



Back to a simpler time

Delight of a book from 1926 shows how wine-making was done

If you've ever been inside a modern winery, you'll remember the array of presses, thermo-regulated tanks, pumps, filters, shiny stainless steel pipes, dials and knobs. Turn the clock back almost 90 years, and how different it was.

"All the equipment necessary [for making wine] is shown in the illustration above," declares the 1926 edition of Larousse Ménager Illustré, the essential French encyclopedia of all things domestic. Admittedly, this was for making wine for the family, but I'm pretty certain things weren't much more complicated, simply larger, if production was on a commercial scale.

So what does the illustration show? A wooden barrel, a thermometer, a wooden tub and a log with the bark stripped off. And the technique? Simplicity itself.

After advice that for each finished hectolitre of wine it is necessary to use three hectolitres (some 135 kilos) of grapes, the instructions are to squash the grapes in the tub with the log, then tip them into the barrel (a second-hand one, well scrubbed, was the economical suggestion), filling it no more than three-quarters.

On top goes a simple wooden rack, weighed down with three or four heavy stones – to force the floating cap of grape skins, stalks, etc, down into the fermenting juice, so avoiding the hard work of pushing it down by hand with poles. Wait for fermentation to finish (this is where the thermometer is needed, to make sure the desired 20 degrees C is achieved – if the liquid is too cold, the recommendation is to put



■ **Domaine de Valmoissine – the home of excellent pinot noir**

some bottles of hot water into the barrel) and draw off the wine to rest in clean small barrels.

What is interesting in this description is the emphasis on cleanliness, something old world winemakers were too often thought to disregard until the squeaky-clean antipodeans arrived on the scene.

There will be some wine left in the mush at the bottom of the barrel, and Larousse advises the economical housewife to turn it into "vin de sucre" – for family consumption only, as this wasn't allowed commercially – by adding water and sugar. Not particularly tempting...

Rustic

Now, after the history lesson, some wines which are tempting. Appropriately, the line-up is French, and they come from the south, long considered the home of the most rustic of the country's vigneron. But these are made by people who have smart wineries and a serious concern for quality.

First, a breath of fresh air from a cool, high part of Languedoc – Limoux, which made sparkling wine well before champagne was invented and where now increasingly fine still wines are

being crafted from chardonnay. Abbotts & Delaunay Zephyr (£17, www.averys.com by the end of September) is a touch smoky-oaky but has an appealing crisp, clean complexity of fruit and flowers, a hint of tropical excitement plus excellent balance. I'd love to wait and drink this vintage in a year or so.

Next, head north and a little east towards the Rhône and into the spectacular Ardèche region, where a big burgundy name has been making appetising chardonnay for ages. Maison Louis Latour Grande Ardèche 2012 (£11-£14, Majestic, Whole Foods Market) is more elegant and less oaky than it once was and has more than a hint of how the grape tastes from more northerly vineyards.

The third point of this southern French triangle lies in the Var region, just north of St Tropez but again up in the hills. Another Louis Latour wine, Domaine de Valmoissine 2012 (price/stockists as Grande Ardèche) is one of the most enjoyable non-burgundian pinot noirs I've drunk recently – fragrant with cherry and berry fruit, elegant texture and long-lasting flavour. It's a great southern achievement.

restaurant of the week

Lunch is pretty lush thanks to Welsh influence

Our critic is cooked for by Bryn Williams as he dines with Lt-Gen Sir Simon Mayall

Here is my declension for the verb "to welsh": I would never, You might well, He probably welshes all of the time, and She ... well, she's Shirley Bassey. They hate it, you know, the Welsh, the fact that "welsh" means to renege upon an agreement. I believe that as a nation, they once campaigned to have the word expunged from the dictionary – and, as usual when the Welsh ever voice an opinion, their clamour was completely ignored. I rather love the accent, I have to admit, but I have found that as a race, they are best avoided when they've had a few drinks: not because they become pigulistic, no no no – but just as every Irishman sincerely believes himself to be a humourist and a poet... so the Welsh, in party mode,

become quite utterly convinced that they are in fact Katherine Jenkins, or Charlotte Church, or even Tom Jones ... and then will set about belting out the evidence of this at extraordinary volume, until you plead to be allowed to leave. I chatter of all these things because, were my most recent lunch to be made into a huge-budget Hollywood blockbuster (I can dream) it might well be entitled *The Welsh Connection*. Because how common is it, do you suppose, to be cooked lunch by a Welsh chef with a Michelin star in the company of the Colonel of the Queen's Dragoon Guards, which is in fact the Welsh Cavalry ...? Rare, wouldn't you say? I should say so.

Bryn Williams is the chef/proprietor at the long-standing and much respected restaurant *Odette's* in Regent's Park Road (and it seems mandatory to

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Joseph Connolly at Odette's



■ Joseph Connolly and Sir Simon Mayall finish off with a 'Jaffa cake' and a savarin

Picture: Polly Hancock

mention that his missus is Sharleen Spiteri "of Texas", who is a key ingredient of something called "the Primrose Hill set"). I was there with Lieutenant-General Sir Simon Mayall – and the last occasion I spent time with this excellent and jovial fellow was in the garden of the Chelsea Arts Club on a warm and balmy evening. We were each enjoying a Cohiba, and he was bursting to tell me about the knighthood, but was sworn to secrecy until the following morning's announcement of the Queen's Birthday Honours. His telling me wouldn't, of course, have made a blind bit of difference, but you don't get to be a general by disobeying orders. I hadn't been to Odette's for some years, and I remembered the décor as having been very canary, with doomy wallpaper from the B&Q

bargain bucket. It's all rather cool now: white brick, black fretwork screens, and supremely comfortable dark green leather upholstered tub chairs.

Portion

There was just the one portion remaining of the "special" starters (at one o'clock) but as this was merely gazpacho, Simon and I didn't trouble to arm-wrestle for it. He ordered asparagus, lardo, truffle and rapeseed mayonnaise, while I was having chicken galantine confit with Jersey Royals and leek (Welsh, see). After that, lamb (Welsh, see) on a courgette and anchovy tarte fine (sort of puff pastry that hasn't been allowed to puff) with artichoke and tomato, and a side of glazed carrots. Simon was having braised beef in ale (which had been simmering, said

the waiter, for thirty hours) with smoked mashed potato and more glazed carrots. I thought a bottle of something red and lightish might suit us both: so an Italian Primitivo – which turned out to be alarmingly gluggable. Simon, I might say, was until very recently Defence Senior Adviser to the government on the Middle East. Fluent in Arabic, Simon is now Mr Cameron's envoy to the Kurds, and is counselling the fighters on how to take on Isis. He was actually brought up initially in Yemen, his first school in Aden. Did he always know, I wondered, that he was destined for the military ...? "My family does have a tradition of service," he says, "although my father was in the RAF, and I had decided therefore to read maths and physics at Cambridge, and also join the RAF. It turned out that I read history and English

at Oxford, and then went on to Sandhurst". While at university he studied the Crusades, and at the age of twenty-eight was a Major in the Army commanding a tank squad for the Sultan of Oman. Were you doing that when you were twenty-eight ...? No: me neither.

Simon was given six asparagus spears (not English any more, obviously, but nicely plump) all very prettily presented.

He put quite a lot of black pepper on it (which he loves) and clearly relished the whole thing. "Nice, melty lardo," he enthused, while using bread to mop up the last of it.

My circle of chicken galantine was also very well made – tasted rather of Christmas turkey and stuffing, which can never be a bad thing – and the Jerseys were truly potatoey. The mains were presented like fine-dining-lite: not impossibly pretentious and attention-seeking, but still in the form of a careful little stack at the centre of the plate.

Simon very much enjoyed his beef, glossily coated in a very fine jus: he put quite a lot of black pepper on it (which he loves). My lamb was just pink enough, the thin and crunchy pastry base alive with good and deep flavours. I don't normally go too strongly on carrots, but these were just perfect – not too sweet and very yielding, while the smoked mash was as smooth as smooth.

Coaxing

In common with many professionals, Simon does not really talk about his work ... but I did a little coaxing. He has seen a fair deal of action, and I asked him whether he had ever considered that death might be staring him in the face ...? "Well ... Northern Ireland, I suppose. 1988. There was quite a bad riot that became ... a bit personal. Baghdad. The liberation of Kuwait ... we thought that a lot of us wouldn't be coming back. I have, of course, lost some very good friends ... But you have to be realistic: soldiers are sentient adults – we can't be squeamish about it". And what of the current global situation ...? "I

have witnessed shocking scenes of Islamic extremism. This is worse". And Tony Blair ...? "That would have to be off the record". At the moment, Simon's regiment is in Afghanistan, and he himself is readying himself for leaving the Army early in 2015, after nearly forty years in the saddle, when he will be lecturing at Harvard for six months. "My father is most concerned that I don't become idle. He is convinced that I still need discipline ..." I also asked him if he had any favourite war films, and he promptly replied *The Dam Busters* and *The Cruel Sea*. One is RAF, the other Navy ...

Then he ate a sublime "Odette's Jaffa Cake" – a beautiful cube bearing not even a passing resemblance to the McVitie's biscuit, comprising chocolate sponge, mousse, orange cream and marmalade. My "special" of a savarin of summer berries was a rather nothing doughnut saturated in golden syrup with a bit of vanilla cream in it, and a couple of berries: the only real let-down. Then the chef appeared, and he and Simon exchanged Welsh credentials. Bryn didn't sing: he maybe wisely leaves all that side of things to the missus.

■ Joseph Connolly's *The A-Z of Eating Out* is published by Thames & Hudson. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website www.josephconnolly.co.uk.

FACTFILE

■ ODETTE'S

130 Regent's Park Road, NW1
Tel: 020 7586 8569

■ Open Mon-Fri noon-2.30pm, 6pm-10.30pm. Sat-Sun noon-3pm, 6pm-10.30pm

■ Food: ★★★★★☆☆

■ Service: ★★★★★☆☆

■ The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆

■ Cost: Two course lunch £13, three for £15 OR three courses with half bottle house wine and coffee £24.75 (all fantastic bargains). Otherwise, about £110 for three course meal for two with modest drink.



Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 30th September 2014, 3.30pm - 5.20pm (followed by drinks)

Council Chamber, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

Guest speaker: **Baroness Sally Greengross**

CE International Longevity Centre-UK, Chair All Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia

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