

## London for wine lovers

28 Feb 2005 by Jancis Robinson

**30 Apr 2013** *London keeps evolving and seems almost immune to any economic downturn. Hence this latest update - timed for all the many visitors who seem to flood in to London at this time of year. Thank you for your latest suggestions of places you love and recommend - please keep them coming via Twitter or email [content@jancisrobinson.com](mailto:content@jancisrobinson.com). They are all welcome!*

**27 Jan 2011** *This is a revised version of an article that was first published on the site many years ago. Fortunately, considerable revision has been necessary because of the healthy recent increase in the number of interesting wine bars, wine-related restaurants and independent wine merchants. As a sign of how long ago I wrote the original, I have just deleted the following sentence: 'I have included fax numbers because this may be the easiest way to book from overseas what with time differences and all.'*

### SIGHTS

Walk down **St James's Street, SW1**. Not only is there St James's Palace at the bottom and various gentlemen's clubs on either side (look for a handsome 18th-century building with no or extremely discreet markings by the door and/or well tailored men stumbling out in the afternoon or languidly reading newspapers in drawing rooms inside; there are more of them along Pall Mall to the left at the bottom of the street). Brooks's at the top on the right as you walk down the street was the late Harry Waugh's and Michael Broadbent's club. Boodles is an even prettier, white building almost opposite. At number 61 on the right is **Justerini & Brooks**, the energetic fine-wine merchant that can offer some hand-picked treasures. Buyer, now managing director, Hew Blair works far harder than he need, thank goodness.

Further down on the opposite side at number 3 is J & B's longstanding rival **Berry Bros & Rudd**, which owns an extraordinary proportion of the real estate in this sector of St James's (just opposite Clarence House, home of Prince Charles, on Pall Mall). This is the real reason for your saunter down this street - which continues to undergo a flurry of renovation with smart restaurants and even hotels going up at a giddy rate. BB&R was for long rather moribund and financed by Cutty Sark whisky, but in the last 10 years or so it has become one of Britain's [most dynamic wine merchants](#) in its own right. The Berrys and Berry-Greens have been clever enough to realise that its strongest distinguishing mark is its long history, which is celebrated in full at St James's Street. The buildings in which it conducts its London business (the real work is done in less romantic surroundings in Basingstoke, called by them in their literature 'our Hampshire cellars') have recently been tarted up, and the extension to the shop now has many a bottle on display. But step on to the bare boards of the original wine shop and you will get something of the flavour of an 18th-century London merchant. Berry Bros still have the weighing scales and records of the weights of Regency dandies and worthies, and the well-suited young men may now use computers but they (the computers rather than the young men) are cunningly inset into old-fashioned high wooden desks. Have a snoop around and ask if you can see their recently restored cellars on at least two floors below in which many wine events are held. While here you could turn in to King Street and see if there's a wine sale going on in one of the grand old, or pretend grand old, salerooms at **Christie's**. Check [www.Christies.com](http://www.Christies.com) first.

If you are that way inclined, you might enjoy immersion in the **City of London**, basically London's financial district. More and more banks and other financial institutions are moving east to the modern wastes of Canary Wharf but you can still get the flavour of this very particular part of London by blinking your way up into the daylight from Bank tube station and watching People at Work, generally dashing about and looking harassed - a highly satisfactory sight when on holiday, I find. Hardly anyone actually lives in this area (it's deserted at weekends) but you can get the historical picture by visiting the Museum of London near the modern Barbican (an exceptional, for the City, housing and cultural development) and, if you're fit, climb the Monument for a better view.

Most wine merchants have been driven out of the City by the high rents but **Uncorked** at 15 Exchange Arcade, Broadgate, London EC2, is an exception. This is a tiny operation that specialises in supplying City wine lovers with some of the world's up-and-coming trophy wines so you might find something of interest here. Free vintner John Davy has a string of faux Victorian wine bars all over the City (and elsewhere in the middle of London) which have particularly good value vintage port, sawdust on the floor, etc. Corney & Barrow have several modern wine bars in the City and can offer some interesting wines by the glass, and the opportunity to study one particular subspecies in considerable detail. Go to

one of these bars only if you have high testosterone tolerance, however. **Sweetings** is the most stereotypical City restaurant.

While you're in this part of London, cross the Thames at **Southwark Bridge**, noticing Vintners' Hall on your right where so much wine was once offloaded from the river, and which still houses the offices of the [Vintners' Company](#). Once over the Thames, turn left and walk along the south bank of the river by the *Financial Times* HQ to [Vinopolis](#), London's rather diluted wine-based tourist attraction. Nearby there is also Neal's Yard Dairy, Brindisa's tapas bar and the rest of Borough Market as well as a retail branch of Laithwaite's, Britain's biggest mail order wine retailer now expanding internationally, inside Vinopolis.

If it's more wine accessories than wine that you're after, [Around Wine](#) near Regent's Park is a wine lover's toy shop, selling everything from foil cutters to Eurocaves.

## WINE SHOPS

Most of Britain's best wine merchants are spread around the country and occasionally suburbs, operating from printed and electronic lists rather than cute little boutiques in the capital. They increasingly operate online rather than with bricks and mortar premises.

However, as well as these merchants mentioned above,

**Justerini & Brooks**, London SW1

**Berry Bros & Rudd**, London SW1

**Uncorked**, London EC2

**Laithwaite's at Vinopolis**, London SE1

there are a few particularly good independent wine retailers:

[Hedonism](#), 3-7 Davies Street, London W1, is the newest, by far the most luxurious, central London wine store. Owned by a Russian tax exile, it is an extraordinary treasure trove of bottles of interest to anyone seriously interested in wine with, for instance, Yquem and Sine Qua Nons coming out of its ears. There are many tiptop wines on taste by the glass. Many a wine lover could spend hours in here.

[Lea & Sandeman](#), 301 Fulham Road, London SW10, and 211 Kensington Church Street, London W8, close to Notting Hill Gate tube station, and 51 Barnes High Street, London SW13, and now in Chiswick W4 at 167 Chiswick High Road. These bright, modern shops offer a wide range of individually chosen wines. The selection is particularly strong on Tuscany, Rhône, Burgundy and south-west France.

[Handford Wines](#), 105 Old Brompton Road, London SW7 (very close to Christie's, South Ken), and 12 Portland Road, London W11. Small, very personal shops whose stock is driven by passion and interest - especially good at Burgundy, southern French, South African and Portuguese table wines.

[The Winery](#) in Clifton Road, London W9. Excellent hand-picked, actually foot-driven, selection from anywhere that owner David Motion has recently visited. Dry Germans are a speciality.

[Haynes Hanson & Clark](#) on Elystan Street, London SW1. Belgravia store run by Master of Wine Anthony Hanson and partners. Burgundy a speciality.

[Roberson](#), Kensington High Street, London W14. Large, modern, cavernous shop with a wide selection at the Olympia end of Kensington High Street.

[Pont de la Tour](#), Shad Thames, Butlers Wharf, London SE1, is the very well-stocked wine store attached to the Conran restaurant of the same name on the south side of Tower Bridge. Excellent and unpredictable selection but Sir Terence believes in robust pricing.

[Jeroboams](#), fine wine stores dotted around central London with a pretty good selection.

[Philglas & Swigot](#), a small group of shops specialising in hand-picked wines, notably but not exclusively Australian.

[The Sampler](#), very useful pair of shops in Upper Street, Islington, and by South Kensington tube station, which offers a rotating range of very fine wines indeed by the 25 ml pour and also has one of the UK's most wide-ranging selections of

fine wines available anywhere retail.

**[Planet of the Grapes](#)** just south of the British Museum is very individual, and as an added bonus they also have two wine bars in the city at **[Bow Lane](#)** (with restaurant) and **[Leadenhall Market](#)**, both of which are shops as well where you can buy take away or drink in with a simple flat corkage rate of £10 on top of the retail price. Purple Pager Henry Jeffreys tell us that 'at Planet of the Grapes on New Oxford Street they spend a lot of time sitting round a big wooden table trying samples (it makes one want to become a wine merchant). If you spend long enough in there, then you will be handed a glass of something and asked your opinion.'

**[Theatre of Wine](#)** in Greenwich and now in Tufnell Park, north London, is also run with great personal dedication.

I am also indebted to Purple pager Dave Stenton for the following recommendations (all comments are his):

**[Bottle Apostle](#)** in Victoria Park and in Crouch End - offers sampling via Enomatic machines.

**[Vagabond Wines](#)**, Fulham - also has Enomatics (and is cheap compared with others - they had a 2005 Alion for £2 a taste when I last visited).

**[Highbury Vintners](#)**, Highbury - fantastic selection of wine but also a wide range of microbrewery beers.

**[City Beverage Company](#)**, Old Street - a little pricey [a description vigorously contested by Stuart Edwards of CDC - TC] but decent selection and, again, good beer selection.

**[Noble Fine Liquor](#)** - a new shop on Broadway Market (a short walk from 259 Hackney Road) run by two young Kiwis. Natural wines from the Loire rub shoulders with rare burgundy and New Zealand's Pyramid Valley. They also work closely with the small Italian importer Tutto Wines so are one of the few UK stockists of the excellent Ar.Pe.Pe Nebbiolos.

**[Prohibition Wines](#)** - a new shop in Muswell Hill that I'm yet to visit - perhaps some North London Purple Pagers know it?

**[Huntsworth Wine Co](#)** - opposite-ish the Notting Hill branch of Lea & Sandeman. Strong Burgundy and Bordeaux focus but there's a smattering of wines from further afield.

**[New Street Wine Shop](#)** - in the city close to Liverpool Street and set-up by D&D London. I've not visited.

Another Purple Pager, Jonathan Hesford, recommends **[The Wine Tasting Shop](#)** in Balham, run by Julia Michael, 'the very engaging owner'.

Patricia Stefanowicz MW quite rightly points out that we had forgotten to include **[The Wine Pantry](#)**, a wonderful little shop selling only English, Welsh, and Cornish wines in Borough Market.

And as the locus of London social life moves east, there is of course a quirky little wine shop at **[259 Hackney Road](#)**, described by Luis Gutiérrez **[here](#)**, and for trendy Brixton there is **[Market Row Wines](#)** run by ex-Oddbins David Simpson who focuses on the £8-12 wines from artisan producers.

There are other small outfits all over the capital. If you are a real wine junkie, or a wine professional, you may want to see where Brits typically buy their wine. More than 70 per cent of all wine in the UK is bought at one of the big supermarkets: Tesco, Sainsburys, Asda, Morrisons, or possibly the Co-operative (which acquired Somerfield in 2009) or (still the best) Waitrose. Branches vary enormously in the range they offer. Flagship stores include Waitrose at Canary Wharf and Halkin Street, SW1, Sainsburys at Gloucester Road and Tesco not far away where the Cromwell Road becomes elevated. If you are staying with a native, rather than at a hotel, ask them to show you their nearest supermarket. You will see just how cut-throat the wine business is at this level. Majestic is a highly successful chain of wine warehouses with a flagship fine-wine store in St John's Wood, NW8.

## WINE-MINDED RESTAURANTS IN AND AROUND LONDON

For recommendations of London restaurants that have no particular wine connection, check out [Nick's weekly recommendations](#) - or you could put 'London restaurants' in the search box, having chosen the Rest of site option from the dropdown menu.

Until recently, London has been generally pretty awful at wine bars and even at wine by the glass. You generally had to go to a gastropub (= converted old pub with a wooden floor, a blackboard menu and some armchairs) to get a decent wine by the glass and sometimes even they can let you down. Today though we can choose from several branches of two establishments that are effectively wine bars with very superior food: **Vinoteca** near Smithfield market, in Seymour Place just north of Marble Arch, and now also in Beak Street, Soho, and **Terroir** between Trafalgar Square and Charing Cross with its offshoots **Brawn** in Columbia Road, east London, **Soif** in south London and **The Green Man and French Horn** in St Martin's Lane. Terroirs and its sister wine bars are closely associated with wine importers [Caves de Pyrène](#) and the [natural wine movement](#).

The wine bars in the food halls of **Fortnum & Mason** and **Selfridge's** are also worth checking out, and, like F&M, **Canary Wharf Waitrose** offers customers the chance to drink bottles bought on the premises paying very modest corkage. Another very welcome addition to the scene is the wine-focused restaurant **28-50** just off Fleet Street, which showcases the smart contents of several personal wine collections at fair prices, now with a second branch in Marylebone. In smart Knightsbridge, in the basement of the Mandarin Oriental hotel, indeed, is the London version of **Bar Boulud**, with a fine, mainly French wine list and always something superior available by the glass.

Dave Stenton also recommends [Andrew Edmunds](#) in Soho: 'I ate there last weekend and was struck by the number of rare burgundies and bordeaux they were selling for not much more (and in some cases less) than retail.' And New Street Wine Shop (mentioned above) is also a wine bar and restaurant.

London now has a few sherry/tapas bars that are worthy of the name such as [Barrafina](#) (always with queues outside, it seems to me), [Brindisa](#) (several branches), [Dehesa](#), [Meson Don Felipe](#), [Morito](#) (son of Moro in Exmouth Market below), [The Opera Tavern](#), [Pepito](#) near Kings Cross and in Canary Wharf, [El Pirata](#) and [Saltyard](#). One tweeter mentioned [Capote y Toros](#), 'probably the best sherry bar in London'. Long may they flourish.

See this [2011 guide to London wine bars](#).

Some of our personal favourite wine-minded restaurants are listed below.

Our son Will Lander re-opened the listed Victorian working men's dining room that is [The Quality Chop House](#) in Farringdon Road, specialising in really interesting wine at good prices and British, produce-driven food in a restaurant and next door wine bar. For obvious reasons, I strongly recommend it and it has garnered some rave reviews from highly respected third parties.

Under the rumbling railway arches of London Bridge you'll find [40 Maltby Street](#) - more wine-bar-serving-food than restaurant, the small plates cooked to order in their postage-stamp kitchen are delicious and the wine list is full of unusual gems featuring a lot of natural and biodynamic producers. You can take a bottle home at retail price, and the mark-ups are transparently low.

If you're prepared to spend and travel to find something really out of the ordinary (strange combos done with conviction and real technical expertise), you should try [The Fat Duck](#), High Street in Bray (tel +44 1628 580333, fax +44 1628 776188) - train to Maidenhead then taxi. Heston Blumenthal cooks a bit like Ferran Adrià of El Bulli in Spain but I don't think he has ever been there, or certainly not until quite recently. Great wine list too.

Also in Soho is the excellent [Arbutus](#), which serves all its wines in a variety of glasses and carafes and has sister places [Wild Honey](#) in St George Street just south of Hanover Square and [Les Deux Salons](#) in William IV Street almost opposite Terroirs.

[St John](#), 26 St John Street, London EC1, has a wine importer attached. It's world-famous, very minimal, very meaty, very English, near the old Smithfield meat market, where there are now lots of bars and restaurants. 'Nose to tail eating' is what they claim to offer. One of Nick's favourite restaurants, though some, especially vegetarians, find it a little stark. Quite interesting French wine list but not great glasses. Also in the St John empire is the more basic **St John Bread & Wine** near Liverpool Street station.

You could do a lot worse than wander round the Smithfield area. If you're interested in eating French cuisine, you might try the [Club Gascon](#), 57 W Smithfield, for lots of little portions of foie gras, local sausages, etc and interesting wines from SW France. Anyone for Marcillac?

One of the most wine-friendly restaurants in London is [Ransome's Dock](#), 35-37 Parkgate Road, London SW11. Martin and Vanessa Lam believe in top-quality local ingredients and giving everyone a fairly casual good time. The unusually wide age range here is a tribute to them. Fascinating wine list and a high probability of bumping into another winey person. The Willi's Wine Bar of London.

Nigel Platt-Martin's group comprising [The Square](#) in London W1, [Chez Bruce](#) in Wandsworth, [The Glasshouse](#) in Kew, [La Trompette](#) in Chiswick and [The Ledbury](#) in Notting Hill has exceptional wine lists and well educated staff in each of them. Pretty delicious food, too, with great wines that are not too overpriced (most other places will make you scream at the greed).

The restaurant at **Tate Britain** has long been famous for the scope and fair prices of its wine list, even if the food is far from exceptional. Great setting, too, and you can take in the Turners en route.

Best Chinese restaurant for wine lovers is [Hunan](#) in Pimlico, which has a superb wine list at knockdown prices. Both branches of [Hakkasan](#) have exceptional wine (and sake) lists too.

Tweeters have suggested [Texture](#) - modern European with champagne bar - and its sister restaurant, [28-50](#), a more informal 'wine workshop and kitchen', warrants a worthy mention. Another tweeter recommends [MASH](#) on Brewer St, 'cavernous with large, US-centric (but not exclusively) wine list, low markups, £15 corkage, free on Sundays'.

Purple Pager Henry Jeffreys recommends the [Giaconda Dining Room](#) about which he wrote a [great review](#) in June 2012, and adds, 'now reopened with a garden room out the back. Excellent unflashy wine list: Faugeres from Dom. Meteor, Marcillac from Dom. du Cros, Urbina Reserva 99 (£30) and, on my last visit, a delightfully rich Gavi.'

Pretty much everything in London costs a fortune. The spreading rash of gastropubs, old pub premises converted into casual restaurants, are probably the best bet for good-value eating. Try [www.zagat.com](#) for the Pub dining section and more details. When in London, you could also buy either *Hardens* or the *Time Out* restaurant guides.

Another potential budget-priced option is to eat Indian. London has hundreds of Indian restaurants and almost any of them would provide novelty to most foreigners (with the exception of Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis, of course). Ask wherever you are staying for local recommendations. Most Indian restaurants are inexpensive and vary from interesting to good. An exceptionally good - and much more expensive - example is **Rasoi Vineet Bhatia** near Sloane Square, where the food is much fresher and more creative than average and the wine list is superior.

Just bring loads of money... London is pretty poor at cheap food. Marks & Spencer stores and the Prêt à Manger chain are probably best for sandwiches, etc, and see [Nick on restaurants](#) for some suggested cheaper places and more recent opening.

Thinking about it does make me wonder how we afford to live here.

See also this [thread in the forum](#) about London restaurants' policy on BYO.