

this week's
wine
with Sam Wylie-Harris
Californian

Bigger and richer

ENGLAND'S net result was an unlikely drawer against the USA, but wine lovers mustn't let the footie get in the way of our close Anglo-American relationship – and thirst for Californian beauties from across the pond.

Boutique winery or bulk producer, the Golden State has one of the finest wine trails in the world.

King of zin, California's signature red grape is blessed by hot, sunny days and cooling fog from the Pacific Ocean. Extremely pleasurable to drink, zinfandel is a kissing cousin to Italy's primitivo. However, in true American fashion it's bigger, richer, with more berry-flavoured wow factor.

Newcomers should try experimenting with the excellent value Ravenswood Vintners Blend Zinfandel 2006 (£6.74 from £8.99, until July 6, Waitrose) from Lodi (the Zinfandel capital of the world). Brimming with plummy black fruits, a hint of dark chocolate and a spicy kick on the finish, it's delicious with steak or barbecue ribs.

Further south in Tempton wine country, Turley winery produces blockbuster zins. Try Turley Zinfandel Juvenile 2007 (£24, Harvey Nichols nationwide). As the name implies, Juvenile is their lightest style but it's still packed with wild berry aromas, raspberry and plums with a hint of liquorice and lively tannins.

Ideal with a big bowl of chilli or anything in a spicy sauce.

Pinot Noir's home may be Burgundy in France, but producers like Au Bon Climat in the Santa Maria Valley have made this sophisticated grape their own.

Try Au Bon Climat Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley 2007 (£19.45, www.abcr.com). Medium bodied, it's a vibrant glass of sweet cherry fruit and a medley of raspberry, seductively silky with soft tannins. Savour with a tuna steak.

Fusion bar keeps on flying high

IT'S been just over a year since D'Fly in Cheltenham underwent a makeover and swapped simple Thai fare for cocktails and sushi.

The gamble appears to be paying off as the venue is thriving, particularly on Saturday nights when there is loud Latino music in the bar and flowing mojitos.

It has also launched an Outfly catering arm serving stylish canapés at weddings and parties and struck up a relationship with Cheltenham Festivals to wine and dine VIPS and hosted a marquee bar at this year's Cheltenham Jazz Festival.

D'Fly was also visible at last weekend's food and drink festival in Montpellier Gardens with Dale Lappert showing the crowds how to create a fusion of Thai and modern British food and head mixologist Dean Simpson demonstrating new methods of cocktail making.

It all seems to be going so well, we thought it was time to revisit the restaurant which on our last visit was rushed off its feet as people piled in to try out the new menu.

We went early this time, as we know from experience that the bar fills up as the sun goes down.

Thankfully it was a lot less crammed and we had the pick of the seats.

We went for one by the window which had well-worn red leather seats and a simple dark wooden table, although if there are a few of

you it's worth grabbing one of the circular booths as you come in.

We were delighted when our waitress told us we had arrived in time for the 2-4-1 cocktail club – a very reasonable £6.50 for two.

I chose The Fly's Soo (Much) Cooler which is a mix of passion fruit vodka, lemongrass, mint, lemon juice, homemade jasmine tea syrup and elderflower cordial.

It was a long drink which was refreshing and delicious – especially on a hot summer's day. Nick spotted his favourite straight away – a Dark and Stormy – which is made with rum, lime, ginger beer and angostura bitters. Free water was delivered to our table too in an old Bombay Sapphire gin bottle.

As we sipped our drinks we took in our surroundings which included plenty of Asian-inspired decor from statues and brightly coloured cushions to decorative dark-wood lattice screens.

In contrast, on some of the walls are paintings of film stars such as Heath Ledger as the Joker in Batman and arty-shots of drinks which adds to the eclectic atmosphere of the whole place.

This fusion element of east and west translates into the menu too – which has changed since the relaunch.

It was a relief to see that the rather expensive Thai curries which had been around £12 a pop have disappeared and been replaced with a more reasonably-priced tapas-style menu where you can have small or large versions of various dishes which can all come at the same time if you want.

They are labelled as 'single' for small or a starter and 'double' for large or a main. Options include salmon and spring veg fishcake, chicken satay, goats' cheese melt, smoked duck breast, moules, chilli and crab noodles and mini prime mince beef burgers. The concept is a great idea if you're meeting friends for a drink and just want something to share rather than ordering a formal three-course meal.

D'Fly also now does coffees and a range of teas for £1 in the day and a £5 lunch menu from noon to 6pm, Monday to Saturday. Once we'd worked out the menu, we ordered a nasi goreng (£4.50) to start and, as there were no spring rolls left that night, the chef made us a special Japanese salad (£4) instead with fresh leaves and avocado in a delicious sesame oil dressing.

The Indonesian nasi goreng was a dish of tasty



Karl Newman mixes a cocktail at the D'Fly bar

fried rice with egg and the portions for both were just right.

For the main course I ordered a Thai green curry (£8.50) and Nick went for a pad Thai (£8). My dish came with rice served in a stylish mini black Le Creuset pot, although the waiter nearly lost it on the way to the table as it slid across the plate.

The vegetable curry was packed with crunchy bamboo shoots, carrots and green beans and had plenty of heat to it.

Nick liked his pad Thai too which was also the vegetarian version served in the traditional way with thin rice noodles, beansprouts and crushed peanuts – very satisfying.

In the background was a laid-back soundtrack of chill-out tunes by Morcheeba and Portishead which by the time we'd got to the bottom of our cocktail glasses had definitely put us in a weekend mood.

We didn't make it to dessert but if you've still got room you can choose from favourites such as sticky toffee pudding, trifle or strawberry and vanilla custard tart.

The bill for two of us came to just under £40 which was a lot less than the last time we visited.

By keeping its pricing consistent hopefully D'Fly will prove to its regular customers that it is here to stay and not just a fly-by-night success.

Lucy Parford



Enjoy a drink on the terrace



Kid goat with curried apricot puree and pickled onions



The interior is stylish and relaxed

LOCAL FOOD HEROES



Scott Oliver

STEPHEN WHEELER
commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, is responsible for sourcing the best food ingredients for top chefs across the county

SCOTT Oliver is head chef at the Brickhampton Court Golf Complex in Churchdown.

The function rooms at the club recently hosted the annual Creed Foodservice golf day where customers, suppliers and Creed staff enjoyed a day's golf on the 9 or 18-hole courses, followed by a dinner in the evening.

Creed asked Scott to create a four-course dinner menu using entirely locally sourced food ingredients.

He accepted the challenge and golfers teed off on beetroot cured smoked salmon from The Severn and Wye Smokery in Chaxhill, dressed with an Evesham asparagus and baby leaf salad.

For mains, the perfectly pink duck breast came from fowl bred and reared in Chepstow, and the spring vegetables including fresh peas and baby carrots from local growers.

The summer pudding included strawberries and raspberries from Primrose Vale in Brockworth. Even the bread rolls were baked by Scott himself using flour milled in Stow-on-the-Wold, and were served with Gloucestershire butter from Lydney.

Scott trained in Gloucestershire College's catering faculty, under master head chef Sean Naen. Teacher and ex-pupil still see each other regularly to discuss menus in Sean's capacity as consultant chef to Brickhampton Golf.

The kitchen brigade cater for a diverse clientele, from hungry golfers wanting pub-grub and a beer at the 19th hole, corporate delegates on day-long conferences, to members and non-members out for a traditional Sunday roast.

I asked Cheltenham born and bred Scott where he liked to dine out locally.

"I went to Lumiere recently in Clarence Parade, which totally blew me away. I wouldn't be surprised if they won a Michelin star soon," he says.

And whose cookbooks does he keep in the kitchen? "The Roux brothers and Gordon Ramsay are always impressive," he says.

Scott and the hospitality team at Brickhampton won themselves an after-dinner round of applause for the dinner menu and the service from Creed's guests. It was the part of the golfing day where 'well over par' took on a whole new meaning.

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