



Bon appétit

Flavours of France



WINES OF THE MONTH

By **Sally Easton**, Master of Wine

Weekend treat

This blend of syrah, with old vine grenache and carignan delivers big density of primary flavours. Enticing, multiple aromas of black pepper, red plum, liquorice root, sweet dry earth and blackberry, meld with rich, fresh fruit flavours on the palate. This layered wine is

remarkably easy to drink for a wine of such big flavour, freshened with acidity.

Les Sorcières du Clos des Fées 2019, Côtes du Roussillon

Drink with: Venison and green lentils
Buy from: Yapp Brothers, £15.95, yapp.co.uk



Save or SPEND



SNAP IT UP

Ormarine, Cuvée Conchylia 2019, Picpoul de Pinet, Languedoc

Ormarine is one of the big cooperative producers in Picpoul, making roughly 40% of all the *appellation's* production. This wine has peachy and lemongrass aromas. It combines well classic freshness and zestiness. **Drink with:** Socially distanced canapés and nibbles
Buy from: Marks & Spencer, £9, marksandspencer.com



FOR CELEBRATION

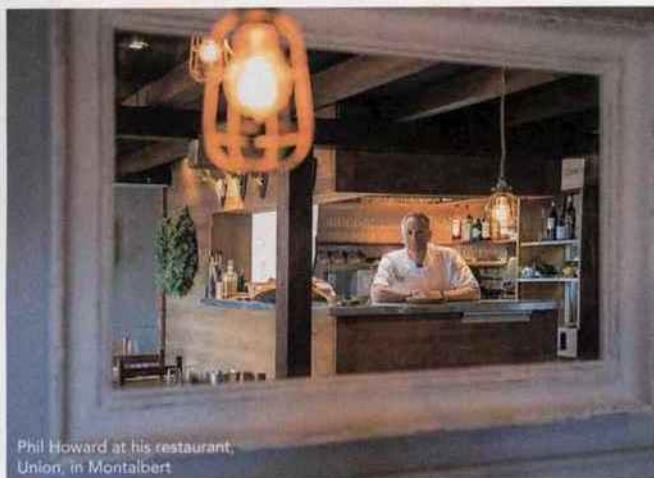
Domaine Gayda, Chemin de Moscou 2017, IGP Pays d'Oc, Languedoc

Fruit for this wine comes from some of the most prestigious spots in Occitanie. Mainly syrah, with some grenache and cinsault, it has a perfumed nose of fresh violets, vanilla toast, nutmeg, cinnamon, black fruit and cracked black pepper. **Drink with:** Beef and ale pie
Buy from: The Oxford Wine Company, £24.95, oxfordwine.co.uk



HAPPY UNION

Restaurant with a team of chefs from London goes from strength to strength in La Plagne ski resort



Phil Howard at his restaurant, Union, in Montalbert

Located in the heart of the village of Plagne Montalbert in the French Alps, Union opened its doors three years ago and has become one of Paradiski's top restaurants. It was created when award-winning British chef Phil Howard and his friend, Martin Cuchet, joined forces to create a haven for ravenous skiers and food connoisseurs.

Phil's career started at Roux Restaurants in the 1980s before he joined Marco Pierre White at Harvey's. He went on to open

The Square in London where he was at the helm for 25 years.

During his tenure, the restaurant won many awards including holding two Michelin stars for 17 years. After its sale, Phil opened his latest venture, Elystan Street in Chelsea, which earned a Michelin star in its first year. Phil's philosophy of highly seasonal cooking using only the finest ingredients takes centre stage at Union too, where the focus is on delivering simple and flavourful food. The menu includes inspiring culinary delights such as daube of ox cheek with creamed potato, a double-baked Beaufort soufflé with a truffle emulsion and poached rhubarb with clementine for dessert.

Main courses start from €20 and a tasting menu costs from €75. Union will re-open for lunch and dinner from 19 December.

unionmontalbert.com



Above: One of Phil Howard's creative dishes

Chez vous

French gourmet food available to buy online



French family-owned luxury food retailer Petrossian has launched an online store in the UK offering a range of tantalising specialities. From expertly matured caviars and beautifully smoked salmons to truffles, creative dips, condiments, sweet treats and spreads, there are plenty of ways to treat yourself at New Year or family or friends celebrating a special occasion. Petrossian was founded 100 years ago when two brothers first brought caviar into France and the company now owns caviar workshops in Paris and smokeries in the Loire Valley, as well as restaurants and boutiques around the world. In the UK, the products can be discovered at the tables of fine restaurants as well as Harrods and now Petrossian's newly launched website. Highlights include caviar starting at £29; smoked salmon; jars of whole black truffles and black truffle fleur de sel from £11. Meanwhile the French gourmet hamper, £99, includes foie gras, smoked salmon, wild salmon roe and chocolate truffles flavoured with black truffle. petrossian.fr/uk_en



WINE & FOOD MATCHING

Plateau de fruits de mer



Anyone who has spent the festive season in l'Hexagone will be familiar with the long queues outside fishmongers on Christmas Eve, as armies of staff diligently shuck oysters in back rooms and customers wait patiently for their pre-ordered *plateaux de fruits de mer*.

The result is a feast for the senses, as several varieties of oyster encircle small mountains of prawns, langoustines, clams, periwinkles, mussels, sea snails – or *boulots*; and for the most indulgent diners, a crab or a lobster. A lemon to squeeze, mignonette sauce for the oysters, and a pot of aioli for the cooked shellfish, and the platter is ready to be served. Its beauty is in its simplicity.

The wine to enjoy with a seafood platter should be dry and white, but within that spectrum, there are a multitude of choices. The variety of flavours and textures in the dish, from the delicate salinity of the oysters to the meatiness of the cooked sea snails, requires a wine that is fresh and mineral, but with enough presence not to be overwhelmed by the fuller-flavoured crustaceans.

The classic pairing for oysters is Muscadet de Sèvre-et-Maine, from the Pays de la Loire, which

is packed with citrus nerve and freshness. Bottles that include the words 'sur lie' have been aged on their lees until the Easter following the harvest, adding a richness to the wine that also allows it to partner well with cooked shellfish.

Heading east to Burgundy, the choice is vast. Most reliable – and best value – are the steely whites of Chablis, Petit Chablis and the neighbouring Bourgogne Côtes d'Auxerre. These offer the required zing, combined with the chardonnay grape's characteristically full, buttery finish.

The great white wines of Alsace can be wonderful partners for a *plateau de fruits de mer*, although it is essential to choose one that is bone dry. Riesling is the likely favourite, with its mouthwatering acidity and effortless weight.

But for those who order their festive fish platters for maximum indulgence, with everything from Arcachon oysters to a whole crab or lobster, the only way to complete the sublime experience is with a bottle of sublimely elegant, rich and biscuity, vintage blanc de blancs champagne.

DOMINIC RIPPON

Cheese of THE MONTH



LE BRÉZAIN

In the deep mid-winter, few things are as comforting as a hearty supper with lashings of melted cheese. A smoked Raclette, Le Brézain adds an exotic twist to a table-top staple. This product is good enough to be savoured cooked or uncooked. Produced in La Balme-de-Thuy in Haute-Savoie, it's the brainchild of Jean Le Gléour, a Breton entrepreneur who bought an old family *fromagerie* in the area back in the 1980s. The name Le Brézain was a nod to his Breton roots and to the *braises* or ashes with which cheeses and *saucissons* were traditionally smoked in household hearths. He found his recipe for success in a Raclette matured for six to eight weeks, then finished off with beech smoke in a *fumoir* for 24 hours. We sampled Le Brézain in tandem with a traditional unsmoked Raclette. The flesh of the former, infused with wood-smoke, is understandably darker, more yellow than ivory. Its lightly smoked flavour, though, was less cheesy than the more robust unsmoked model. Both, however, were a delicious revelation: full of character, with a creamy, almost cloying consistency. Only the thought of that cooked supper restrained us from polishing it all off.

MARK SAMPSON