A new wine bar for central London

31 Oct 2006 by JR

Hold on for another bee buzzing around my bonnet.

It has long been a source of wonder to me that London has so few genuine wine bars, places where you can drink a glass of interesting wine with some decent food. Yes of course there are myriad Pitcher & Pianos and All Bar Ones and it's great that they exist, but they are not pitched at serious wine lovers (those of us who never smile).

Don Hewitson's **Cork & Bottle** in the north east corner of Leicester Square is one longstanding noble exception, along with its once-stablemate **Shampers** in Kingly Street, W1 – although both of these are period pieces in terms of décor and food.

Xtevenes

in St John Street, EC1 was an extremely welcome addition earlier this year and is so popular that it can be difficult to get a place. **The Arches** wine bar in NW8 just west of Swiss Cottage is another hangout for lovers of fine wine with a well priced restaurant in the basement and great wine prices.

But what about somewhere you can drink really, really good wine in comfortable, modern surroundings in the London's West End with Shaun Hill-inspired food? That place opened yesterday, **1707 Wine Bar** in the basement of Fortnum & Mason, Piccadilly. I must immediately declare an interest in that Nick is helping this venerable store update its restaurants so I have been vaguely aware via half-heard telephone calls what has been going on. But I saw the first new place at Fortnums, together with the menu and the wine list, for the first time last night and was very impressed indeed.

Lined with pale wood, it looks a bit like a super-cool sauna carved out of the basement food hall, just next to the lovely, airy, well-lit wine department from which you can choose any bottle and drink it in the wine bar for a corkage fee of just £10. Thanks to the super-keen wine buyer Tim French, F&M have a thoroughly superior range of wines, including but by no means limited to their own label bottlings. (Chablis comes from Louis Michel, Pouilly Fuissé from Verget, Barossa Shiraz from Torbeck etc.)

The wine bar list currently offers 28 wines by the glass and relatively simple food – game pie with wild mushroom salad, warm spinach and ricotta tart with autumn salads and a walnut dressing, for instance - but specific wine matches are proposed (see the forum discussion of Wine and Haute Cuisine

) including two flights. A 125 ml glass of each of a Michel Chablis 2004, a Verget Pouilly Fuissé 2005 and Jean Bollot's Puligny Clos de la Mouchère 2002 costs £18.50. The same of three Luciano Sandrone reds costs £16.50.

The wine bar is currently open only during shop hours, which means 10am to 8pm, but towards Christmas it is likely to be open later. It's not possible to make reservations apparently.

1707 Wine Bar, Fortnum & Mason, 181 Piccadilly, London W1

If you know a really good wine bar of interest to lovers of fine wine with decent food, please tell us in the box below.