

The rise & rise of London wine bars

Whether you're a local or a visitor, you're never far from a great glass of wine in London. Matt Walls lists his top 10 destinations, and the five best outside the capital

Photographs: Louis Fernando, 28°-50°; John Carey (2)



MEETING UP FOR a drink with friends is central to London life. Once that surely meant a pint of beer, but increasingly it implies a glass of wine. The capital has seen net closures of 100 pubs a year between 2008 and 2012. Wine bars, though far fewer in number, are flourishing. I counted more than 50 worth visiting while researching The London Wine Guide, with newcomers popping up all the time.

The UK foodie revolution shows no sign of abating, and increasingly we want to eat while we're out drinking with friends. The food situation is improving in many pubs, but compared to wine bars it can still be basic or stodgy. And whatever the craft beer camp would have us believe, we all know that it's wine that works best with food.

The modern wine bar is not tied to tradition like other drinking hangouts. Owners are free to create something original and unique. A new generation of fearless wine entrepreneurs are applying their experience of bars in other countries to the London scene – a city where sourcing the rare, mature and esoteric is relatively easy. Whether you have a thirst for Sherry, Champagne, natural or fine wine, you'll find a huge variety to choose from, with something to suit every taste.

If you're a committed wine lover, the bar is the perfect place to drink – increasing numbers of forward-thinking proprietors work on a flat cash margin per bottle basis rather than a percentage margin like most restaurants, meaning the more expensive wines are relatively attainable. And who can handle three courses every night anyway? Save the calories, and the bill, for the wine.

I've chosen 10 bars which reflect the contemporary London wine bar scene. But it's changing all the time. There's never been a better time to be a wine lover in London.

Have we got it right? Email editor@decanter.com and let us know your favourite wine bars and why



28°-50°

www.2850.co.uk

Originally a single site in Holborn, 28°-50° is now a chain of three chic bars managed by Master Sommelier Xavier Rousset, co-owner of Michelin-starred Texture. The Maddox Street site is convenient for Central London, and features a bar on the ground floor and a restaurant offering French cuisine in the basement. Each site has a selection of 30 wines available by the glass, carafe or bottle, supplemented by a 'Collectors List' of reasonably priced fine and rare bottles – such as Bodegas Roda's Roda 1, Rioja Reserva 2005 for £69.

José

www.josepizarro.com/restaurants/jose

Have ever a wine's fortunes turned around so rapidly as Sherry's? There are now a dozen Sherry bars in London (Capote y Toros, Pepito, Drakes Tabanco, Morito, Trangallán...), but José is the pick of the bunch. 'My customers tell me they come away from an evening at José feeling as though they have been in Spain,' says owner José Pizarro, and you can see why. It's a lively, bustling corner bar serving an excellent range of Sherries by the glass alongside terrific tapas. Don't miss Lustau's González Obregón Amontillado del Puerto at £7 a glass. >

Above: José Pizarro, chef and owner of José (above left), enjoys one of the excellent range of Sherries he offers by the glass

Top: the Marylebone branch of 28°-50°, like its sister sites, offers 30 wines by the glass

Opposite page: since it opened a year ago, Sager + Wilde (see review overleaf) in Hackney has established itself as the London wine bar to beat

New Street Wine Shop

www.newstreetwineshop.co.uk

The first to fully dissolve the boundaries between shop, bar and restaurant, this is a fairly small space but it's smartly designed. Choose a bottle from the shelves to take away, drink in for £8 corkage, buy by the glass, or sample top-end wines from the Enomatics. The range concentrates on European classics, with a good range of grower Champagnes. A playground for wine lovers.

Sager + Wilde

www.sagerandwilde.com

Sager + Wilde is a small, urban bar that attracts a younger crowd. It may be in trendy East London but you'd be wrong to assume it's all about natural wines; expect big names instead. There's little under £40 a bottle, but great value to be had as you go down the list. How about a glass of Clos des Papes 1998 for £12.50? A bottle of Eben Sadie's Palladius 2009 for £55? Or Clape's Cornas 1983 for £115? A year old in September, Sager + Wilde has established itself as the one to beat. Small plates, cheeses and charcuterie available. A second branch, Mission, opens in Bethnal Green this September.

The Quality Chop House

www.thequalitychophouse.com

As the son of Jancis Robinson MW, Will Lander must have felt a certain weight of expectation upon opening a wine bar. And he hasn't let the side down with his list: 125 wines, 16 by the glass, most between £25 and £60, with a couple of dozen more top-end bottles if you deserve it. No specific focus, but a well-chosen selection just on the right side of esoteric, such as Robert Weil's Kiedricher Gräfenberg Riesling Spätlese 2005 for £57. The food is very good, consisting of traditional and modern British dishes and small plates.

Terroirs

www.terroirswinebar.com

The opening of Terroirs in 2008 was a milestone in London's wine scene. It was the first to embrace the wilder fringes of natural wine, and to offer excellent food alongside it. More than 200 wines range from £17 to £180, 20 of which are by the glass, with a strong leaning towards France and Italy. Terroirs has spawned a number of offshoots around the city (Green Man & French Horn, Soif, Brawn, Toasted), all of which are well worth a visit.

The Remedy

www.theremedylondon.com

Barely a year old, The Remedy is an understated bar just 15 minutes' walk from Oxford Circus. The wine list is a thing of dreams, packed with the interesting, the characterful and the curious; both natural and conventional, Old World and New World. There's a solid selection of fine and rare treats from £50 to £100, but lots to choose from between £30 and £40, and several by the glass. Try Suertes del Marqués' stunning Trenzado 2012 from Tenerife for £43. They also offer simply prepared food focusing on quality British produce.



Above: the wine list at The Remedy is 'a thing of dreams'

Top: Vagabond's half shop, half bar is a popular hangout with wine lovers

Vagabond

www.vagabondwines.co.uk

Another wine hangout that's somewhere between a bar and a shop, Vagabond has walls lined with tasting machines so you can buy or try an exciting and ever-evolving selection of 100 wines. The original Fulham site has now been joined by a more central one near Tottenham Court Road. Plates of cheese and cured meats will stave off any hunger.

Verden

www.verdenE5.com

The newest on our list, Verden opened in June 2014 in deepest Hackney. Firmly in the contemporary vein, the bar is somewhere between Japanese and Scandinavian in design – open and airy upstairs, warm and sleek downstairs. There are 150 wines on the list: they start at £18 and rise to £190 but most are priced between £30 and £45, with 30 available by the glass. The pricing is keen: Emidio Pepe's



'The new generation of modern London wine bars can be traced back to September 2005'



Above: Terroirs was the first wine bar to embrace natural wine – with excellent food alongside

Above left: Verden takes its charcuterie seriously

Top: New Street Wine Shop is a true 'playground for wine lovers'

Vinoteca Farringdon

www.vinoteca.co.uk

The new generation of modern London wine bars can be traced back to September 2005 with this branch of Vinoteca in Farringdon. It was the first to offer wines to take away as well as to drink in, just like an Italian enoteca. It's a small, simply decorated square room, always busy thanks to the inclusive atmosphere and quality of the wine list – not to mention the bistro-style food. There are nearly 300 wines, ranging from £16 to £189 to drink in, with 20 available by the glass. Try the Berres' Urzinger Würzgarten Riesling Auslese 1994 for £47.25, or £27.50 to take away. There are now four branches across London; expect a fifth in 2015. **D**

Writer and author Matt Walls is a contributor to Decanter and editor of The London Wine Guide <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/the-london-wine-guide/id859974239>

Best five outside London

Divino Enoteca, Edinburgh

www.divinoedinburgh.com



Stylishly designed Italian restaurant and wine bar in the heart of Edinburgh. More than 200 bottles from £19 to £690, mostly Italian, with 32 available by the glass or sample from Enomatic machines.

Live music, outside courtyard, good food; a slick operation with lots for the wine lover to enjoy.

Flinty Red, Bristol

www.flintyred.co.uk

Flinty Red is a small, informal wine bar and restaurant situated in Clifton, near to independent merchant and sister business Corks of Cotham. A tight but intriguing and well-priced selection of wines, mostly Old World, with many available by the glass. Be sure to try the food.

Ten Green Bottles, Brighton

www.tengreenbottles.com

Ten Green Bottles is an airy space in central Brighton where you can buy to take away from their range of more than 200 wines, drink a bottle in for £5 corkage, or choose something by the glass. Many wines are imported directly so expect a unique range.



1855, Oxford

www.1855oxford.com

Managed by aspiring Master of Wine Alistair Cooper, 1855 is the wine bar Oxford has long been waiting for. Centrally located within the historic Oxford Castle quarter, it has a thrilling list of more than 150 wines, with 25 available by the glass and a range of decent small plates to accompany them.

Loki, Birmingham

www.lokiwine.co.uk



Situated in the smart Great Western Arcade, Loki Wines is a small independent merchant with an excellent, fairly priced selection of wines. Upstairs is a quiet, comfortable room if you can't wait

until you get home to pop the cork. There are further wines by the glass, bar snacks and 24 wines in Enomatic machines to keep you entertained.