



Duck de luxe, and bottles shared



by wine expert, Rob Chase

A month or two ago, I titled an Essential Suffolk column 'Local man makes good... as well as excellent wines' – partly due to my enthusiasm for the product and partly in the hope that more might come of it. And indeed, it has. Subject of the piece was Old Ipswichian and former Adnams colleague, David Rowledge – a corkscrew-wielding prop forward of a man, who has for the past fifteen years been growing and developing his singular wine business, Alchemy Wines. During that time, he has propelled the enterprise steadily forward to a point at which he and his European wine-making team now export their vinous creations to customers internationally as well as here in the UK.

I use the word creations advisedly, as it best describes what Alchemy Wines is all about. The team includes exceptional wine-makers in Spain, France and Italy, who work with David to create bespoke cuvées for clients around the world, tailored specifically to their particular markets. But this ability to craft consistently delicious wines from multiple vineyards bothers me. Where are the individual estates, the *goût de terroir* (Google it), the winemaker's signature style and all those other anachronistic elements which we try to identify when buying our daily vino? Why would I choose a wine of unknown provenance when I have been accustomed to buying from a Jean-Paul, a Miguel or a Luigi? An inquisitive palate is rarely sated, so I recently hooked up with David at The Duck in Campsea Ash – one of four hostellers run by local chef and patron Vernon Blackmore – to put some of Alchemy's wines to the test.

David and I were joined for the occasion by two directors of Vernon's empire (which also includes The Table and The Anchor in Woodbridge and the Easton White Horse) and together we shared small plates of mouth-watering food cooked for us by Justin Osborne, The Duck's classically-trained chef. We were delighted to discover that three of

the courses matched perfectly three of Alchemy's 'La Révérence' range of wines from the Languedoc, created by wine-maker Boris Kovac and designed for David's UK clientele. As a result, some will also be making guest appearances at The Duck – along with the relevant dishes – during September.

The first culinary offering was the most appetising rilette I've had outside the Loire Valley – a concoction of hot-smoked salmon and potted brown shrimp with dill, tarragon and a sprinkling of nori powder. To complement this culinary marvel, we began by broaching the 2018 Révérence Sauvignon Blanc. This, however, proved no match for its smoky flavours so instead, we turned to the Chardonnay. Most European wineries benefitted from the sun and heat of 2018 but it wasn't necessarily all plain sailing: grapes needed to be picked before the acidity vanished, seemingly overnight, leaving behind it flabby wines. You needed to know every block of vines and be prepared to pick early to capture the freshness and integrity of the grapes. Which is exactly what Boris did, and the 2018 La Révérence Chardonnay partnered the rilette with great aplomb. Un-oaked, pure, fresh and with harmonious stone fruit and melon notes – the combination was delicious.

Meanwhile, I was anxious to revisit the Sauvignon and was given the ideal opportunity with the arrival of a perfectly-formed quenelle of ricotta cheese, with lemon, parsley, basil oil, courgette purée and a delicate 'trimming' of lemon/courgette ribbons. Here, my long-held view that Sauvignon pairs best with cheese was upheld and it proved just the wine for the job. Interestingly, the fruit for this 2018 came from three vineyards with different soils, microclimates and even growers. Picked at optimum ripeness, the end result has all the aromatic and taste components you might expect but without the searing, aggressive acidity so often found in NZ Sauvignons and

frequently counter-balanced by an unnatural sweetness. When it comes to matching this grape variety with food, La Révérence can show its Antipodean challengers a distinctly clean pair of heels and I'm hoping it, too, will feature on the list at The Duck in due course.

Vernon has long been an ambassador for Gressingham Duck so it was no surprise to see it on his menus – as both starter and main. I love duck in all its forms but in the interests of continued health, I felt obliged to leapfrog the croquette of duck leg confit with beetroot addition and even to bypass a char-grilled, smoked, Dingley Dell rump of pork, grown in the field bordering the parish boundary. This was served with an über-dark reduction, pancetta, girolles and baby onions and – I was reliably informed – was to die for, which I very well might have done. As it was, my downfall was a fine, rich, 21-day hung, pulled, Asian-style short-rib of beef creation, with which I allowed myself just a sip or three of 2018 Merlot. I am not a Merlot worshipper, but this from La Révérence was a truly class act from a forward, drinking vintage. On its own, I often find Merlot a tad bland and lifeless but with food, it takes on another dimension. This wine, in my opinion, could be served lightly chilled, allowing its acidity to frame the fruit, with its ripe tannins giving it just enough backbone to make you sit up and take notice.

The Duck is a modern, dining pub in the best possible taste (closed on Mondays and Tuesdays) and is a great addition to the affordable dining options in this part of north Suffolk. My thanks to all who on this occasion pampered my need to explore new wines – in particular the manager, Charlotte – and should you wish to follow my example, I suggest you beat a path to its door forthwith.

Mention Essential Suffolk when you visit The Duck for a complimentary glass of either the La Révérence Merlot or La Révérence Chardonnay with your meal. Offer ends 31 October 2019.



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Why not pop in and meet the team at Alchemy Wines – David, Peter & Rebecca would love to understand your wine requirements!



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