

COMMUNITY
Social network
We bring you pictures from all the best parties and events

FOOD & DRINK
Winter warmer
Discover why The Bottle House in Penshurst is a perfect pub

TRAVEL
Timeless tradition
Experience the elegance of The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne



Joy to the Wells

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS



Take a sneak peek at your magical lead up to Christmas...

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NOVEMBER 2023

Editor's Letter



Welcome to your November edition of SO magazine.

As the festive season will soon be upon us, we thought we'd shine a spotlight on what is going on for Christmas here in Tunbridge Wells.

With the support of RTW Together BID we have put together a kind of 'What's On' for the holiday season – but as you will see when you flick to page 10 it's been done so in a fun way courtesy of the beautiful Advent style calendar that RTW Together has created especially for 2023.

In it, you will get a sneak peek at the various spots around town that are putting on festive events and the establishments who've created delicious seasonal menus for November and December. There's also lots of info on The Big Reveal, which has tripled in size for this year. Described by RTW Together as 'the ultimate Christmas event' it offers fun-filled early evening events for the whole family to enjoy. Expect carols, live music, a visit from Santa Claus, special guests, festive food and drink

as well as multiple light switch-ons and the biggest window reveal ever! On November 16 the event will take place in the upper town and Camden Road from 4.30pm til 7pm and then on November 17 it will be the High Street and Chapel Place's turn followed by The Pantiles' on November 18.

So why not give our local retailers, restaurateurs and venues the best Christmas present by supporting them this festive season?

Talking of Christmas, we also have another fabulous gift guide (p60) which features a number of local independent retailers plus lots of mouth-watering menus to peruse in case you're looking to get together with friends and family over the festive season (P54).

With a look ahead to what's on at some of our brilliant local events spaces for the month ahead (p36), a trip to The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne (p92) and all your favourite local experts on health, lifestyle and wellbeing we think you'll agree this month's edition is another great read! Enjoy,

Eileen Leahy

Eileen Leahy

Editor SO magazine

Don't forget to follow us on Instagram @somagazines

SO TUNBRIDGE WELLS

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Sip and savour: exploring Muscadet

This month SO's resident Wine Editor **James Viner** raises a glass to the newly revitalised Muscadet: a crisp, dry, modestly-priced, medium-bodied white wine produced eastward and southward of Nantes in the Atlantic-influenced far western Loire Valley...

Muscadet nowadays shows great potential with geologically specific sub-zones helping to improve its reputation and an emerging generation of ardent vignerons devoted to one grape and excited about the fantastic soil diversity.

Based on a recent press trip, I believe that some of Muscadet's remarkably affordable top wines can now become great substitutes for Burgundy's Chablis. They're also a wonderful match for our seasonal native oysters and other bivalves.

Look out for Muscadet's ten crus communaux and for bottle labels that read 'sur lie,' indicating that the wine was left resting unracked on its fine lees (dead yeast cells) for many months to gain extra flavour/rounder mouthfeel (helping to balance the high-acid vim of the Melon). Santé!

1. 2021 Château de la Petite Giraudière, Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine Sur Lie (£8.35, The Co-op, 12%)

Decent trendy, Picpoul de Pinet – the so-called 'Muscadet of the South' (though fruitier) – is hard to find under a tenner. This zesty, bargainous, lees-aged Muscadet from one of France's oldest (1936) appellations is perfection poured



cold with bivalves. Think citrus, apples and a soupçon of saltiness.

2. 2019 Domaine Bruno Cormerais, Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine Vieilles Vignes Sur Lie (£13.95 mix case, Lea & Sandeman, 12%)

Muscadet is no longer just an engine for inexpensive, simple wine. Here interesting terroir, longer ageing on the fine lees (15 months) and older vines (around 40 years on average) helped to craft a characterful, racy, Chablis-like expression with subtle notes of fennel, tarragon, wet stone and citrus. Moules marinières ahoi!

'Nowadays quality is no longer an afterthought. Muscadet's 'crus communaux' are helping to wholly refashion Muscadet – place matters in Muscadet'

3. 2016 Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine La Haye-Fouassière, Le Clos du Château l'Oiselinière, Chéreau-Carré (£14.50, The Wine Society, 12%)

Muscadet's most important development has been the sanction of ten crus communaux (CCs) subzones (2011). Based on specific soil types these are its most age-worthy, complex and rounded wines produced from low-yielding vines and the fruit of extended mellowing on lees (a minimum of 18-24 months). Production is tiny.

Cru communal La Haye-Fouassière's subsoils are made up of metamorphic, mainly

orthogneiss, rock. This superb 2016 from Chéreau-Carré was produced from low-yielding 80-year-old vines and spent a full four years on its fine lees.

I recently caught up with third-generation winemaker Louise Chéreau who sells it to The Wine Society (her family has supplied the Society's Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine sur lie since 1985). I asked her: "Do you think your aged 2016 La Haye-Fouassière will cellar further?" Louise replied, "We only make 'Le Clos' in a very good vintage. All ten CCs are made to be kept. We have some 2009-2004 in stock that tastes beautiful!"

"Muscadet has many faces depending on subsoils, ageing on lees and if the wine is kept in bottle. It shows all its potential after some years in the cellar."

This superior silken 2016 is in great form with a lick of stony minerality and subtle flinty/

menthol complexity. An electrical current of tangy, saline acidity throbs through it, yellow apples and zesty citrus echoing across the penetrative finish. A steal. Don't serve too cool, around 12°C (54°F) is perfect. Louise runs 1.5-hour vineyard/tasting tours throughout the year for €10 per person. E: louise@chereau-carre.fr

4. 2018 Muscadet Sèvre-et-Maine Château-Thébaud, Jérémie Huchet & Jérémie Mourat (£21, Tanners, 12%)

Château-Thébaud is the smallest cru communal, with gneiss and granodiorite subsoils, requiring a minimum lees ageing of 24 months. This compelling luxe example is textural, chewy and quince-flavoured with hints of liquorice, dried fruits, honey and seashell. Lees-aged complexity (60 months) lives here. Lively mineral finish. Patience will be rewarded; outstanding value.



"Say 'Salud' to International Sherry Week, 6-12 November with Bodegas Hidalgo La Gitana's Amontillado Seco Napoleón (£15.95, Whisky Exchange, Alc 17%, 50cl). Made by the renowned Hidalgo-La Gitana, it's divine with game patés & cured meats. A joy."

UNCORKING MARVELLOUS MUSCADET

• Grape variety:

Melon de Bourgogne ('Melon B') is the most planted grape variety in the Loire Valley.

It resists the cold well and became the Loire-Atlantique department's leading variety in the 17th century when Dutch traders favoured it as the neutral base wine for distillation

• Area under vine (average of the last 4 years):

~7000ha for all 4 Muscadet appellations

• Annual production (average of the last 4 years)

~300,000hl = 40m bottles (the UK produced 91,323hl/12.2m bottles in 2022)

• Exports (2022) for all 4 Muscadet AOCs

- 45,000hl, 10,400hl exported to UK
- Muscadet crus communaux: 590hl, 28 hl exported to UK

More information at www.vinsvaldeloire.fr/en
Follow James on Instagram @QuixoticWines



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