

2016 Comes to a close 2017; Game Feasts Cellar Wine List

With the Christmas Party season in full swing, the thought of quiet fireside evenings at home in January is already beginning to appeal. The Tap & Kitchen will work flat out through to the close at the end of New Year's Day after which the whole team will take four very well deserved days off.

Let's face it, whatever our New Year's resolutions, we will still need to eat in January albeit hopefully guided a bit by our determination to eat food that is better for us and maybe consume a tiny bit less. Which is where game comes in; it is generally very low on fat, packed with flavour and, for the increasing numbers that care about these things, comes with a food-miles sticker that is as close to zero as you can get.

Our swaps' board really comes into its own in January. Warm winters mean that rabbits are plentiful and the pigeons are out in force on the young crops and there are still some brassicas and root veg that may need eating up. So, please, remember, when you have been out shooting or gardening, bring in what is surplus to home requirements and get yourself some credit behind the bar. Hopefully one or two of you will source some local venison too. What we have seen so far this year has been absolutely lovely.

The partridge and pheasant seasons end on February 1st so, before the shutter comes down, we will be holding a game feast on January 26th.

The menu will be dependent on what is available in the days before. But with Pete Blatch's skills we are pretty confident that we will have some pigeons and rabbits to kick the evening off and, frankly, given the number of countrymen in the surrounding villages we aren't too worried about failing to source everything we need.

You may remember that we spoke about a new restaurant in London called Clipstone whose food is simple, informal, colourful and with a courage that extends to having several 'house' wines that are shipped in 50l kegs and available on tap. Sadly, as we write, the death of AA Gill has been announced. He very quickly (but gratifyingly a couple of weeks after our Tap & Kitchen post) raved about the place, with particular praise being heaped on the poached brain on toast.

You may, possibly, but only very possibly, get brain fritters at our place but it is very unlikely indeed that we will serve the whole, unadorned, poached cerebellum glistening on your plate. For a few, it would be lovely, but it might just be a bridge too far for many of our loyal customers.

But we came away from our first visit with particularly happy memories of two of their simplest dishes; a plate of pickles so perfect in presentation as to have featured in more foodie articles than any other plate of food this year and a totally scrumptious starter of rabbit rillettes.

The latter is served on sourdough toast and miraculously lifted by the addition of blobs of lightly, pickled mustard. Not only does this add subtlety to the flavour but the popping resistance of the seeds as they are crunched is marvellously reminiscent of fish eggs.



Rabbit Rillettes at Clipstone

It is a stunning dish and we will be serving it as our second opener after some pigeon hearts which have been a great success on the menu during November. Think flavour packed, marinated meat nuggets and you will be getting a feel for how good these hearts are and Puy lentils are a perfect accompaniment.



Pigeon hearts on toast

Unlike previous feasts, we will be taking bookings at the time that you want to eat rather than feeding the whole restaurant at the same time. The feedback we have had is that many of you would like to choose the time that suits you and, to be honest, it makes it easier for us. The beef feast was a sellout and it would be lovely if lots of you took this event as an excuse to let your hair down after a quiet January.

We are taking bookings from today.

How can you ever justify selling a bottle of wine for £70 or even £100? It's a question that is hard to debate as in almost any field the very best examples of anything can command crazy prices and the argument quickly gets into whether a society that can pay so much for a wine, car, painting, jewel can pay so little to, say, a nurse or a nursery teacher or even a poet. We aren't going there but the fact is that a few people really do occasionally want to buy something a bit special and our response is to create a 'Cellar List' of magnificent wines that are marked up from cost price very modestly indeed to avoid accusations of profiteering. If you want to take a look, ask a member of staff.

It is an unashamedly old fashioned list as it contains wines we love and our preference, all things being equal, is to drink from the great terroirs in France. So there are a number of clarets and a couple of absolutely cracking examples from Chateau-neuf. But there is a nod or two to the New World as well. A couple of years ago, when driving through the Calchaquí Valley in the Andes high above Salta, we stayed in Cafayate and visited the Michel Torino winery where the wines are irrigated from deep aquifers replenished by glacial meltwater and the temperature varies each day from near freezing at night to the mid or high 20s in the peak of the day. The result is grapes that are packed with so much flavour that a lesser winemaker could end up overpowering the drinker.

The very best of the wine is held back, blended and aged in new oak barrels for at least two years. Their lesser wines are called Don David and really very good but the best is called Altimus and it really is the best.



Don David Altimus

This is a wine for someone who likes big reds to go with red meat, strong cheese, welsh rarebit, anchovies, bacon sandwiches...you get the picture. It's £47 and, for all the reasons mentioned above, we are never going to tell you that this is cheap. But we will say two other things; you won't find it at this price on any winelist we have found, including in Argentina, and if you want to spend £50 on a great big mouthful of red wine heaven, you will love this wine.

Best wishes,
TK