

**Client:** Tagus Creek  
**Source:** The Mail on Sunday (Live)  
**Date:** 11 November 2012  
**Page:** 37  
**Reach:** 1811463  
**Size:** 544cm2  
**Value:** 31464.96

  
Tagus Creek



## Olly Smith

# Don't fear the sommelier

**LUXURY, FINESSE AND** expertise come in all sorts of packages. It could be the latest in luxury cars, such as my recent carriage, the Jaguar XKR. Sommeliers are similar. Externally, they present a classy demeanour, but internally their minds are a whirring machine of expertise that's been expressly designed for one purpose: to make you happy.

If you're someone who loves the pleasure of good-value wine paired perfectly with the right dish, then sommeliers are your new best friends. But how can you get the best out of them, and what exactly is a sommelier?

Honesty is key. Tell your sommelier exactly how much you want to spend, or if you want to be discreet, point to the price of a bottle on the wine list and say, 'I was thinking of something around this mark.'

The best way to get value from a sommelier is to request wines from areas off the beaten track, such as Romania or Portugal, unusual varieties such as Italian Nero Di Troia, or even just plain old unfashionable, such as Muscadet (see left).

If you have a favourite wine it's a good idea to let the sommelier know so they can select a bottle that will appeal to your personal palate.

However, where they excel is with wines that pair beautifully with food. Sommeliers know the chef's dishes inside out and will have rehearsed which wines match the headline ingredients and textures.

Ronan Sayburn has just taken over at the Dorchester and explains: 'The challenge I look forward to most is to ensure each of the lists remains true to its means and is well-paired with the food being served.'

Ronan is a Jedi knight of the wine world: a Master Sommelier. A sommelier will have been trained to source wine, store it correctly, advise diners and help develop the wine list. A Master Sommelier is one of only 186 people worldwide who have passed the rigorous examination of the Court of Master Sommeliers.

Part of the job is to make sure the wine is in good condition (ie, not corked, volatile or tainted in any other way), and it's worth knowing that when they offer you the wine to taste, they aren't asking if you like it, merely that you accept it is in good condition. If the wine is in any way knackered, you can send it back and ask for a replacement of the same. You really only need to smell the wine to check, but by all means have a sip too.

If you really hate the wine, of course you should let the sommelier know so that they can get a better idea of what you might enjoy for your next glass.

And this is what it comes back to – serving wines by the glass. I serve all my wines in my bar the Glass House – all 32 of them – by the glass. It's the way forward that gives everyone the chance to explore a wider variety of vino without splashing out on a bottle every time.

When selecting a wine with a sommelier, never feel intimidated; seize the opportunity to have an honest and frank conversation about your meal, the budget and wines that you love.

Then revel in the elegance and luxury of the sommelier's expertise – which, unlike the latest Jaguar, costs you nothing. ■



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### Ask Olly...

#### Should we be worried about the words 'contains sulphites' on bottles of wine?

If you have a reaction, of course give that bottle a miss next time around. But sulphites have always been there. As well as being added to preserve wine, sulphites are a natural by-product of fermentation. The best advice I can give is to investigate 'natural' wines that aim to keep additives to a minimum.

### Wine news

Charlotte's Bistro in London's Chiswick already had a great wine list but has recently been revamped – and if you love your wine (and food, of course!) it should be on your list for its bold choices and great-value bottles as well as a

good few choices by the carafe or glass. I visited recently with my pal James Winter, my series producer on *Saturday Kitchen*, and we both gave it the big thumbs-up.  
[charlottes.co.uk](http://charlottes.co.uk)

### Wine Rules No. 27

If it's not right, take it back! If you buy a bottle of wine and it's faulty (corked, oxidised or otherwise tainted) return it to the shop and exchange it for another fresh bottle. I just opened a bottle of M&S Herbert Beaufort Grand Cru fizz and it's flat! Zero bubbles in top-notch Champagne just isn't on. Rest assured, I shall be asking for a fresh bottle – this fizz is too good to miss out on.



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**Paparuda Pinot Noir 2011 (Romania) £5.99, Wine Rack**  
Light-bodied red with a summery fruitiness of decent quality and amazingly good value. Thrilling to find such quality Pinot Noir for this outstanding price.



**Torre del Falco Nero di Troia 2010, Puglia (Italy) £7.99, Waitrose**  
A little-known grape variety that's soft, perfumed and exuberant. As at home as a kitchen table red with ratatouille or paired with Sunday roast pork; delicious and marvellous in equal measure.



**Tagus Creek Shiraz Trincadeira 2011 (Portugal) £5.98, Asda**  
Good value for a dark fruity Portuguese red with a jolt of spicy fragrance. Grab a hearty stew and this lip-smacking vino will be its best friend.



**Château de Cléray Muscadet de Sevre et Maine Sur Lie (France) On offer for £7.99 in Majestic (minimum purchase six assorted bottles)**  
Impeccably bright and invigorating wine, like a lemon harnessed to the power of the sun. Zing in a glass and splendid with shellfish.