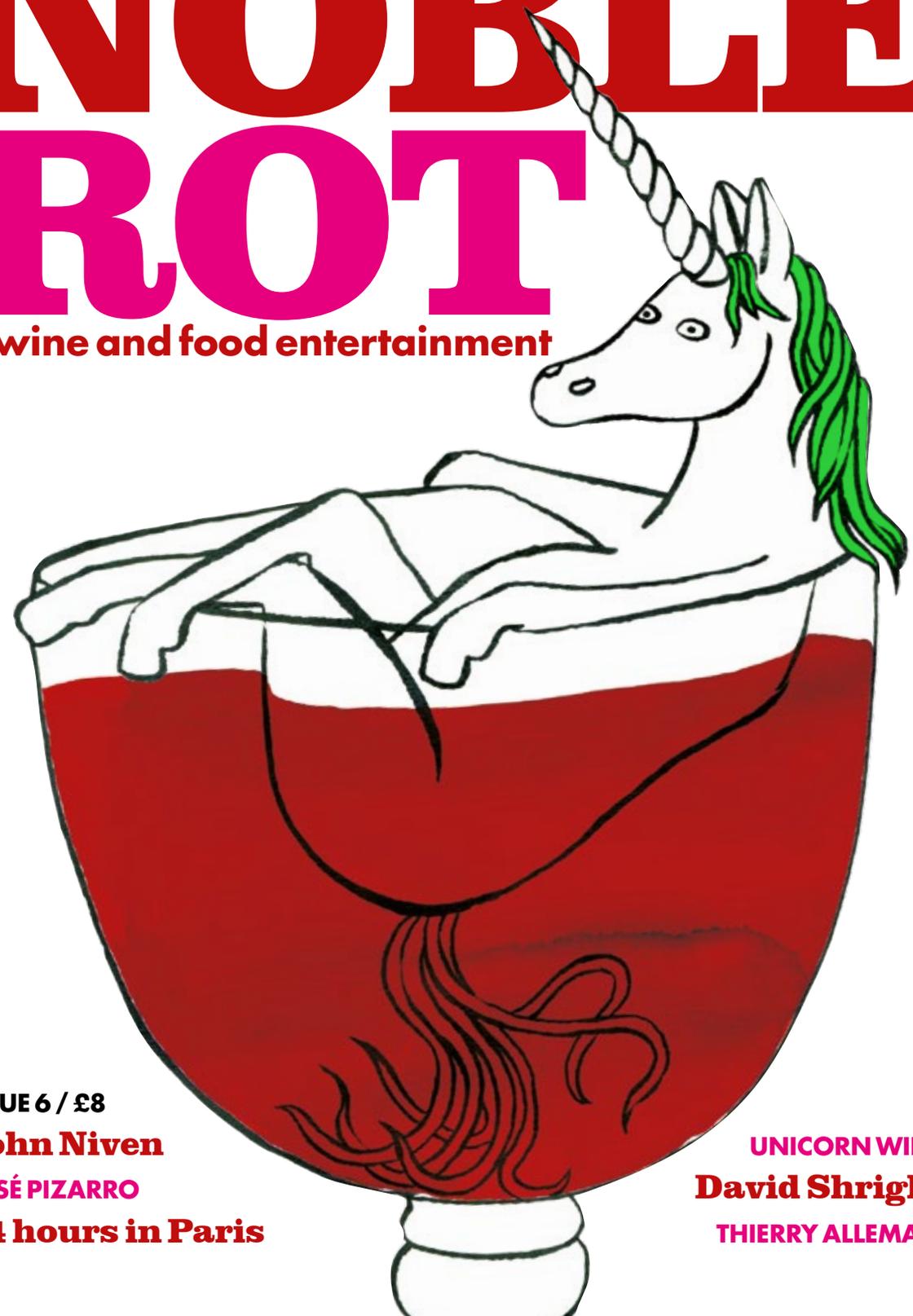


# NOBLE ROT

A wine and food entertainment



ISSUE 6 / £8

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# Wine List Man vs Inverted Snob

## 'Here, you take the wine list, you know about wine...'

Words by Zeren Wilson

Illustrations by Jose Mendez

**T**his seemingly harmless sentence is uttered in restaurants throughout the land during every service, typically aimed at the table's self-professed connoisseur of the grape. If that person is you, then you'll know that when that list is expectantly thrust towards you, the

pressure is on. Do you really know about wine? Or is all your swaggering braggadocio about to be mercilessly skewered by the secret wine buff in your midst? Who knows – you certainly don't. Buckle up, head down, start scanning. (Don't mess this up, whatever you do, do not mess this up...)

For some people, having the wine list pushed in their direction will fill them with a little frisson of pleasure, a tiny ripple of pride, the chest puffed out just a tad (yeah, check me out, I'm all over this), with the opportunity to parade wine knowledge (real or fantasy) providing an unmissable and thoroughly enjoyable moment of one-upmanship.

Lately, however, the restaurant wine bore/snob has come under threat. The old knee-jerk certainties of safety and comfort on a wine list are sometimes frighteningly absent amongst the rash of new London restaurant openings (Where's my Sancerre? Where's the bloody Chablis? Where are you hiding the sodding Claret?) Pipe down Wine List Man, just have a chat with your friendly wine waiter; they won't bite (hard). In the wake of the continuing industry conversation regarding 'natural' wine, sommeliers and wine buyers have developed a tendency for compiling funky styles of vino and obscure grape





varietals into a list that will leave the traditionalist floundering — it's not Lucozade mate, it's an orange wine, yeah?

Wine lists in London now sparkle and gleam with renewed lustre, fairy dust sprinklings of rarely seen varietals increasingly adding to the colour and texture of the roster: Vespaiolo elbows out a Sauvignon Blanc; Schioppettino kicks another Merlot in the nether regions. It's good, of course it's all good, and encourages conversation and engagement with whomever is pouring your wine. The danger is that reverse snobbery may take the place, at times, of the usual connoisseurial snootiness.

The messianic fervour of some champions of the 'natural' wine movement has done plenty of good for the wine industry 'chat' in general, but sometimes the proseletysing and tub-thumping veers into its own kind of inverted condescension: a rictus grin that oozes a holier-than-thou smugness that can grate just as abrasively as Wine List Man. As sommeliers and wine buyers we should remember to keep a check on our own highfalutin ideas and wine prejudices. But it's difficult; man can it be difficult.

The whole ritual of ordering wine in a restaurant can still make me cringe sometimes, for reasons even I don't fully understand. Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing — apart from choosing a bottle of grape juice from amongst a list of other bottles of grape juice. This is where

**“The whole ritual of ordering wine in a restaurant can still make me cringe sometimes, for reasons even I don't fully understand.”**

the blissful freedom of the BYO venue comes gloriously to the rescue: bring your bottles, plonk them on the table, get them open, then go about the much more important (and enjoyable) business of choosing what to order for lunch. Another welcome benefit is that you'll be sucking down some wine within seconds of taking your seat.

Back to the initial dilemma of the wine list. The bottle you have bravely chosen arrives. You taste it. It is correct and healthy, but boring. You smile and nod — “It's great, cheers,” — then simmer in quiet discontent for the rest of the bottle. You're annoyed mainly with yourself for being such an idiot and not choosing the wine you know well because you wanted to try something new. If the crowd you are dining with are wine ingénues, you've escaped; you're probably safe. If there's a whiff of wine trade there, you may have just knocked a few points off your reputation. Well done. At other times you

may emerge bathed in glory like a returning warrior with a haul of gold and a dragon's head in your treasure sack. I'm personally still feeling warm and fuzzy from the memory of plucking out Walter Schug's 'Sonoma Coast' Chardonnay at Beast restaurant in London; I received such a rapturous response from the table I might as well have just transmogrified water into Grand Cru Burgundy in front of them.

It also happened to be a scintillating match with the King Crab which was served, and with that the crowd roared and rose to their feet, chanting my name, as I rode off into the sunset with the girl, the money, the knighthood and the magical amulet. That night, the Californian wine gods had truly delivered.

So there we have it; the glory is there to be seized, but dare you roll the dice?

“Here, you know your wine, choose something...” — Nah, thanks, I'm drinking beer.