

Fairtrade comes of age...

Moral dilemma moment: do you choose wine entirely because of country of origin, grape variety and familiarity of taste, or does the wellbeing of the workers involved in its production matter at all? Fairtrade Fortnight 2014 has 10 days still to run, so the question is topical – and also important.

As far as wine's concerned, Fairtrade doesn't have as public a profile as coffee, for example, or chocolate. But, increasingly, the same supermarkets that have promoted the curly green



■ Andrew Baker, Virgin Wines buyer, with the children of the Lorraine Primary School project in Rawsonville, South Africa

money in their own right."

Mann is correct – the quality now is far, far better than in the days when drinking for good

is a combination of the regular social premium on Fairtrade goods and voluntary add-ons.

But it is aiming to raise the level of help higher still, by urging customers to take the Fairtrade Wine Challenge – to replace one of their favourite wines with a Fairtrade one. And that wine will be as good, argues Andrew Mann, customer director at The Co-operative Food: "To gain a place in our range, the wines must compete directly in terms of quality with wines which are not Fairtrade certified. The quality of Fairtrade wines in general has improved massively over the years, and we are now at the point where they represent excellent quality and value for

gathered for a sociable Sunday lunch.

Very fair prices

As ever, personal taste played a huge role, but what must be encouraging for the retailers is that all those tasters who liked particular wines were certainly ready to pay the very fair prices asked for them.

There were, though, some stand-out bottles. The Co-operative Argentine pinot grigio 2013 (£5.60 until March 11 – like its fellow Fairtrade wines reduced by 20 per cent for the fortnight) is brightly aromatic, fresh and just a touch off-dry, a classic crowd-pleaser. Another Argentinian from the ethically inspirational

and organic La Riojana co-operative, Tilimuqui single vineyard ttorrontés 2013 (Waitrose, £6.40 until March 11, also a Fairtrade Fortnight reduction), makes a pretty, scented aperitif. Two other popular whites were South African: Usizo colombar-sauvignon blanc (www.virginwines.co.uk, £8.50) – "summery" was one comment – and aromatic, concentrated Six Hats chenin blanc 2013 (Marks & Spencer, £8).

For me, the surprise was the South African reds – a category where I too often find an unpalatable burnt-rubber edge. But not in Usizo pinotage (www.virginwines.co.uk, £8.50), whose juicy fruit has a pleasant spiciness, nor Fairhills shiraz-merlot (Morrisons, £8), smooth and food friendly. The star red, though, was Monteflores malbec 2012 (M&S, £10), a smart, sophisticated Argentinian well worth its price tag.

I haven't room to detail more good bottles – Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Fairtrade wines (£7.50-£8), for example, or, at Tesco, further wines (£8) from enterprising and successful Fairhills, the world's largest Fairtrade wine project. But Andrew Mann is right: these wines stand up proudly to the taste-for-taste challenge.

restaurant of the week

No need to call the midwife, I've eaten too much

TV writer Harriet Warner joins our reviewer for a large number of Argentine little plates

The Prologue: here commenceth my 250th restaurant review for the *Ham&High* – and I do so hope you are coming to an event I am doing at Hampstead Waterstones next Tuesday at 7pm. It's a sort of a Q&A thing, built around my new book, *The A-Z of Eating Out*. OK: there endeth the plug – and now for the review:

Television. It used to be the grey, flickering screen in a big veneered box that dominated the living room, and famously killed the art of conversation. Though I don't believe that before that time the nation was spectacularly eloquent, nor bursting with anecdote: people simply listened to the wireless instead. And now...? Well now, although screens of one sort or another are just everywhere, and constantly about our person, traditional prime-time terrestrial TV still does pack a mighty punch:

the horrible game and talent shows become daily headline news – and who would ever have imagined that a show so very trite and derivative and flagrantly soapy as *Downton Abbey* could have conquered the world? The days are long gone when such as *The Morecambe & Wise Show* would be viewed by literally three-quarters of the adult population, but still a programme is said to be a massive hit if eight or nine million people tune in (conveniently forgetting the more than 50 million who don't). On the production side of things, the maw of television is insatiable: God knows how many channels, all of which have to be pumping out something or other, virtually round the clock. Though still it remains a very difficult world to break into, and everybody seems to want to be in it or on it (little girls no longer aspiring to be air hostesses or Mrs Thatcher, but a "presenter" instead).

“Oh God, I've got to stop eating so much, you know. 'I love food too,' said Harriet. 'I cook every day from scratch. I think the reason is, I really love to create happiness. Food makes people happy, doesn't it?' Well, it sure works for me.



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ARCHANT

Joseph Connolly at Zoilo



■ Joseph with Harriet Warner at Zoilo in Duke Street

Picture: Polly Hancock

One of my own experiences of writing for television involved my novel *Summer Things*. A French film company took out an option to make it into a movie at the same time as Granada had commissioned me to write it as a six-parter for the BBC. I thought that the French film stood no chance on earth of ever being made, whereas the BBC thing was looking good. I had written two of the episodes, the director of *Cold Feet* was on board, Joanna Lumley and Jim Broadbent had been cast in the leads: yum yum. Then something called Greg Dyke landed at the Beeb, apparently declaring my novel to be “too elitist” (ie, white and middle class) and so it was binned. Meanwhile, the French film, starring Charlotte Rampling, was made and in the cinemas inside of

a year. All very rum. My guest for lunch has suffered no such BBC ignominy: my dear friend Harriet Warner has, over the past 10 years, written for quite a few successful series, most notably and recently the big hit *Call the Midwife*, currently being broadcast. In this series, as in the last, Harriet wrote episode two, and also the penultimate episode which comes up this Sunday – and I asked her how she had found the whole experience. We were sitting in Zoilo, a small and rather unusual Argentinian restaurant just beyond the Wallace Collection in Marylebone – an area that is just packed with eating places. The exterior is grey, because that’s the law, and inside it’s rather cosy: a long bar with bottles of wine massed on shelves in the manner of a library, a black-and-white tiled

chequerboard floor, old exposed brick walls and red leather buttoned banquettes. They serve steaks (how could an Argentinian restaurant not?) but it’s not really about that: it’s much more a “little plates” set-up, and they did sound very attractive. Always difficult to know quite how much to order ... but we plumped for scallops with sweet potato, caramelised pork belly and chorizo (that’s just one dish), crab on toast, grilled rump of lamb with broccoli, quinoa and anchovy, flank steak with celeriac and bone marrow, duck egg with wild mushrooms and chips “provenzal”. Enough, do we think...? Who knows? So let’s now talk about *Call the Midwife*: “It’s a very intense process,” says Harriet. “Although I was doing just two of the eight episodes, I had only two weekends

off in nine months. Discussions are constant – but it’s a very exciting and creative process. All the actors – and Jessica Raine is my favourite, she’s just lovely – actually become very emotional about the scripts, even during the read-throughs, when we’re all just sitting in a circle.” I actually seem to be one of the few men who enjoy *Midwife* (although a little blood and screaming women being repeatedly exhorted to “PUSH!!!” can go a very long way) – but how does Harriet explain the enormous draw that the series exercises...? “I think it’s mainly the 1950s. We crave that ... simplicity. Because of the way the world is now...”

Very luscious

First to arrive were the scallops and crab plates: two large scallops and a couple of cubes of pork with lovely caramelisation, cut nicely by the sweet potato: very luscious, and it didn’t last two minutes. The crab was largely white meat – always a treat – and piled quite high on a small round of toast. Really good – and just as it was sadly vanishing, along came all the rest of the grub. The four chunks of lean if undercooked lamb were a good deal better than the steak – largely because the steak was flank, and therefore very flanky: it looks like fillet, but there the resemblance ends as it is cut across the grain, and really as chewy as hell. The marrow was nice, though – and the wild mushrooms, tiny and juicy and powerful, were simply sensational, the goo of the fried duck egg adding immeasurably. Chips were hand cut and very nicely crunchy, the “provenzal” bit being seemingly the addition of paprika. “Gary Rhodes,” said Harriet, “has written that after the third mouthful, you don’t taste any more.” Well if Gary Rhodes really did write that, then Gary Rhodes is an ass: I taste every mouthful, which is why I always want more. And talking of that ... I then ordered more. Another of the scallop things because it had been Harriet’s favourite, and something billed as chicken, grilled peppers and shallots ... though actually it was a dinky little Cornish pasty

with proper primed pastry and all of the above minced up inside. It was really good, if a little small. Oh God ... I’ve got to stop eating so much, you know...

“I love food too,” said Harriet. “I cook every day from scratch, no matter what sort of a day it’s been. I think the reason is, I really love to create happiness. Food makes people happy, doesn’t it?” Well – it sure works for me. I wondered whether she had ever been on set during the filming of *Midwife*. “Once or twice. It’s actually quite dull. There’s no ... romance. And as a writer, you’re only in the way, of course.” Of course. So: she writes, I write. She eats, I eat. What’s different...? “Well,” she says, “I do have a personal trainer.” Ah yes – well there we do diverge, of course, because I don’t even have a trainer who is reasonably stand-offish. “He keeps on saying, ‘You just must focus!’” moans Harriet. “Basically, it’s just a whole hour of pain.” The man is called Ed Power, though whether he is any relation of Will is unrecorded.

And so after all that food I eventually waddled away, no doubt appearing to the charming staff to be thoroughly large with child – although I am pleased to say that none of them was moved to panic, and call the midwife.

■ Joseph Connolly will be talking about his new book, *The A-Z of Eating Out*, at Hampstead Waterstones on Tuesday, March 4, at 7pm. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

FACTFILE

- **ZOILO**
9 Duke Street, W1
Tel: 020 7486 9699
- Open Monday-Saturday noon-10.30pm
- Food: ★★★★★★☆☆
- Service: ★★★★★★☆☆
- The Feeling: ★★★★★★☆☆
- Cost: As ever with little plates, anything you want it to be – but I reckon about £100 for two with wine.

Graph showing emotional response vs proximity to me.

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