

Apples for dinner - technology corner

1 Sep 2010 by Jancis Robinson

The iPad (which I have yet to even handle) is all set to create a revolution in all sorts of spheres, we are assured - not least in publishing. But it is already creating a stir on the wine side of the restaurant business. Restaurant wine lists are starting to be offered to diners on iPads.

One highly unlikely early adopter is sommelier Colm McCan at **Ballymaloe** near Cork in Ireland (pictured), the Allen family's idiosyncratic hotel, restaurant and cooking-school complex in the depths of the Irish countryside near the tiny settlement of Shanagarry. He reports that his customers are enjoying the topicality and flexibility that the iPad offers. They are now able to sort the wines on offer - that particular day - by price, style, region, vintage, food matches etc. There is the great advantage that the list can be kept instantly up to date, there is no use of paper, no printing costs, and the type can be adjusted to take account of individuals' eyesight and - most important in many dark restaurants - the screen's brightness can be adjusted. (The number of times I have wanted to ask for a torch in some American restaurants...)

Thanks to the controversial magic of Twitter, I learnt yesterday that other establishments already embracing this new technology for their wine lists include **SD26** and **South Gate** in New York, **One** in South Carolina, **Barbacco** in San Francisco and **Grapepad** in Texas.

I asked Colm which other places he knew of and this is his reply:

'Yes, there are other establishments doing it. The only place that I had heard about before now, was **El Bulli**. They apparently have an electronic format wine list - also an interactive wine list on their website (I think the format is the same as the wine list). Options include traditional, advanced and 'virtual city'! One can choose, and pre-order the wine [here](#).

'Also **The Greenhouse** in Mayfair, London, have one, according to [this article](#) in *The Independent* last March. *Wine Spectator* also ran an article, 31 May 2010 issue, 'Restaurant Wine Lists Go High-Tech', by Tim Fish, Nathan Wesley (only saw these two articles yesterday while doing research for your reply!). There are some places in the USA doing an electronic wine list, such as **Adour**, **Clo Wine Bar**, **SD26**, and **South Gate**, New York, and **Aureole**, Las Vegas (yes, that would make sense, that a place in Las Vegas, and Shanagarry, have electronic wine lists available for guests!)

'The idea here at Ballymaloe developed through a number of things - some American guests, regulars, showed me their iPad earlier in the summer - I thought it was just amazing. Also, I had heard about the wine list in El Bulli, but had not seen it. Also on your website, you have short video recordings of winemakers, etc., so I thought it would be great to do a dedicated short video clip of the visiting winemakers who come to Ballymaloe, talking about their wines that are on the list, building an electronic list. These winemakers do not pass by Shanagarry every day, so it seemed like a shame not to do something when they are here, and this personalises the videos for Ballymaloe, rather than just downloading something from the web; it's great for the guests, students and everyone working in Ballymaloe.

'It will, and has, complimented the traditional format wine list, and is unlikely to be ever more than that. However, who knows where technology will take us. Alberto Antonini told me, while at the Ballymaloe Cookery School last year, that he would not be surprised if he would be able to taste wine via technology in the future, and this would reduce his present six months' travelling each year which his consultancy entails. Guests, and students, are so used to iPhones and touch screen technology, that an iPad is very comfortable for them to use. Someone involved in the arts in Holland recently said to me that the Hermitage, Amsterdam, is using similar technology to enhance visits, especially for younger people, and to take some of the mystery out of art and make it more fun - similar to what we are trying to do with wine, I suppose, to bring the wine label alive - to see, and hear, the person behind the label.

'On the Ballymaloe Facebook page (see www.ballymaloe.ie) we have a nice photograph of Cullen (Cully) Allen, Hazel and Rory's son, who helped me with the technological side of things, and founder of 'Cully and Sully' (see www.cullyandsully.com - award winning website), outside the Gatehouse at Ballymaloe, which is described in the current September issue of Ireland's *Food and Wine* magazine, in an article by Georgina Campbell, as 'Ireland's most ancient hotel room'. Nice contrast with the iPad!'

If you know of any other places already using the iPad for their wine lists, don't hesitate to add them in the box below.