



# Year to thwart vandals

If there's one resolution I'd particularly like to see kept in 2014, it's that wine vandals should be caught and prosecuted out of existence. Growing good grapes and turning them into desirable wine is a risky enough affair, fraught with a stack of potential natural calamities, and the people who are doing it should be spared human malice.

But recently, and in 2013 in particular, there have been too many vinous victims of intentional damage, destruction and theft. One to suffer was highly-regarded South African Eben Sadie, whose European joint venture Terroir al Limit – in Spain's Priorat region – was attacked in June 2011, with casks contaminated with household bleach and vats opened, their contents lost. The same week, 150 vines were ripped out of a vineyard in another Spanish denomination.

In Italy, in December 2012, a disaffected former employee of top Brunello di Montalcino grower Case Basse drained barrels containing more than 62,000 litres – almost the entire production from six vintages and a loss estimated at as much as £8million. In this case, at least, the culprit was arrested and jailed for four years.

France's big names have been hit, too, but by theft rather than vandalism. Last June, thieves lifted 380 half-bottles of 2012 Sauternes, worth some £85,000, from a warehouse at Château d'Yquem, the country's best-known maker of sweet wine. Earlier in the year, 3,700 bottles, valued at more than £250,000, were stolen from the champagne house of Jacques Selosse. Labels and neck-collars went as well as the wine, indicating that the very professional



■ Katie Jones in her winery in the Languedoc village of Tuchan

burglars (they destroyed traces of DNA or fingerprints with cleaning chemicals) had plans to fraudulently label lesser bottles of fizz to increase their nefarious income.

New world growers haven't escaped, either. In New Zealand's Hawke's Bay region, Dan Barker of Moana Park winery lamented "it's gutting to have all our hard work wasted like this" after the valve on his largest vat of merlot was forced last spring. A thief intending to make off with the equivalent of a couple of bottles for home consumption, perhaps? Maybe, but the pressure in the tank meant that 6,000 litres of wine (£90,000 worth) flowed away to waste. "It's a lot of blood sweat and tears to just literally pour down the drain," Barker added.

## Heartbreak

But the victim I feel most sorry for – because I know her, and respect the huge amount of commitment and effort she puts into making splendid wine – is Katie Jones. In April last year, someone broke into her tiny winery in the calm Languedoc village of Tuchan and opened the taps on her two vats of ready-to-bottle grenache gris. Her entire

2013 vintage of white wine, a quarter of her total production, had gone before she discovered the loss.

Katie's many friends in the wine trade, here in the UK especially, rallied round, providing funds to keep her operation afloat. An ingenious deal backed by Naked Wines' customers helped immediate cash-flow problems, lots of supporters bought the 2013 vintage in advance, and a "recovery range" has been sourced, starting with the appropriately named rosé *Après La Pluie, Le Beau Temps*.

Welcome as all that is, it doesn't cure the heartache, but as Katie says: "I am even more motivated to make things work."

You can show support – and enjoy some great wine – by buying Katie's currently-available wines. A broad choice is at [www.farehamwinecellar.co.uk](http://www.farehamwinecellar.co.uk), prices from £8 (rosé) to £15.15 (trophy-winning fitou), or buy direct – for UK delivery – from <http://shop.domainejones.com>.

Moana Park wines are available from Hard To Find Wines ([www.htfwines.co.uk](http://www.htfwines.co.uk)) at £13-£16, with a mixed half-case discounted to £60 plus £8 delivery.

## restaurant of the week

# Nothing hurried as Italian café bucks latest fad

Pleasing eatery has vast 10-page menu ignoring current craze for fast street food

Sup, blud ...? No, not a misprint, but merely a heartfelt greeting and enquiry, from me to you, in the new Multicultural London English that apparently is sweeping the capital, having taken over from Jamafrican and common or garden cockney. Here is the translation: What is happening, friend ...? And you might well ask. What is most certainly happening on the restaurant front is that more and more of them are trying to cash in on the Multicultural London fetish for street food: food to go, call it what you will. Food these days – for the young, anyway – is not to be sat in front of and savoured, no no no: it is to be grabbed. As in a bite. On the hoof. We have come – depending upon your age and attitude – a long way, or else nowhere at all, with actual regression an increasingly strong possibility.

In the old days, for the kids, it was just about going to McDonald's. And talking of McDonald's – now that the Hampstead Village branch has closed after 20 years – maybe a word about the so-called collective "hysteria" that reputedly met its inception way back in 1993. The chief, if not sole, objection to McDonald's was that they were after what is now Waterstones: i.e. the largest and most central premises in the Village. And that would have been bad. But the inoffensive little shop they eventually acquired has been no bother at all – and its fascia (another bone of contention) was actually one of the more pleasing in the High Street. Anyway: gone now – and in its place, another baker (bakers fast becoming as numerous as phone shops). Well there it is: but street food lives on, one of the newer fads being "cronuts", you know. A hybrid

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# Joseph Connolly at Spiazzo



■ Joseph with *Ham&High* editor Geoff Martin at Spiazzo in Crouch End

Picture: Polly Hancock

croissant/doughnut – which maybe is enjoyed by the wife of Chris Christie, the giant New Jersey Republican presidential hopeful, this lady being, we are told, a “doughnut queen”, whatever more than usually disgusting thing on earth that might be. Maybe along the lines of Sarah Palin having been a “hockey mom”. Ah, the US of A – it truly does remain quite perfectly impenetrable.

Anyway, pursuant to my calling for slow food, and the slower the better, I went to a rather pleasing Italian café/restaurant/deli in Crouch End – because there’s nothing remotely fast about Crouch End, and that’s a

good thing. My guest was a local inhabitant, and also, incidentally, editor of this very journal: Geoff Martin. Spiazzo takes up the left wing of a rather fine Art Deco building – its architecture resembling a low-slung version of John Barnes – and Geoff was telling me all about it: “The central part used to be Hornsey Town Hall – and at some point a theatre where The Kinks used to play. Soon it is going to be a theatre school and generally a hub of the community”. And there’s more: Spiazzo itself may be spotted in former local boy Simon Pegg’s cult classic *Shaun of the Dead*, taking the form of an electrical shop with a window full of television

screens which all are reporting the invasion of the zombies. Well, no zombies today – well, not really: just Geoff and me.

There’s a lovely terrace flanked by troughs of evergreen treelets, which is a permanent wow in summer – and also now, for early morning coffee drinking, and a drag on a fag. The interior is long – on one side an attractive deli counter and bar, and on the other, the length of the huge windows, booths with banquettes upholstered in coffee and cream leather. The globular clusters of pendants are sympathetic to the period – though rather predating it is the constant loop of Chaplin silent films shown on a flatscreen.

People eating pie will look up to see one being slapped into the little tramp’s face. And as to the menu ... oh good heavens: ten pages. Honestly. Ten pages of food ranging from anything to anything, with everything else taking up the slack. You don’t so much choose as resign yourself to plumping for something towards the middle, because you just simply can’t go on reading any more. Which in my case came down to meatballs in tomato sauce (a little plate which I thought would do as a starter) and goat cheese muffins for Geoff. He liked these – rather thin slices, maybe not quite melty enough, on split-open muffins – and the pork meatballs were pretty good too, though only warm. The waiter had taken the whole order – including a rather nice Chianti at a rather nice £17.95 – without writing down a single word. Normally I insist that they do, whereupon they get rather shirty at the inference that they are not of sound mind. Geoff wanted pan fried monkfish and salad, while I ordered Milanese di pollo (breadcrumbed and fried flattened fillet of chicken) with spaghetti Napoli. And I received Milanese di pollo ... with chips. You see ...?! Couldn’t be bothered to send it back, because the whole lunch would have been thrown out of kilter ... but you see ...?! I accepted the waiter’s twist of pepper from a mill a good yard long (and how he must thrill to it, whenever there is a girls’ night out).

## Unbelievably garlicky

The monkfish lacked the bite, I thought, and was unbelievably garlicky: the sort of seasoning that stays with you for days – and Geoff had a dinner that night at Admiralty House, in his role as newspaper editor. It is an annual thing for a small elite, in recognition of the agreement by press and publishers to never print anything that would endanger the defence of the nation. Anyway – whatever he ate at that dinner, it will have tasted of garlic, right down to the pudding. My chicken was OK, but dry (where the spaghetti and sauce should have come in) the salad dull, the chips

all right. And so we chatted: Geoff recently took a holiday in his native Ireland, partly to celebrate his 60th birthday. His daughter asked him what he wanted ... and what he wanted was a select band of family and friends in Portstewart on the north coast, where they would consume fish and chips and champagne, looking out to sea. “It was wonderful,” he says. “I might make it an annual event”. So he loves the old country still ...? “Oh yes. The trouble is, Northern Ireland is full of wonderful people who can’t get on with each other”. As, indeed, has been observed.

And now, what you have all been waiting for: an insight into the Gents. There is this on the wall: “Polite Notice. Please leave the toilets CLEAN the way you found them. Thank you.” There were also 34 lavatory rolls and a huge yellow bucket of Jeyes Citrus Zest Urinal Channel Blocks (who knew?). And across said urinal, a handwritten sheet of paper reading, “Out of Order”. And on my way out I encountered an old geezer (even older than I) with cropped white hair beneath a baseball cap, a blouson, tracksuit bottoms and great white trainers: the way the kids used to dress in the ‘90s, but no one does any more, except old men. He didn’t say to me “Sup, blud?” ... but you really do have to wonder, don’t you? Let me ask you this: What is happening, friend ...?

■ Joseph Connolly’s latest novel **ENGLAND’S LANE** is now available in paperback (Quercus £8.99). All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## FACTFILE

- **SPIAZZO**
- 26 The Broadway, N8
- Tel: 020 8347 6065
- Open daily 9am-10pm.
- Food: ★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆
- Cost: The menu is so vast, it can be anything you like – though there is a set £9.95 two course lunch.

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