

wine notes



WITH COLIN PRESSDEE

THE Welsh have traditionally been a nation of beer drinkers. In the industrial revolution and coal mining eras the refreshment after a hard day of work in the mine or steel mill was rewarded with a few pints. Large breweries were located within the industrial areas, many owned by the mine or mill proprietors.

As the economy changed most of the breweries disappeared. Yet the Welsh still had a healthy thirst for their local brew. In the last 20 years it has been encouraging to see a revival in interest - largely sparked by the Campaign For Real Ale (CAMRA) - in true British beer. There are now over 30 independent breweries in Wales, from large ones such as SA Brain of Cardiff down to smaller micro breweries such as Purple Moose in Porthmadog.

The small breweries are located all across Wales, so it's not difficult to find a local ale to go with a meal, rather than choose a wine. There is nothing down market about this - Le Gavroche in London has a beer list alongside its hefty wine list, all selected by the two star Michelin chef Michel Roux Jr.

Think of matching some fine Welsh produce with a local ale. Monty's in Montgomery in the heart of the rural borderland is surrounded by wonderful Welsh hill lamb. Its ales are particularly attractive with a range of lamb dishes from a lighter grilled chop or leg steak through to a rich ragout.

The North Wales coast has several breweries making a wide range of styles, through from light wheat beers to full bodied stout and porter. Look for the range from the Conway Brewery and Great Orme Brewery.

The industrial heartland of South Wales has a number of top class brewers that fit the contemporary scene.

The Celt Experience makes a range that includes a fine lager, and weightier ales called Gold and Bronze. Oley Brewery has its brews depicted by Oi, O2, which ascribes their style. Perhaps one of the most appropriate for all of Wales comes from the Breconshire Brewery. Its Ramblers Ale is rich and sustaining, ideal for reviving after a day on the mountains. Match these against a platter of Welsh cheeses and a feast is in store.

WHIMBERRY AND PORT JELLY (for 6)



ingredients

4 gelatine leaves
225g sugar
450g whimberrys or blackberries
30ml cassis
150ml port
crème fraiche

method

- Put gelatine in a shallow bowl, cover with cold water and set aside to soften
- Combine the fruits, sugar and 150ml of water in a saucepan, bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the cassis and port.
- Strain the gelatine and combine with 150ml of water in a small saucepan. Heat slowly to dissolve and stir into the fruit mixture.
- Rinse 6 ramekins or suitable moulds with cold water. At this stage you can strain the fruit mixture or pour into the moulds as it is. Place in the fridge and leave to set overnight if possible.

FOR THE HONEY MADELEINES

ingredients

2 large eggs
75g sugar
10g dark, soft brown sugar
pinch of salt
90g plain flour
1 tsp baking powder
vanilla essence
90g melted butter, cooled
1 tbsp clear honey
30g melted butter for greasing

method

- Combine the eggs, both kinds of sugar and salt in a bowl and beat until the mixture turns a light colour.
- Sift together the flour and baking powder and fold gently into the mixture, together with the vanilla - do not over work the mixture.
- Pour in the honey and melted butter, mix well and cover until needed - the longer left the better.
- Pre heat oven to 200°C. Brush insides of the madeleine tray with melted butter, spoon the mixture into the cavities of the tray.
- Bake for about 5 minutes; do not overcook as they must be moist. Turn out onto a cooling rack. Serve warm with the turned out jellies and crème fraiche.

bryan webb



AT the moment the seasons are slowly changing into the autumn mood. Native strawberries have now finished, while raspberries are in full swing but only for another week.

The tiny red and black berries are still available to make probably the last of this year's summer puddings, but what are in abundance at the moment are whimberrys.

Regular readers and customers at the restaurant will know they are one of my favourites to use in desserts. It is back-breaking work picking them on the moors and time-consuming picking and cleaning them back in the kitchen, which is why they are expensive. Last Wednesday at market they were selling for £2 for a 150g punnet - but worth every penny. Be careful if you are picking your own, they do colour light clothes easily and leave a stain on your hands.

I was once offered six kilo of them, at a rock bottom price, while in South Wales but then had to get the fruit back to London on the train. By Hammersmith tube station the bags had started to leak and a trail of whimberrys followed

HEAVENLY PUD DONE ON A WHIM

us on our walk home.

But the humble blackberries, which grow on hedgerows in the countryside, are free to whoever gets there first and are an excellent addition to a summer pudding. Partnered with stewed cooking apples, and topped with an almond crumble, they are the first choice of an autumn dessert, with hot creamy custard of course.

A whimberrys jelly goes well with simple roast grouse, which is now in season and on my menu from today -

now that is what I call heavenly food.

Today's recipe of whimberrys and port jelly was given to me 20 years ago by chef Simon Hopkinson when he was at Bibendum restaurant in London. It originally used blackberries. If you can make the honey madeleines they do go well with the jellies, as does a scoop of crème fraiche.

I used blueberries from the supermarket, as the picture (above) was taken some weeks ago, but blueberry is the same family as the whimberrys.

● Bryan Webb is owner/chef of Tyddyn Llan, Llandrillo, near Conwen