

TASTE NOTES

Innovations, observations and reviews in the world of food and wine, by Joanna Simon

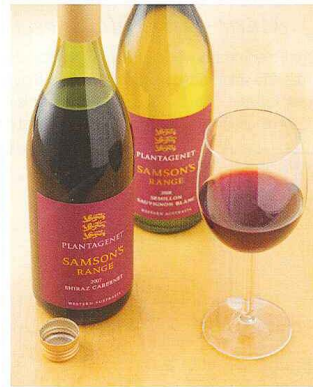


'Hot preservament' is the term coined by Jules & Sharpie for its jellies, chutneys, marmalade and jams, flavoured with Scotch bonnet chillies and made without additives, colourings, flavourings, salt or gluten. Jellies, such as hot pepper, hot mint, and hot apple and sage (pictured), are surprisingly versatile, while for chilli fanatics there is an uncompromising 'extremely hot pepper jelly'. I can also recommend the marmalade – perhaps for kick-starting teenagers in the morning. All cost £3.99 for a 340g jar. For mail order and stockists, call 01728-833955, or visit www.julesandsharpie.co.uk

Inevitably, the idea of portable porridge is Scottish, but Stoats, which started with porridge bars at festivals and farmers' markets, is expanding in the south, with porridge pots and porridge-oat bars. Raspberry and honey is the most popular flavour of the cereal bars, followed by goji berries and flaxseeds. The latest addition, by popular demand, is plain porridge. Four bars cost £5 by mail order; they are also sold in delicatessens and health-food outlets. For stockists and mail order, call 0131-657 9955, or visit www.eatstoats.co.uk



Wines of the month



It used to be said that Western Australia produced less than 5 per cent of Australia's wine but received 20 per cent of the publicity – an exaggeration perhaps, but indicative of the quality and distinctive character of wines produced on this side of the continent. These two, with screw caps to preserve freshness, have recently arrived in Waitrose. Plantagenet Samson's Range Shiraz/Cabernet 2007 is a full-bodied but elegant red, with liquoricey, berry fruit. £7.99. Plantagenet Samson's Range Semillon/Sauvignon 2008 is a lively, unoaked white in which the Sauvignon gives zesty, grapefruit and gooseberry flavours and the Semillon lends roundness. £7.99.



Single estate counts for a lot in wine, but rarely applies to cognac because most cognac is blended by the big houses. For the same reason, few labels show an age or vintage. Family distillers do exist, however, making pure, unblended cognacs that they can date accurately. Brandy Classics specialises in these and has more than 20 in its Hermitage collection – all Grand Cru and free of the sugar syrups and caramels used in large-scale production. Prices range from around £28 for a five-year-old to over £1,000 for a 1900 vintage. For more information and mail order, call 01225-863988, or visit www.brandyclassics.com

The new School of Artisan Food, on the Welbeck estate in Nottinghamshire, is ideal for honing traditional cooking and preparation skills. Courses include cheese-making, butchery – such techniques as preparing a three-bird roast and making hand-raised pies – brewing, French and Italian bread-making, and much else. Prices range from £65 for a half day to £585 for a five-day course. For more information, including recommended local accommodation, call 01909-532171, or visit www.theschoolofartisanfood.org. If you are more taken with the idea of making fashionable French macarons, it is one of many options at L'atelier des Chefs in London. The two-hour course costs £72. For further information, call 020-7499 6580, or visit www.atelierdeschefs.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHS: LIS PARKINS