



NEWS IN BRIEF

WINES ON THE WEB

Two new websites have launched, aiming to give wine lovers more information about their favourite tipples. On www.alsacewines.co.uk, Francophiles will find free information about Alsace and its wines, as well as food and wine matching suggestions and recipes. While fizz fans should go to www.ChampagneGuide.net, a subscription service that has notes on more than 100 Champagne houses and 600 wines, written by American critic Peter Lien who is based in Champagne.

SICILY IN SIGHT

Italian chain Carluccio's will be celebrating all things Sicilian in its annual wine festival this year. Running from 7 June to 1 August, the event includes special wine tastings and winemaker dinners, and will promote regional and seasonal produce. There's even a chance to win a trip to Sicily in time for the wine harvest. See www.carluccios.com for more details.

BETTER THAN GOLD?

Research has shown that investors in fine wine have weathered the economic downturn better than those who favour commodities such as oil and gold. Data from London-based Premier Cru Fine Wine Investments showed average returns of 35%, with some as high as 71%, on investment values of £10,000 between 2006 and 2009. Stacy Golding of Premier Cru, said: 'Being easily realisable and protected under bond, fine wine will come into its own this year as the full effect of the market comes into force.'



WINE FOR SPICE

Michelin-starred spice maestro Anil Kochhar (pictured left) has launched his own white and red wines. They are available by the glass at both Benaras in Mayfair and Vodka at Wickham Vineyards in Hampshire. Made at Domaine du Grand Mayre in the Duras, a stone's throw from Bordeaux, Kochhar's wines comprise a Sauvignon Blanc and a Merlot.

Renowned for his contemporary approach to Indian cuisine, Kochhar was inspired by his involvement with Wickham. 'I wanted to tackle the spice challenge,' he says. 'It's a balancing act between the acidity and the fruit [in the wine].' He believes Sauvignons from regions such as New Zealand and Australia can overpower the food, and so he's veered away from the tart green fruit aspect towards more mature, stone-fruit flavours. 'I wanted something that was clean and light. I'm very happy with the white wine. It's the perfect complement to seafood and white-meat.' The red is more of a work in progress. 'The timings are not quite right,' he admits. 'It's a good table wine, but I want to bring in a touch more fruit to match the spicy food.' Report by Susanna Forbes
www.benarasrestaurant.com; www.vodkairestaurant.com



SPANISH FIESTA

The inaugural Spanish Wines Tasting at Old Billingsgate in March was a stunning success. There were 150 wines – all available in the UK – plus a delicious assortment of tapas and speciality food. Oh... and guitar music and wine experts to assist. Highlights included wines from Rioja, Priorato, Rueda, Jerez and Ribera del Duero, while on the grape front Albariño, Verdejo, Tempranillo and Garnacha won new friends among the 300 attendees. All ridiculously good value at £15. If you missed it this year, keep your eye on squaremeal.co.uk in February 2010.

STAR SOMMELIER

Congratulations go to Laura Rhys from Hotel TerraVina in Hampshire, who has been named UK Sommelier of the Year 2009.

Rhys (right, with Christian Holthausen of Champagne Charles Heidsieck) beat off stiff competition from 150 sommeliers around the country at the event which was organised by the Academy of Food & Wine.

