



Plan B went down a storm

One dark, cold morning in early January, I received an email in broken English: "Do you like taste Terras Gaudas wine? Tell us your address and sending you samples." I ignored it. I'd not heard of Terras Gauda.

They tried again the following month and still I didn't bite. I sat on my high horse. I told myself, I'm an independent wine critic; I'm not in the business of giving anyone free endorsements. I only recommend wines I think are good. They wrote again in May.

A few weeks ago I got another email. Apparently a box of wines had turned up at the office and would I like to try them? They were from Terras Gauda. So I adopted Plan B, I served them blind to one of my wine classes. And they went down a storm. The next day I did a bit of hasty detective work, contacted the winery and discovered that the wines are imported by one of the UK's most innovative and inspired merchants, Les Caves de Pyrene, who stock some of the wines I admire most.

So I think the good, patient, folk of Terras Gauda, who are based in North West Spain more than deserve a mention. Thank goodness they were just a little bit pushy.

They are justly proud of a spicy dry white, Terras Gauda, 'O Rosal' Rías Baixas 2011 (£15.49). As well as the familiar grapes Albariño and Loureira it also includes a rare heritage variety Caiño. It makes for delicious summer drinking: spicy, floral, lemony and very mineral, in a salty, savoury way. Bring on the shellfish!

Two red wines are from the neighbouring region of Bierzo, just a little further inland, and feature the excellent local grape, Mencia.

Pittacum 2007 (£14.49) is excellent value for money: elegant, but flavoury, with a little spicy oak, plenty of juicy, black cherry fruit and a subtle suggestion of chocolate. To be honest I prefer it now to the much more expensive and more heavily oaked Pittacum Aurea 2007 (£35.49), but in 10 years' time, if I'm still around, I might think differently. All are available from www.lescaves.co.uk

If you don't mind ordering wine online and fancy something refreshingly different this summer, I warmly recommend Wirra Wirra 'Mrs Wigley', Mascato 2011 from South Australia. An unlikely but tasty tribute to a vineyard moggy, it doesn't smell in the least bit catty, but is sweet, fizzy and irresistible, a mix of ripe, scented grapes, grapefruit and melon. And it's just 4.5% alcohol (£6.75 for 50cl from www.ampsfinewines.co.uk).

Finally a wine that should be easily available locally and perfect for drinking now: Henry Fessy Brouilly 2010 (£10.99 from Waitrose) is textbook Beaujolais at its glorious best from a stonkingly good vintage and one of the top 10 villages.



Sarah Abbott is one of the wine experts who will be speaking at the festival

Raise a glass...

The Northumbria Food and Wine Festival 2012 will bring together a heady mix of the region's best chefs, a mouth-watering line-up of wine merchants and importers, some of the UK's most knowledgeable wine experts and superb live music.

It all takes place at Tynedale Park in Corbridge, Northumberland. The doors will be open between 2pm and 11pm on Friday, August 10, and between noon and 11pm on Saturday, August 11.

Greg Bureau, the owner of the award-winning Bouchon Bistrot in Hexham and head chef Jérôme Cogné will be cooking up French rustic goodies for visitors.

Rhian Cradock of the Feathers Inn at Hedley on the Hill, near Stocksfield, will endeavour to keep the flag flying for British food, something he does with imagination and consummate skill.

There will be plenty of other gourmet treats too, but the core of the festival is a

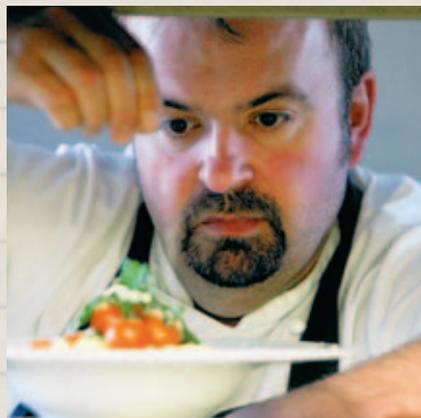
showcase for wine merchants, including Bin 21, Carruthers & Kent, Dennyhofer Wines, Dillies, The Hop The Vine, Proteas Wines, Premium Cellars, Romanet, Tyne Wines and Prosecco specialist Fasol Menin, owned by Stuart Colmer, who has organised the festival with Helen Greer and Richard Cradock of The Feathers.

As well as an opportunity to taste a huge range of wine, there'll be an exciting programme of wine talks. Leading wine experts Sarah Abbott, Master of Wine, Karen Hardwick and The Journal's own Helen Savage will be doing a series of 'pop-up' wine tours.

● Tickets are available from the festival website, www.nfwf.co.uk, which has full details of what's on offer. There are a range of prices, including a group-saver special, but the standard online ticket price is £20. It includes an engraved wine tasting glass and 12 wine tasting tokens. Tickets on the door on the day are £25.

Email your food and drink news to katharine.capocci@ncjmedia.co.uk

Match made in heaven



Chef Richard Sim, of the Falcons

On the subject of wine, Angie Butcher of Accolade Wines, gave a fun and knowledgeable talk, pairing wines with foods, at a recent gourmet dinner held at Newcastle Falcons.

Critically acclaimed Richard Sim, new executive chef at the Falcons, was overseeing the menu on the evening, which included delectable lamb cooked three ways and white chocolate panna cotta.

Wines included South African tippel Flagstone Word of Mouth viognier 2010 and Blackstone Winemaker's Select Chardonnay 2010, both of which are supplied by Matthew Clark wine distributors, www.matthewclark.co.uk