdirect.com (smart French-dominated selection). Browse and buy now: Christmas sorted.

## restaurant of the week

# Here even small fry can afford to dine on big fish

Our reviewer visits a Marylebone chippy with a long history of serving deep-fried delights

**'F**rying Tonight!" Or, sometimes, "Frying Tonite!" Either way, it was always

somehow rather ridiculously exciting, seeing those words chalked up in the window of a corner chippie, the glass quite thoroughly obscured by steam, as if to assert the validity of the sign's proclamation. The fact that it was a fish and chip shop, and therefore there would be frying going on there every bloody night, in no way seemed to temper the allure of the announcement.

There are fish restaurants – which have always been rather smart and rather pricey, as exemplified by the late and lamented Wheeler's and, these days, Scott's and J Sheekey – and then there are the many more chippies: about 11,000 in Britain,

they reckon (which is impressive, though there were more than three times as many before the war). The fish and chip shop is newly fashionable, because it chimes in well with being authentic, déclassé and British good value ... and people do very much like to eat the product. So much so that there are aficionados who travel the length of the country in quest of the perfect fish supper. The current supreme winner of the National Fish & Chip Awards (because, yes, there are awards now for absolutely everything) is someone called Calum Richardson in Aberdeen, who reports that he regularly sees people from London who have made the journey specially. Yes ... and we call these people complete and utter bleeding idiots, who clearly have quite a lot of time on their hands. "What shall we do at the weekend,

“I wondered whether the staff get fed up with the sight of fish. We were slap bang opposite the extremely good Le Relais de Venise, which serves only steak. Maybe they meet after dark in the middle of the road and do a surreptitious swap

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## Joseph Connolly at The Golden Hind



■ Joseph at The Golden Hind in Marylebone Lane

dearest?" "Well how about driving six or seven hundred miles up to Aberdeen for some fish and chips, sweetie?" "Sound plan, my love: can't see the downside," Calum also sees tourists from America, and simply coachloads from Japan, so it is comforting to know that stupidity on so exalted a level is not wholly confined to these islands.

### Quite a reputation

Well the fish and chip mood was upon me, see ... so I thought, oh bugger Aberdeen: think I'll go to Marylebone Lane instead. The Golden Hind, but of course: a true original with quite a reputation. I thought it dated back only to the 1930s, but the current owner (who has been there for 11 years) tells

me that in 2014 the restaurant will celebrate its centenary. It is a pleasingly humble establishment – the sort of place that before Marylebone became so terribly smart and cool and expensive would have been taken at face value ... but now it is seen to be a perfectly delightful retro throwback, true to its roots and function ... and that is something else again. Even its name is pretty straightforward, if a little obscure. But do you know that the famous galleon from which it takes this name, at the time when Francis Drake embarked upon his circumnavigation of the earth in 1577, was actually called the *Pelican*...? Which would be a great name for a fish and chip shop, I think. Anyway – halfway into the

epic three-year voyage, Drake actually changed the name of the ship to the *Golden Hind*. Which is weird. And, incidentally, when eventually he returned to Blighty, he had plundered for his Queen £160,000 ... which in today's money amounts to a trillion zillion – enough to buy a house in Bishop's Avenue (almost) – and so of course he was awarded his knighthood: little changes. And as a name, The Golden Hind is whole lot better than many on the list of this year's 'best': The Frying Squad, The Good Catch, My Plaice, and (be ready) ... The Codfather. Only hairdressers seem more inclined to punning.

There is a rather glorious green and cream opaque glass art deco backdrop which from the 1930s

onwards was where the fish and chips were actually fried, and a serving counter used to front it – because until recently, here was more or less a takeaway. But next door has been acquired, the (very gloomy) basement has been pressed into service, and so now there is room for quite a crowd: and by 12.45pm on a Tuesday, nearly every seat was taken. Why should this be...? I reasoned that it couldn't be the decor: apart from the deco bit, all we have is grubby white walls, Ronsealed plywood and B&Q wall sconces (some of which had light bulbs in them). And it wasn't because it is in any way fashionable ... so why should the locals flock here? Well because, by Marylebone standards, it's very good value: you get a vast amount of pretty good grub for really quite little.

### Usual suspects

The menu is basic, which is just what you want: all the usual suspects are on offer: cod, haddock, rock salmon (so euphemised because long ago it was feared that "dogfish" might deter the punter) and halibut. These are available fried or steamed, chips are extra, as are the luminous mushy peas. So my wife had dogfish (it did not deter that particular punter) and I went for fried haddock. Large. Because there was an option of small or large, you see, so no contest, really: I also rather stupidly kicked off with a prawn cocktail which was a decent amount of very ordinary and chewy Atlantic numbers, much lettuce, and a fairly acidic Marie Rose: pointless, actually. And so to the main event: well – I asked for large, and by God I got it: about a foot long, this haddock fillet, and in excellent batter. The same went for the "rock salmon" – a fish I actually detest: a very strong and earthy taste, I find ... but then I wasn't about to eat it. The chips were ... OK. Could, and should be better ... but being quite doughy, I can see that they could have been quite the thing doused with Sarson's vinegar (on the table, together with salt, and even white pepper). The mushy peas were so-so ... the tartare

sauce kind of all right ... but really only the fish here is in any way outstanding.

They don't sell booze, so fizzy water all round. And sipping it, I noticed that six separate tables were filled with Chinese people. Well I wonder why...? Maybe they just adore fried fish ... or possibly they just seek out western restaurants in order to marvel at the invention of the fork. I then got to wondering whether the staff get totally fed up with the sight of fish ... just as I noticed that we were slap bang opposite the extremely good Le Relais de Venise, which serves only steak. Maybe they meet after dark in the middle of the road and conduct a surreptitious swap.

Pudding? My wife said that following a dogfish the size of Moby Dick, she rather thought not. And then her eyes alighted upon bread-and-butter pudding, and so that was that. A big disappointment, though: pretty much just lumps of crusted bread, a few sultanas and an avalanche of goodish custard. She maybe should have gone for spotted dick, or treacle pudding, or jam sponge – all of which are available to the brave, and starving. And so there we had it: excellent fish, not much of anything else, followed by a refreshingly low bill and the pleasing realisation that one is not in Aberdeen.

■ Joseph Connolly's latest novel, *England's Lane*, is now available in paperback, published by Quercus. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

### FACTFILE

- THE GOLDEN HIND  
73 Marylebone Lane, W1  
Tel: 020 7486 3644
- Open Monday-Friday noon-3pm, 6pm-10pm. Saturday 6pm-10pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆ (for the fish) ★★★★★☆☆ for everything else
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆
- Cost: Modest: fish and chips for two, about £20 or less.



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