

Food & Drink

Souvenirs to leave behind



**Jancis
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Wine

At this time of year, bottles carefully brought home from southern Europe are traditionally opened all over northern Europe in a fever of anticipation. But those who expect their treasured wine mementoes to prolong the warmth and languor of the summer holiday just past are all too often disappointed. The red, white or rosé that tasted so glorious on a vine-shaded terrace seems just plain ordinary under grey skies. Cue the perennial question: why doesn't this wine travel?

Except that it is rarely the wine's fault. That wine tasting is a subjective experience is vividly illustrated by this frustrating phenomenon. It is almost invariably ourselves, our mood and our environment that have changed rather than the wine. Modern wine is made to withstand long journeys. Many a bottle on a British supermarket shelf was trucked across the Channel only days before.

And this phenomenon is by no means restricted to wine. Dusty bottles of ouzo, Metaxa and Fundador lurk in cocktail cabinets everywhere as testament to hopeful travellers keen to import liquid souvenirs. Even professionals are not immune to the charms of local drinks that take on a quite unjustified allure when consumed *sur place*. I recall quite happily downing local brandy and lemonade, a combination I would regard as an abomination in London, on our one and only holiday in Cyprus.

But as more and more holidaymakers fly, rather than drive to and from their destinations, these liquid souvenirs are becoming a thing of the past. In our new security-conscious era, flying is an operation that is inimical to the old mores of a wine-lover. I remember clearly how outraged I felt the first time I encountered any restrictions on flying with a bottle of

wine. It was 8am one morning in 2002, before British airports had started to collect all our water bottles. I was being screened at Shanghai airport before boarding a plane for the currently troublesome far western Chinese region of Xinjiang. Just as I was leaving my hotel that morning, the local distributor had left me a sample of Grace Vineyards' Chairman's Reserve, said to be the most promising wine then made in China. There had been no time, or inclination, to try it then but I thought I'd be able to take it with me on my flight to Ürümqi and taste it that evening. But no – China had this quaint prohibition on carrying glass and liquids on flights. But Grace's wines were virtually impossible to find. I was so loth to hand over my one and only bottle to the security guards and miss my chance of tasting it that I dashed over to a café, got a tumbler and proceeded to pull the cork as hordes of bemused Chinese air passengers streamed past me at the security gate. (The wine was worth it).

Nowadays, of course, air travellers everywhere are prohibited from passing through security with anything even remotely resembling a liquid in their hand luggage, and corkscrews are presumed dangerous weapons too. This particular prohibition has also had implications for travelling wine lovers and wine professionals. Corkscrews are the tools of our trade, although admittedly not as deeply personalised as the batterie of knives that professional chefs are now precluded from taking on board with them, even on the briefest of trips.

I treasure a small but tough and effective plastic corkscrew that lives in my sponge bag. It is sheathed innocuously. The material does not set off any alarms. And I have had it so long that it, mysteriously, carries a long-forgotten

logo of British Telecom International.

But in my experience, the desire of wine producers the world over to transfer as many bottles as possible from their cellars to visiting wine writers remains largely unaffected by our new era of flying restrictions. This varies by region and by personality but Italians in general, as one might expect, are the most insistent that no visitor departs empty-handed. Our protestations about travelling with hand baggage only and the severe weight restrictions of some airlines fall on deaf ears. The important thing, as with Italians generally, is that generosity is manifested in all respects. Even if it means that the visitor has to leave the bottles behind in an airport lavatory.

Recommendations

WHITE

Dom Laguerre, Le Ciste 2006 Côtes du Roussillon
Tangy, smoky, a good value alternative to Le Soula Blanc from the dynamic Agly Valley. €12.50. www.1855.com

REDS

Ch Prieuré Borde-Rouge, Ange 2004 Corbières
Fully mature mountain wine – more pleasurable than Ch Lafite 1998, tasted the day before. £15.50 incl delivery, www.winehunters.co.uk

Les Clos Perdus, Cuvée 41 2006 Corbières Grenache
A Châteauneuf taste-alike with great character. £13.99. www.zelas.co.uk
Dom La Combe Blanche, Clos du Causse 2005 Minervois La Livinière
Fine, silky, age-worthy red selected by Brigitte Chevalier, ex Thunevin of St-Émilion. Contact www.chevalierins.fr

The professional quandary of being given too much wine is not, I realise, going to generate much sympathy with people who do not write about wine for a living, but perhaps those in other professions have come across the dilemma of being presented with other heavy and voluminous mementoes on their travels – gifts which it would be discourteous to refuse, yet highly inconvenient to take home on a flight. My heart sinks as rapidly as my arms whenever I am presented with the definitive illustrated monograph on such-and-such a wine region that will surely take me over my luggage limit.

It is not easy to fly with wine, even with it in checked-in baggage. Not only are they heavy, wine bottles are also more fragile than most other things sensibly packed in a suitcase, and even I find it hard to think of a bottle of red wine so precious that it is worth the risk of its leaking all over my clothes. On the rare occasions that I have flown with a bottle in a suitcase, I pack it in a polystyrene tube and swathe the whole thing with Sellotape. So far, so good. But polystyrene, the lightest and safest packaging material for any wine in the hold, is horribly difficult to recycle, and has a tendency to shed clingy white particles. Packing wine in a suitcase is a practice I adopt only in extremis such as travelling as an overseas judge at an Australian wine show where they persist, current flying restrictions notwithstanding, in the custom of expecting us to bring very serious bottles for consumption at judges' dinners (as if we needed them after tasting 200 wines a day).

Enough complaining. In the box (left) are wines I enjoyed on my recent holiday, and did not bring back in my luggage.

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