

Autumn/Winter 2007

# Grapestalk

The magazine of the Association of Small Direct Wine Merchants

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## Serving temperature

Make sure you get it  
right this Christmas



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## Italian Evening a Great Success in Northumberland

**A COLD TUESDAY** evening in October brought together a wide range of individuals in the small Northumberland village of Hedley on the Hill, keen to learn about Italian wine. The evening was held at The Feathers Inn, recently selected as Northumbrian Dining Pub of the Year 2008, by the Good Pub Guide. Organised by hosts Rhian Craddock and Helen Greer, in conjunction with Stuart Colmer of Hopscotch Enterprises (Fasol Menin UK), the event aimed to offer participants the chance to taste a range of Italian wines, each matched to excellent Italian fayre, produced by chef Rhian.

Stuart had invited Massimo DeNardo, proprietor and founder of the Fasol Menin winery to join the event, ensuring that the keen students of Italian wine were able to hear first hand about the winery in the foot of the Valdobbiadene hills. Massimo was in the UK, as the day before Stuart and Massimo had represented Fasol Menin at the 'Vino in Villa' event at the Institute of Directors, Pall Mall London. The event had been organised by the Producers consortium for DOC Prosecco in the Conegliano-Valdobbiadene region of Veneto, Italy, to meet the growing demand for Prosecco in the UK, and knowledge of its production. Thirty-two of the consortiums most important producers were represented and a Master Class was held by Peter McCombie MW. Following a long-trip back to the North of England,

Stuart and Massimo were ready to pour and talk for their Northumbrian students.

The evening started with Prosecco Brut DOC Fasol Menin, matched to a Polenta, which brought out the mineral flavours of this low sugar content Brut. This was then followed by the light apply Prosecco Extra Dry Fasol Menin married to a risotto. As the diners enjoyed their food and experimented with identifying the different flavours of these two great Proseccos, Massimo talked about the grape life-cycle, the main production process and the secondary fermentation which gives Prosecco its final flavours and important bubbles!

Following the Prosecco courses, the menu moved to a fantastic tagliatelli with hare, well matched with a Merlot DOC from the Introvigne winery, before offering a course of local cheeses fabulously matched with the rich and full Raboso DOC Piave from Giorgio Cecchetto.

For those with sufficient stamina, the evening closed with a Passito and long and lively chats between the diners, Massimo, Stuart and Rhian as votes were cast on the favourite wines and dished of the evening.

The night was a sell out and requests have already been made for Massimo to make a return trip to Northumberland; a task which he is looking forward to!

## Canons Ashby 2007 tasting

**THE ASDW HELD** its third tasting of 2007 at the National Trust's Canons Ashby House near Daventry pretty much in the heart of England.

Seven members of ASDW exhibited driving up from Wokingham, Guildford, Oxford, London, Nottingham, Slough.

Geoff Ponter and Annalisa Baj of Amordivino were there with their range of Italian wines; Jim Monks of Spanish specialist Decanter Wines; Richard Loadman who finds bin end gems for Individual Wines; Leon Stolarski with his selection of predominantly Languedoc and Roussillon wines; Marta Lunardi of her family Argentinian vinyard Martas Vinyard; Nick Dobson with his increasingly varied list of Swiss, Austrian, Beaujolais and now new Zealand wines; and Warren Edwardes of Wine for Spice - a range of cool refreshingly sparkling wines for curry and spicy food.

The weather held off and the feedback from National Trust Staff and visitors was excellent. One visitor said to Siân Watson the Property Administrator of Canons Ashby House that she used to often visit National Trust's Waddesdon Manor to buy Rothschild wines. But ASDW's wines were better at a much better price.

Nice feedback indeed. We're delighted to be of service. ASDW will be doing 2 shows at Canons Ashby on 2008.

## The first ever Newbury Wine Festival

**WHAT AN AMAZING** start! The first ever Newbury Wine Festival was held in the Corn Exchange, Newbury on 13th and 14th October this year. Around 18 small independent wine importers/retailers joined forces to bring the people of Newbury and surrounding towns, a unique opportunity to broaden their wine drinking horizons.

By experiencing and enjoying wines offered by passionate organisations, such as ASDW members Individual Wines, Amordivino, Step Up Wines, Italyabroad.com, Decanter Wines and Nick Dobson Wines, visitors were

able to discover that there is a world of amazing wine beyond the shelves of the big retailers, available at sensible prices.

In addition to the wines offered in the main auditorium, Tasting Masterclasses were held, giving Festival visitors the chance to learn a little more. The two themes were Old World Wines Vs New World and Champagne Vs Sparkling Wines. These were well attended and visitors were able to taste wines, find out about the

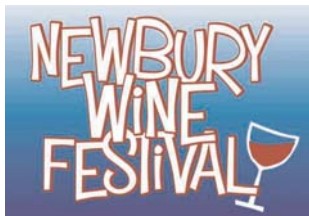
regions, gain some tasting technique and an insight into how the wine is made. In addition to the wonderful wines, various foodies provided cheese and other tasty treats to accompany the wine.

The Newbury Wine Festival has two main objectives; to promote small producers by supporting their small UK distributors, and to enlighten an increasingly thirsty wine loving public about the wines they offer. It is not a stuffy event

for the old school "officianado" but a fun, vibrant festival to which all wine lovers regardless of their understanding of wine, can come and experience superb wine in an informal and relaxed environment.

Over 350 visitors attended the inaugural event, which has now been planned to run every year going forward. For 2008, the dates are 1st and 2nd November, again in the Corn Exchange, Newbury and organisers are hoping to double the number of visitors for next year.

For regularly updated information please visit [www.newburywinefestival.co.uk](http://www.newburywinefestival.co.uk)



# Discovering Dolcetto



Andrea d'Ercole

What I like most about my job is the possibility to know different cultures and people through the tasting of wine and food, and I spend lot of time going around Italy tasting wine and food made by small producers, attending local events or visiting their farms. Even though my friends don't believe me, this is not always easy, sometime I get to taste so many wines during the day that by the time is dark I am so tired that I can't wait to go to bed!

The tasting involves a lot of concentration and the greater the number of wines, the harder it becomes and more concentration is required. After the first few wines, the senses involved in the tasting, mainly the nose and the mouth, become tired and it

gets more and more difficult to assess the wine, so more and more concentration is required to make for the loss.

At one of my last tastings, at the beginning of September, I was in Alba, a beautiful town in Piedmont mainly known for its wines and truffles, where every year the Dolcetto & Dolcetto is held, an event organised to promote the Dolcetto which is a wine still unknown to the masses but used as the table wine for the natives and often shadowed by the more famous Barbera or Nebbiolo. Together with other wine experts, importers and journalists, we spent three days tasting about 170 Dolcettos made by around 100 different producers.

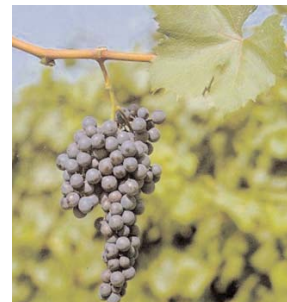
The producers attending the event are not the totality, many more make Dolcetto, but events such as this one tend to be attended only by small producers that hope to find ways to expand their market or receive positive reviews. Famous producers often do not attend these events because they don't think the event is worth their time. Amongst the wines tasted, there were only a couple of big producers and we all agreed that their quality was way behind the others.

During the morning we had tasting sessions and the afternoon was reserved to visit

to the producers even though they were already harvesting due to the hot summer. They were however still happy to show us around, which was followed by various dinners where local dishes were matched with the wines, and not solely Dolcetto.

Dolcetto is made with a grape of the same name and, together with Nebbiolo and Barbera, these are the main grapes cultivated in Piedmont. The Dolcetto grape is a very delicate grape, very sweet, and it is not easy to grow. In the past, the grapes were used for bathing because it was thought to have medical properties. Not only are the grapes difficult to grow, but the wine is also difficult to make. If the wine making and the cellar procedures are not followed carefully, the wine can be easily ruined and therefore undrinkable, so a lot of care is taken in the cellar to ensure that the wine is properly made. There is more than one Dolcetto wine and this depends on where the vineyards are located. There are twelve different denominations, each one from a specific area, with eleven of them DOC and one DOCG. Below is a list of the ones that were tasted:

Dolcetto d'Asti  
 Docg Dogliani  
 Doc Dolcetto di Dogliani  
 Doc Dolcetto di Diano d'Alba  
 Dolcetto di Ovada  
 Dolcetto d'Acqui  
 Dolcetto d'Alba  
 Langhe Dolcetto



Dolcetto delle Langhe Monregalesi

The existence of so many types of Dolcetto wine is probably one of the reasons why the Dolcetto is so little known outside Italy. The name of the grape means the wine is often thought of as a sweet wine which is far from being true. Dolcetto, according to the locals, is a wine that should be drunk young. It is their everyday wine, a versatile wine that can accompany all local dishes of the Piedmont cuisine. Even though the Dolcetto is best when consumed young and its ability to age is not mentioned, during the tasting I had the possibility to appreciate the capacity of the wine to age.

One cannot compare this ability of the Dolcetto with Barbera and especially Nebbiolo, the grape that produce the Barolo, but I was very impressed by a series of Dolcettos tasted that went back to 2000. Even though the nose of cherries and red fruits

*'Nothing is more difficult than to act simply: the ideal is to do nothing'*

Aubert de Villaine





had nearly gone, in the mouth the wine was very smooth and soft. There was a big gap in the nose between the last vintage and the one before, but after that the differences on the palate were very small.

Two main differences were immediately noticeable; the differences between the different producers, the wine maker philosophy, and the differences between the different Dolcettos. We tasted different vintages, varying from 2004 to 2006 and it was evident that even though the Dolcetto is by definition a wine to be drunk young, this varied depending on the producer. Some of the 2006 tasted were not yet ready to be drunk and the wine was still close on the nose and rough on the palate whilst there were others that had already passed their best and were starting their final descent as the new vintage was going to be harvested. Another difference was given by a short time the wine would spend in barrels, which is followed by some and not by others. This gives the wine a bit more structure, complexity and tannins and requires more time in the bottle for the wine to be ready.

All Dolcettos have similar characteristics, like the ruby colour with violet tinges and the intense perfumes of cherries and red fruit macerated with a light bitter aftertaste. However there are minor differences between the different denominations. It would be a useless exercise and it would

take more than the whole magazine to go through all twelve types, highlighting their characteristics and recommending a few wines for each category.

What I can say is that amongst the Dolcetto tasted, I found several wines that I thought were good, some were ready and others were not. I also found very interesting and well made wines that exhibited very different characteristics on the nose and on the palate from what I would have expected from a Dolcetto. I wondered whether I needed to judge the wine based on what I was expecting or how the wine was made. I thought the right answer was between those two extremes.

I first tasted the Dolcetto a few years ago and I fell in love with the wine and decided to import what I thought was one

of the best I had tasted, the Rivetto Dolcetto D'Alba, both Ercolino and Frach. I decided to import them in the UK and it took me some time before my customers decided to give the wine a chance. Now they keep coming back for more....

I would like to be able to recommend a few of my favourite Dolcettos however, I can't. I can't because they are not available in the UK. The majority of wines presented during the tasting were not available, except for a few cases, outside Italy therefore there won't be any point for me in recommending a wine which is not available for you to buy.

Amongst the best Dolcetto tasted, it was with no surprise that I once again found the Dolcetto D'Alba Rivetto which is one of those producers of which the wines takes a bit

longer to be ready. In fact the 2006 vintage that we tasted was not yet ready when we tasted it in September It should now be ready and it also lasts longer than many others.

I would like to conclude this column with one thing I learned from my granddad: you only learn about wine drinking it. So, drink intended as a taste, and don't stick with your favourite wines, try new wines and don't be afraid of new wine experiences.

To help you in discovering the Dolcetto, I will be happy to add a free bottle of Dolcetto D'Alba Rivetto worth £8.99 for each order received at [www.italyabroad.com](http://www.italyabroad.com).

*Andrea d'Ercole runs Italy Abroad.*



# Weinbau Heidi Schröck

## Rust, Neusiedlersee-Hugelland, Austria



Nick Dobson

**UNDOUBTEDLY ONE OF** the most prominent female wine-makers on today's Austrian wine scene is Heidi Schröck, who runs the family winery at Rust, on the banks of the Neusiedlersee, a shallow steppe lake straddling the Austro-Hungarian border. Wine history abounds here; archaeological excavations in Burgenland from the period around 990 BC testify to the region's participation in the earliest wine culture of central Europe. The history of the Free City of Rust has always been intertwined with viticulture, and noble sweet wines were documented here as early as 1526.

One of Rust's most famous daughters, it's not hard to see why Heidi has become so well known; her uncompromising quest for quality means her wines are simply stunning. Her rise to fame has included en route a stint as Austrian Wine Queen, time working in Germany and South Africa, and more recently in 2003 she was awarded the title "Vintner of the Year" by Falstaff magazine, one of Austria's main wine publications. From 10 hectares of vineyards in top sites around Rust she crafts a wide range of lovely wines, from a mix of indigenous Austrian red varieties such as St. Laurent (said to be related to Pinot Noir), Blaufränkisch, and

Zweigelt (a cross between St. Laurent and Blaufränkisch), and also historic white varieties such as Furmint (the Hungarian Tokay grape) and Muscat-Lunel, which hark back to the days of the Austro-Hungarian empire, together with a few international grapes. In addition to her red & white ranges, Heidi is particularly noted for her sweet wines, including the famous Ruster Ausbruchs. In addition to being superwoman on the winemaking front, she also finds time to teach at the Austrian Wine Academy headquarters in her home town of Rust, and is a member of "Le Donne del Vino" (an Italian wine group) and the "Cercle Ruster Ausbruch", formed in 1992 by leading Rust wine-makers with the goal of continuing the tradition of the famed Ruster Ausbruch. As long-time leader of this association, Heidi works with other producers to maintain and improve the quality standard of this noble sweet wine, and to restore this historic speciality to its rightful place as one of the world's elite dessert wines. Oh, and she's also mum to twin sons who form 40% of a fledgling rock band.

The area around the Neusiedlersee is well known for outstanding sweet wines. The vast expanse of the lake has a crucial influence on the climate and viticulture in Rust. As the grapes reach ripeness in autumn, fog cloaks the region's vineyards. Humidity promotes the noble rot *Botrytis cinerea*, which perforates grape skins,

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dessicates the grapes, and gives the resulting noble sweet wines their legendary concentration of sugar, acidity, and aroma. The grapes for these wines tend to be grown on the narrow strip of land between the water's edge and the lake-side road, as it is here that the *Botrytis* attacks the grapes most reliably; cross the road and it is much less dependable, so grapes for dry reds and whites tend to be grown further from the lake shore. Sweet *Botrytis* wines made in this region include, in addition to Ausbruch, Beerenauslese

(BA) and Trockenbeerenauslese (TBA).

Ausbruch is an old name for dessert wines with must-weights between those of BA and TBA (around 138 degrees Oechsle), and comes from the German verb *Ausbrechen* meaning to "break out", referring to the method of grape selection during harvest – that is, the botrytised grapes are the only ones picked from, or "broken out" of the bunch, when harvesting. Ausbruch production died out after the phylloxera outbreak in the 19th century, and only recently has





production been revived. In times past, Ruster Ausbruch gave the town of Rust its fame, and in the old days, it was made by taking botrytised grapes and adding to them some fresh grape-must to get the fermentation process started. The wine was barrel-aged until it developed a "rancio" character, reminiscent of Tokay. One or two producers still make sweet wines in this style, but more generally things have moved on, and today there is little to distinguish the vinification methods for Ausbruch from those for BA and TBA; the differences are more stylistic. Heidi makes Ausbruch in most but by no means all years, as even here, the conditions allowing the Botrytis to work its magic are not always right. In the glass, her Ausbruchs are nothing short of astonishing; Heidi's 2002 is a beautiful bright pale gold, viscous, sticking to the inside of the glass as it is swirled round, concentrating the already powerful yet bright zippy aromas of smoky botrytis, dried fruit, honey, and herbs. On the palate there are stone-fruit flavours, honey, a

racy acidity, a hint of spice, and a finish that goes on forever. This is a real work of art; rich, unctuous, like drinking liquid honey. Wine such as these last almost forever - it seems as if in their nearly limitless storage potential, a little bit of immortality has been captured. As well as Ausbruch, Heidi also often makes a delightful BA.

Amongst her whites, Heidi's most unusual and interesting wine is arguably her Furmint, made from the grape used to make Hungarian Tokay, which after near-extinction in Burgenland, was reintroduced here in the early 1990s by Heidi and a handful of other producers, who now make from it a dry white wine. It's a late ripening grape, with good acidity - the grapes for Heidi's 2006 were picked in the middle of November. It's a really great dry white - exotic and unusual,

*Heidi makes Ausbruch in most but not all years and hers are nothing short of astonishing*

with aromas of ginger, quince, and honey, and on the palate immediately spicy and exotic, a complex mix of fruit, ginger and pronounced minerality. Heidi also makes a classy Pinot Blanc and a fine Muscat - but all is not quite what it seems here, because in Austria there is no "Muscat" as such - they have Gelber Muskateller, and Muscat-Ottonel - and Heidi's Muscat is in fact a blend of these with a little Sauvignon Blanc.

Heidi makes a clutch of classy reds too - a Zweigelt, a St. Laurent, and St. Laurent, and a Blaufränkisch. All quite hearty numbers, yet all very soft, smooth, juicy, and above all they smell so very good. And they are just so easy to drink. She also makes a wine called "Lionne", a blend of some indigenous reds with a splash of Cabernet Sauvignon - a big wine to be sure.

Heidi is undoubtedly an important producer in the overall landscape of Austrian wine. She not only makes great wines, but also cares about and is protective of her region's heritage, and is proactive in improving things, setting standards, and pushing boundaries for the future. And yet she is sufficiently in touch with her vineyards and nature to know the limitations of what can be achieved; I'll leave the

last word to Heidi herself -

"The vineyard doesn't just bring grapes for my wine, it teaches me to wait, absorb nature, and to understand my own boundaries."

Profound stuff indeed. Now where did I put my corkscrew...?

*Nick Dobson is Chairman of the ASDW and runs Nick Dobson Wines.*

### Weinbau Heidi Schröck at a glance

Vineyard area: 10 hectares

Annual production: 60,000 bottles (50% white, 20% red, 30% sweet)

Best sites: Vogelsang, Turner

Soil: Eroded primary rock, mica slate, limestone, sandy loam

Principal grape varieties: Pinot Blanc (Weissburgunder), Furmint, Muscat Lunel, Pinot Gris (Grauburgunder), Welschriesling, Zweigelt,



# Serving temperature

**If you invest in good wine, makes sure you serve it at the correct temperature**



**Paul Howard**

**“WHAT IS THE** best serving temperature for a wine and what is the best way to obtain it”, is one of the most frequent questions asked at any wine event. It’s also one of the most important - the smell and taste of any wine is radically altered according to the temperature it is served at, and this will either heighten drinking pleasure or potentially spoil it. Temperature is fundamental to our ability to enjoy wine. To paraphrase Goldilocks and the Three Bears,

‘First Goldilocks tasted the wine of the Big Bear, and that was too warm for her. Next she tasted the wine of the Middle-sized Bear, but that was way too cold for her. And then she tried the wine of the Little Bear and that was neither too hot nor too cold, but just right, and she liked it so well that she drank it all up, every drop’.

To understand how wine temperature affects taste it’s worth

*There are clear and proven environmental benefits from being organic, which is why more and more vineyards are converting*

understanding something about the physics and physiology involved.

**Physics** - the higher a wine’s temperature the easier it is for the lighter and hence more volatile and aromatic molecules it contains to evaporate into the air. Below 8 °C evaporation is so low there is relatively little aroma, while at over 20 °C most flavour compounds will rapidly boil away and even the alcohol itself will start to evaporate. Every wine is made from a unique cocktail of chemicals and flavours. When some of these vaporise and become odourants they are able to communicate flavour messages when we inhale them through the nose and mouth.

**Physiology** – The human nose is highly sensitive to smell and constitutes most of our sense of flavour and aroma. In the roof of each nostril is a region called the nasal mucosa. This contains up to 10 million highly sensitive receptor cells, grouped into around a thousand different types, with each type sensitive only to a narrow range of odours. When we inhale, the odourants are dissolved in mucous and bind with the receptors. Messages are then sent to the olfactory bulb and these are in turn interpreted by various parts of the brain. We can combine odours into patterns, recognise them and memorise them. How this is done is still not fully understood, but we can discriminate between 4,000 and 10,000 different odours. The sensitivity of the human nose is the principle reason why a wine can display its own unique flavour signature.

The mouth and tongue also play a part. Taste-buds are important to distinguish sweet-

ness, acidity, bitterness and saltiness and the mouth also conveys a sense of texture and warmth through touch.

However their role in determining the range of subtle flavours that a wine can produce is relatively small. Taste is in fact 90% smell and smell is 10,000 times more sensitive than taste - with a blocked nose it’s tough to tell the difference in flavours between grated apple and grated onion!

Consequently, trying to serve a wine at its optimal temperature might at first seem a pretentious practice best left to those of us with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders, but getting this right enables us to extract the maximum amount of aroma and hence flavour from the wine.

Obtaining the right serving temperature is based on simple principles that apply to any wine regardless of expense. You can maximise the enjoyment of a cheap wine or ruin an expensive one by getting it



wrong. Even better, you don’t need to spend much money to do this, though some methods have pitfalls worth avoiding.

I’ve seen some guidance merely stating “serve at room temperature”. This is imprecise and of little value. In the past the Georgians and Victorians found it hard to regulate room temperature and houses were typically draughty and heated by big fireplaces. They were certainly cooler than today, where modern central heating and insulation gives a room temperature of around 23 °C, excessively warm for wine.

The temptation is always to serve whites too cold and reds too warm. Thankfully there are only three simple principles involved based on physics and physiology.

- The colder the wine the less it will smell, and vice-versa;
- Low temperatures bring out acidity and tannin while higher temperatures minimise them;
- It’s much easier to warm a wine up than chill a wine down – if in doubt, serve cool;

These principles have some very useful consequences:

The more naturally aromatic a wine, the cooler it can be served - a useful property on a warm day. Examples would be Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Muscat, Cabernet Franc and Pinot Noir.

Sparkling wines usually show better at low temperatures because cooling slows down the release of carbon dioxide bubbles, so reducing the tendency to froth and making the

bubbles last longer. Champagne too cool when it sets my fillings on edge! I also prefer Vintage Champagne with only a light chill to do justice to the complexity of aromas and flavours that should be on offer.

Full-bodied or oaked whites have more natural extract, with bigger flavour molecules that are less volatile - so can be served warmer. Conversely if the wine is flabby it will taste better by chilling it to bring out the acidity.

Full bodied reds also have more extract and also tannins. Young or full-bodied reds are frequently bitter and tannic when served slightly cool. Hence these are generally much improved by serving them warmer. Nebbiolo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah/Shiraz and Malbec are all good examples. However, above 20 °C an increasing proportion of these compounds will be boiled off, so don't take this too far; 18 °C is a useful upper limit.

Unless perfectly balanced between acidity and sweetness, most sweet wines will benefit from being chilled. This also applies to soft low-tannin dry reds from Beaujolais and the Loire and even some red Burgundy.

There are always exceptions. Tawny Port is delicious lightly chilled, as are the red Vin Doux Naturels of France such as Banyuls and Maury - it is better to balance their acidity and sweetness even though they are full-bodied.

And dull or poor wines? Use an old Sommelier's trick - temperature is a great way to mask unpleasantness and increase acceptability, (at least up to a point - a faulty wine really will taste horrid whatever you do). For whites - chill them senseless. For reds - turn them into mulled wine by simmering in a pan with sugar and spices.

And wine tasting as opposed to wine drinking? Typically, a wine tasting is more about analysis and first impressions (as opposed to wine drinking, which should be about lingering enjoyment), so my advice is to serve the wines slightly warmer at a tasting.

A Rough Guide to wine serving temperatures. Temperatures are in °C, plus an approximate chill time in your refrigerator if necessary.

#### White

Light/sweet	6 - 10 °C	4+ hours
Light/aromatic/dry	8 - 12 °C	2 hours
Medium bodied/dry	10 - 12 °C	1.5 hours
Full dry	12 - 16 °C	1 hour
Full/sweet	8 - 12 °C	2 hours

#### Rosé

Treat as for whites above

#### Red

Light/soft	10 - 12 °C	1.5 hours
Medium	16 - 17 °C	
Full &/or Tannic	16 - 18 °C	

#### Sparkling

White	6-10°C	4 + hours
Red	10-12 °C	1.5 hours

But let's not get overly complicated. If in doubt, serve the wine on the cooler side of its natural range and then allow it to warm up in the glass naturally. You can encourage this by cupped hands and discover the changes in flavours as wine warms, with new nuances of aroma and flavour exposed. The evolution of a wine as it sits in the glass is affected by temperature as well as the exposure to air.

Please do remember that these are guidelines rather than rules, as this is far from an exact science and every wine is unique! More importantly, you are the arbiter and enjoying wine is always about your own personal choice.

So having established some rough serving temperatures, there are of course good and not-so-good means of achieving them. Some of these are obvious and some are common sense. Again, physics can help - because water conducts heat more efficiently than air, methods that employ water are frequently the quickest and most successful, particularly useful if the wine has been forgotten about until the last minute. They are worth knowing about even if you are the lucky owner of a specialist Wine Cabinet as these are unlikely to be able to store wines within a range of optimal serving temperatures.

#### Chilling down

Ice Bucket - the ideal way for a rapid chill. You don't need much ice as it's the water that is important. Ensure most of the bottle is immersed. Easily overdone, as the wine will over-chill if left too long.

Fridge - generally safe and reliable, 1 - 4+ hours needed, depending on the 'fridge setting (typically at around 7 °C). It's much slower because it relies on air temperature.

Gel wrap - inexpensive and reasonably efficient accessory but check it can be adjusted to different sized bottles. Also buy one that can be heated to warm wines up too.

Doorstep - in the UK this is very successful at almost any time of year. Your neighbours will ask you who your milkman is.

River/sea - is there a better way on a warm sunny picnic? Do ensure the bottle is securely tethered and leave the cork in! More fun than an electric coolbox.

#### Warming up

Use an ice bucket in reverse; fill it with luke warm (not hot) water as the best way to obtain gentle but rapid warming.

Plan ahead - Leave the bottle in the living room or airing cupboard. Kitchens can get too hot. Ensure no direct heat.

Use your hands to warm the wine in the glass after serving.

#### Bad methods, to be avoided

Microwave - for sadomasochists only. You'll cook the wine in seconds unless you are very skilled. And bottles with Screwcaps or foil will spark!

Open fire or a radiator - again, a sure-fire way to cook a wine. Avoid if at all possible.

Freezer - very dangerous. I learnt my lesson with a Grand Cru Chablis. Water expands as it freezes - so the bottle exploded and I was left with shards of glass and frozen alcopop. Use a gel wrap instead.

Heating the wine glass with a candle - I witnessed this in an Italian wine shop where the proprietor reduced his Chianti and Barolo to murky soup. They tasted awful.

And so to a final burning question. Do I use a thermometer? In public, no. In private...well, my OCD tendencies are harder to control, so I do possess one but it's used only rarely. Thermometers are not strictly necessary but may help you to get a feeling for temperature range. If you are interested in buying one go for the traditional thermometer type rather than those based on metal bands that fit around the bottle - they rarely fit properly and tend to be inaccurate.

Finally, stick to one of life's maxims whatever you do - be gentle and have fun experimenting.

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# The Rhône Valley



James Bercovici

**THE RHÔNE VALLEY** produces massive quantities of wine from around 70,000 hectares encompassing sixteen distinct appellations. These are evenly divided into two sub-regions: the Côtes du Rhône Septentrionales (the north) and the Côtes du Rhône Méridionales (the south). This article is concerned with the latter.

Wines from the south are hot like the region. Based on the Grenache grape, they have high alcohols with some knocking on 15% ABV. In the right hands this is not a problem until, perhaps, the morning after. Grenache has to be very ripe when it is harvested: anyone who has ever tasted light-weight Garnacha-based Spanish reds will know how insipid the variety can be otherwise.

Grenache accounts for only one of several varieties used in southern reds. Its main collaborators are Syrah from the north and Mourvèdre from the Mediterranean (best in Bandol but there are some noteworthy Spanish Monastrells). Any of

these can be produced as mono-varietal wines if the appellation rules permit (I have only ever seen Mourvèdre at Côtes du Rhône level but Grenache and Syrah mono-varietals are produced as Châteauneuf-du-Papes and other denominations).

Some of the best wines from Châteauneuf-du-Pape are pure – or almost mono-varietal – Grenache, usually from vineyards planted at the beginning of the twentieth century in lieux-dit such as Rayas and La Crau (pronounced “crow”). That said, most wines are blends.

Syrah can be magical in the south too, oozing blackcurrant flavours that combine the best of French structure and New World exuberance. Châteauneuf-du-Pape is not necessarily the best appellation for these wines; some of the top wines come from Vacqueyras or even the generic Côtes du Rhône appellation.

White wines account for a mere 2% and, as with the reds, are usually blends with Grenache Blanc the most widely planted variety. However, as producers are becoming more focused on these wines they are concentrating more on grapes from further north with Roussanne and Viognier often taking centre stage.

The real joy of having so many permitted varieties is the huge range of styles that can be found in the finished wines. Different terroirs, different blends, different vinification techniques... Whereas Burgundy can produce some of



the most sensual and Bordeaux some of the most majestic wines in the world, neither can begin to challenge the Rhône for sheer diversity.

The best wines from either region should - and generally do - come from the geographically defined village appellations including Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gigondas and Vacqueyras. Between these

and the generic Côtes du Rhône wines are the Côtes du Rhône Villages. Additionally, there are satellite appellations such as the Côtes du Ventoux where some good, long-lived wines are made.

As with any wine region, the general rule is that the superior appellations produce the better wines. However, many excellent wines are produced throughout the region

so it is worth investigating top estates in all appellations. The “king” of Southern Rhône wines is Châteauneuf-du-Pape which permits up to thirteen different varieties to be used. In practise it is the holy trinity of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre which make up the majority, if not all, of most wines.

Stalwarts such as Raymond Usseglio have been improving their wines steadily without changing the 75/15/10 ratio between these varieties in over a decade. Château de Beaucastel (generally considered to be the best Châteauneuf-du-Pape of all, at least of those commercially available) is more flexible, more prepared to vary according to the needs of the vintage its slightly unusual mix of 30% each Grenache and Mourvèdre, 10% each Syrah and Counoise and the rest made up of any of the other permitted varieties.

The range of styles produced in Châteauneuf varies between ultra-traditional wines such as Clos des Brusquières who vinify all the varieties together before ageing them in large old foudres (huge, old-oak barrels) and modernists who vinify separately and use a combination of new oak, stainless steel and, occasionally, concrete for maturation. The modernists seem to be winning the day, unsurprisingly as the wines are more drinkable in the short term with international appeal yet age well developing unmistakable Châteauneuf-du-Pape character by the time they reach their seventh birthdays. The only downside to their forward natures is that few make it that far.

Châteauneuf has its annual festival over the first weekend of August. The Fête de la Veraison celebrates the ripening of the grapes as they begin to turn from green to black. The theme is a medieval festival with jousting and processions including the Pope and lots of wine-tasting to be done for the price of a glass (3.5€ this year). It has obviously been well planned over all the years it's been running as lots of fun is to be had by all the family.

After Châteauneuf-du-Pape in terms of prestige comes Gigondas. This pretty Provençal village sits under the Dentelles de Montmirail, a jagged tooth-like rock formation in the foothills of Mont Ventoux. Whereas Châteauneuf-du-Pape can boast two or three dozen world-class estates, Gigondas has only three or four consistently great producers: Brusset, Santa Duc and St Cosme. That said, there are a great many others such as Bouissières, Cayron and Redortier that can sometimes better these estates but in other vintages flop equally magnificently.

Nearby Vacqueyras became an appellation in its own right in 1991 and has struggled to deserve this until the last few years. Suddenly there are some contenders but Sang des Cailloux and Domaine des Armouiers are still ahead of the pack. This is a village well worth visit-



ing if you happen to be in the area around Bastille Day when they hold their annual wine festival. The village opens its garage doors, each of which is a different Rhône village for the weekend. Make sure you take a car (and non-participating driver) as you will certainly want to get some take-home treats.

Across the other side of the river, Lirac has a handful of great estates lead by Christophe Delorme's Domaine de Mordorée producing Châteauneuf-du-Pape as well as red and white Lirac. Otherwise, St Roch and Lafond are names to look for. Nearby Tavel proclaims itself to be home of the best rosé wines in France which always strikes me as unnaturally modest – surely they mean the world. However, as palates change, Tavel is struggling to keep up with the rest of the region and I certainly have no favourites.

After the Crus (the names villages) which have recently been joined by Beaumes-de-Venise (better known for its sweet, fortified Muscats) and the improbably names Vinsobres, come the Côtes du Rhône Villages, nineteen villages most to the north and west of Gigondas with the best in the Vaucluse department (the only real exception to this rule is Domaine Ste Anne in St Gervais).

Cairanne and Rasteau lead by example and could easily gain cru status if they wished. Cairanne has numerous estates worth looking at: Brusset produces three wines with a luxury Mourvèdre-lead cuvee “Hommage à André Brusset” made only in top years (the first vintage was 1999). Another excellent Mourvèdre-based wine is made by the Alarys at L'Oratoire St Martin and called “Hauts Coustias” (there is a superb white cuvee by the same name).

Rasteau was a one-horse town (Soumade) until quite recently but several estates have upped their game to take a share of the action, notably Bressy-Masson and Côteaux des Travers, run by the impossibly tall Robert Charavin.

Rasteau also has separate appellations for its vins doux naturels (naturally sweet wines, made in the same manner as Port) which range from the very good Rhône takes on Port as in Charavin's Rouge and a very rare Rasteau Rancio, somewhere between a white Port and Madeira. Bressy-Masson make the best example of this.

The increasing popularity of Rhône wines may be summed up in three reasons:

1. They offer the best value of any top appellation for red wines in the world.
2. Many can be enjoyed young but can also evolve magnificently over time.
3. They are extremely food friendly wines.

Wine lovers who resent the prices of top Bordeaux and Burgundy should look to the Rhône Valley for a wide range of food-friendly wines at remarkable value.

*James Bercovici runs The Big Red Wine Company which specialises in wines from the Southern Rhône.*

Some recommendations (prices are approximate – anyone wanting to find these wines should check out Wine-searcher's Pro version for the best prices)

#### 100% Grenache wines:

Château Rayas, Châteauneuf-du-Pape £100

Domaine de Cristia, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Vieilles Vignes £30

Domaine de la Janasse, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Chaupin £50

#### Other top Grenache-based Châteauneuf-du-Papes:

Le Vieux Télégraph £30

Raymond Usseglio, Châteauneuf-du-Pape “Impériale” £24

#### Pure Syrah:

Domaine des Armouiers, VDP “Hautes Terrasses” £18

Domaine de la Charité, Côtes du Rhône “Les Ombres” £15

#### White wines:

Domaine des Anges, Côtes du Ventoux “L'Archange” (Roussanne) £10

Château de Beaucastel, Châteauneuf-du-Pape “Roussanne Vieilles Vignes” £50

L'Oratoire St Martin, Cairanne “Hauts Coustias” (blend) £13

#### Fortified wines:

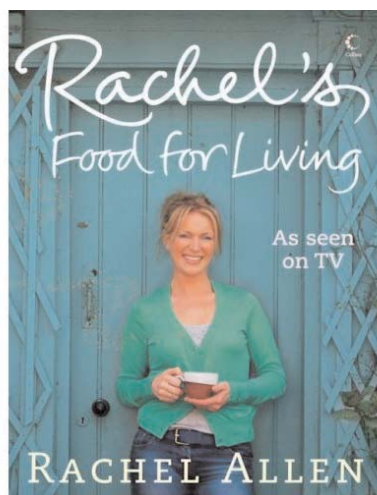
Domaine Bressy-Masson, Rasteau Rancio £13

Domaine des Côteaux des Travers, Rasteau Rouge £13

Domaine de Durban, Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise £13

# Eating & Drinking

## Recipes



**RACHEL ALLEN APPEARS** on the BBC's Saturday Kitchen and also broadcasts for RTE in Ireland, where she lives. She also teaches at the world-renowned Ballymaloe Cookery School, which is run by Darina Allen, another of Ireland's best chefs.

This is a beautifully produced book with attractive full page photographs and over a hundred recipes to suit most tastes. The chapters are divided into chapters which give an indication of what to expect in that section, so *Food for the Soul* is all about comfort eating and *Pleasure Without the Guilt* offers a lighter, more health conscious array of dishes.

Nothing appears complicated, most seem delicious and it is very unlikely that you will not find inspiration somewhere in this book. Here are a few tasters.

### Baked Eggs with Chorizo, Cream and Cheese

*This is one of my favourite breakfast or brunch recipes. In fact, it would also be good for supper too! It's the perfect start to a long and lazy Sunday.*

#### INGREDIENTS

2 tsp tomato purée (optional)  
4 tbsps double cream  
Salt, freshly ground black pepper and sugar  
16 thin slices of chorizo, 2cm in diameter  
8 eggs  
2 generous tbsps grated cheese such as Cheddar or Gruyère

*Serves 4*

Preheat oven to 230C/450F/Gas 8

Mix the tomato purée (if using) with the cream and season with salt, pepper and a pinch of sugar. Spoon half of the cream mixture into the base of four ovenproof cups, bowls or ramekins. Add two slices of chorizo to each, then crack two eggs into each dish, top with another two slices of chorizo and spoon over the remaining cream. Sprinkle with grated cheese and place in a hot oven and cook for 9-12 minutes, or until the

whites are set. Serve on their own and serve with buttered toast.

### Broccoli with Garlic, Lemon and Parmesan

*I love this way of cooking broccoli and I sometimes add a red deseeded chilli to the mix as well.*

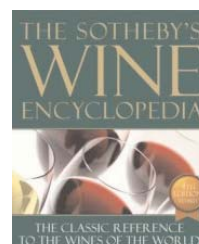
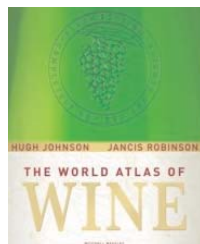
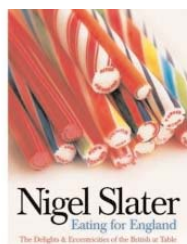
#### INGREDIENTS

2 large heads of broccoli  
1 tsp salt  
4 tbsps olive oil  
4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed or grated  
Finely grated zest of 1 large lemon  
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
75g Parmesan cheese, grated

*Serves 10-15*

Peel the tough outer parts of the broccoli stems and cut the florets into long thin stalks. If they are large, cut in half lengthways. Add the salt to a saucepan of water and bring to the boil, add the broccoli and cook on a high heat with the lid off for about 5-6 minutes until cooked. Drain the broccoli and set aside. Pour the olive oil into a frying pan on a high heat, add the garlic and cook for a minute until pale golden, then add the broccoli and lemon zest and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a warm serving bowl, sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese and serve.

## Other Christmas highlights...



# Current members

ASDW members as at the 1st December 2007

## Amordivino

Geoff Ponter & Annalisa Baj  
[www.amordivino.co.uk](http://www.amordivino.co.uk)

Amordivino wines present to you the best wines that Italy has to offer. An enormous range of interesting and exciting Italian wines, many of which are not normally available outside top London restaurants.

## Cathar Wines

Katrina Balmforth  
[www.catharwines.com](http://www.catharwines.com)

Cathar Wines sells special wines from small producers in the Languedoc-Roussillon area of France. Our aim is to supply interesting, quality wines which you wouldn't find in the supermarket but without charging an arm and a leg!

## Champers

Henry Speer  
[www.champers.net](http://www.champers.net)

Champers specialise in champagne, particularly personalised label champagne for corporate brands and social events. They also supply the range of Champagne du Mont Hauban, and a range of half bottles.

## Decanter Wines

Krystyna & Jim Monks  
[www.decanterwines.co.uk](http://www.decanterwines.co.uk)

Independent specialist importers of Rioja and other quality wines from Spain, including Cava and Spanish brandies.

## Devigne Wines

Mike & Pat Robertson  
[www.devignewines.co.uk](http://www.devignewines.co.uk)

Devigne Wines are specialists in Rosé, Méthode Traditionnelle (Champenoise) & wines from Gaillac, the Jura and the Languedoc.

## F & F B Wines

David Riach

F&FB Wines specialises in internationally recognised red wines from Tuscany, holding stocks of mature vintages from the 80s onwards. Sales are by mail order or collection by arrangement.

## Field & Vine

Stefan Reynolds  
[www.fieldandvine.co.uk](http://www.fieldandvine.co.uk)

Field & Vine specialises in selling a range of hand-picked quality wines to organisations, businesses and corporate clients as well as providing wines to private individuals for every type of social occasion.

## French Regional Wines

John Dickinson  
[www.french-regional-wines.co.uk](http://www.french-regional-wines.co.uk)

An ever expanding range of French wines with familiar names and exclusive imports. Quality and affordable wines for every occasion.

## Harlequin Wines

Martin Bayne  
[www.harlequinwines.co.uk](http://www.harlequinwines.co.uk)

Harlequin Wines, established in 2000 by Martin Bayne, is a company dedicated to quality. We started selling wines of the Franken region of Germany. This region remains our speciality.

## H C Wines

John Hattam & Andy Clarke  
[www.hcwines.co.uk](http://www.hcwines.co.uk)

H C Wines imports a range of interesting, individual and affordable wines with a special emphasis on south-west France. We also conduct tailored tastings for a wide variety of clients.

## Hopscotch

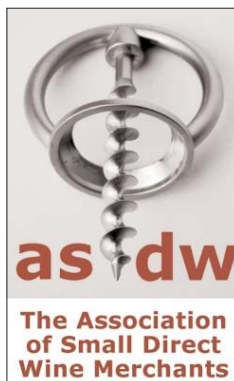
Stuart Colmer  
[www.fasolmenin.co.uk](http://www.fasolmenin.co.uk)

Hopscotch Enterprises represent the Fasol Menin winery, of Valdobbadiene, in the UK. Our key product is a Prosecco DOC (Brut and Extra Dry) though new wines will be added over time.

## Individual Wines

Richard Loadman  
[www.individualwines.com](http://www.individualwines.com)

The aim of Individual Wines is to bring you fine wine at low prices. Most of my wines are about 20% lower than the next cheapest retailer I can find, with some significantly cheaper.



# Current members

## Italy Abroad

Andrea D'Ercole  
[www.italyabroad.com](http://www.italyabroad.com)

Italyabroad.com imports some of the finest Italian wines. We are passionate about wines and our team travels the whole Italy looking for hidden gems that we then make available to the English public.

## Leon Stolarski Fine Wines

Leon Stolarski  
[www.lsfineswines.co.uk](http://www.lsfineswines.co.uk)

New classics from Languedoc, Roussillon and southern Rhone. An impressive range of red, white, sparkling, dessert and fortified wines from some of the best producers these regions have to offer.

## Marta's Vinyard

Malcolm Falconer  
[www.martasvinyard.com](http://www.martasvinyard.com)

Marta's Vinyard deliver the very best quality wines from our estates in Argentina – directly to your home.

## Nick Dobson Wines

Nick Dobson  
[www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk](http://www.nickdobsonwines.co.uk)

Mail-order specialist offering wines mainly from smaller estates in Southern Burgundy (Beaujolais, Mâconnais, Côte Chalonnaise) and Germany (mainly Mosel). Also the UK's widest selections of Swiss and Austrian wines.

## South African Wines

Susan Weerts  
[www.southafricawines.co.uk](http://www.southafricawines.co.uk)

We specialize in selling quality South African wine from some of the best Cape estates. We offer our customers award-winning wine, friendly & efficient service, delivering throughout the UK.

## Step Up Wines

Nick Willcocks  
[www.stepupwines.co.uk](http://www.stepupwines.co.uk)

Step Up Wines Limited are specialists in offering wines hand crafted by small, dynamic producers. By setting up exclusive partnerships with the Vineyards we aim to bring you wines that you will not find elsewhere.

## The Big Red Wine Company

James Bercovici  
[www.bigredwine.co.uk](http://www.bigredwine.co.uk)

BRW imports wines from leading estates throughout France with a special focus on the Southern Rhône Valley. Quality, value and helpful, friendly service are its aims.

## Vinpromo

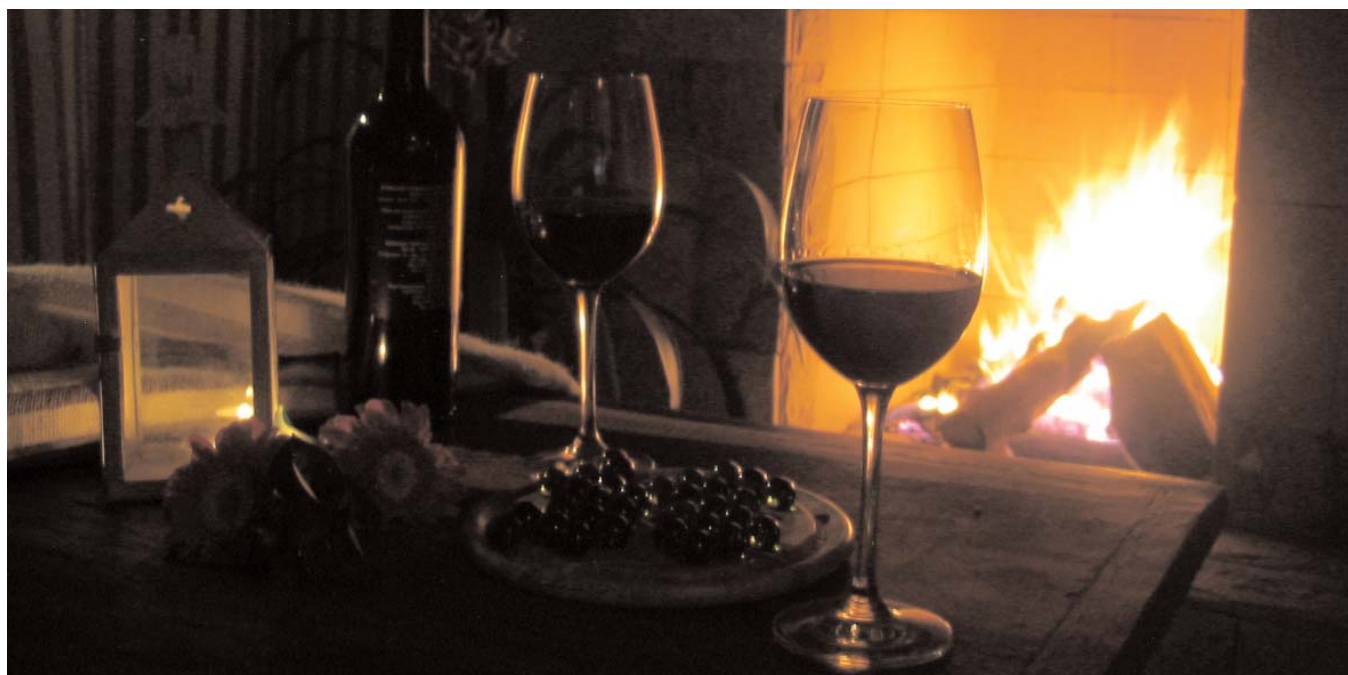
Bill Laverick  
[www.vinpromo.co.uk](http://www.vinpromo.co.uk)

Vinpromo has a range of some 80 wines. Sourcing wines principally from international companies who do not generally deal with the multiples, the list has a strong Latin focus.

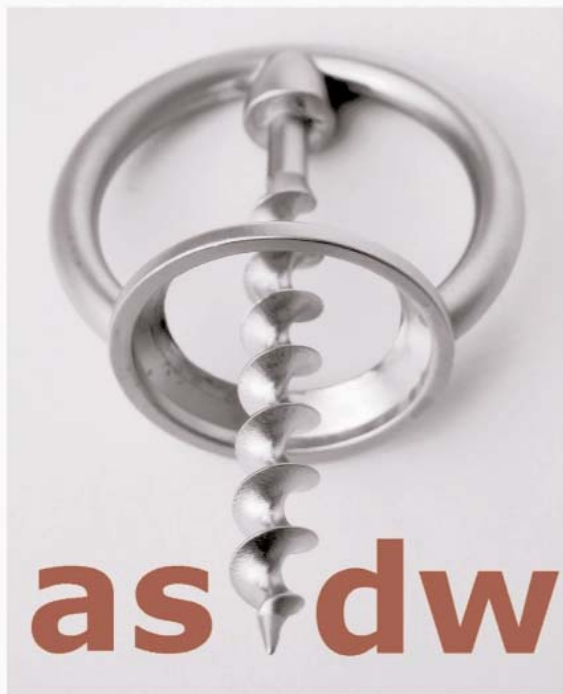
## Wine for Spice

Warren Edwardes  
[www.wineforspice.com](http://www.wineforspice.com)

Wine for Spice's naturally semi-sparkling wines Very Dry Viceroy White, Quite Dry Raja Rosé and Off Dry Rani Gold, are cool refreshingly sparkling, fresh & fruity wines to accompany curries and spicy food.



*we open up a  
world of fine wine*



**The Association  
of Small Direct  
Wine Merchants**

**asdw.org.uk**

