



LITTLE POMONA
ORCHARD & CIDER



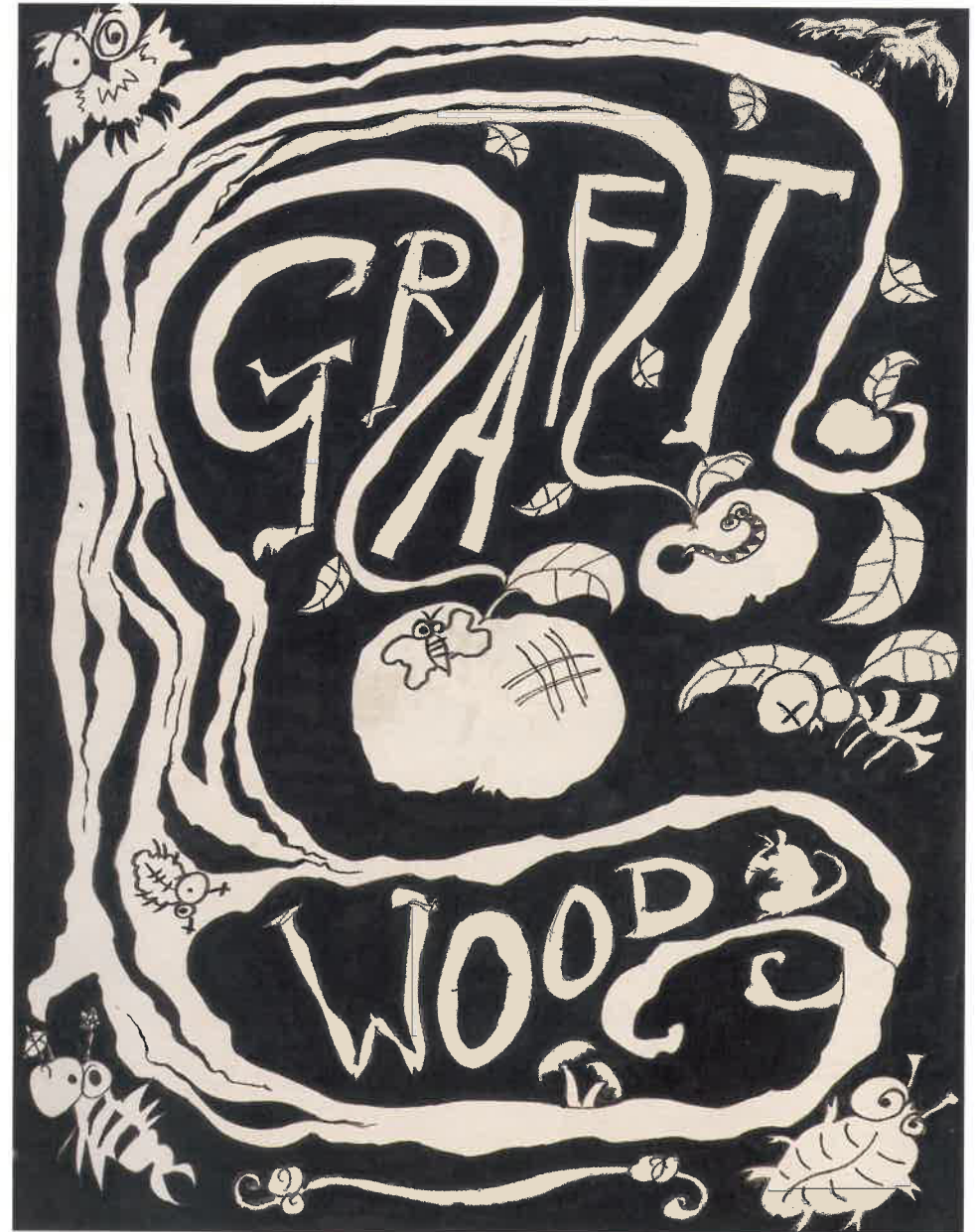
I never really liked Champagne anyway...

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GRAFTWOOD

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RETHINKING CIDER

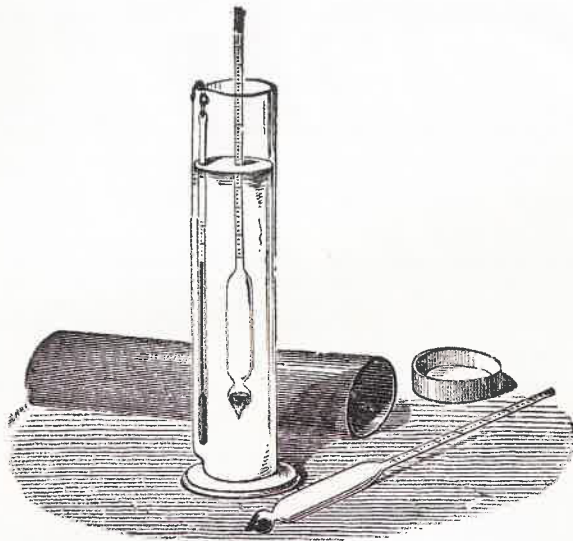


FIG. 36. MUSTIMÈTRE SALLERON PLONGÉ DANS LE MOÛT AVEC THERMOMÈTRE POUR LA CORRECTION DE TEMPÉRATURE.

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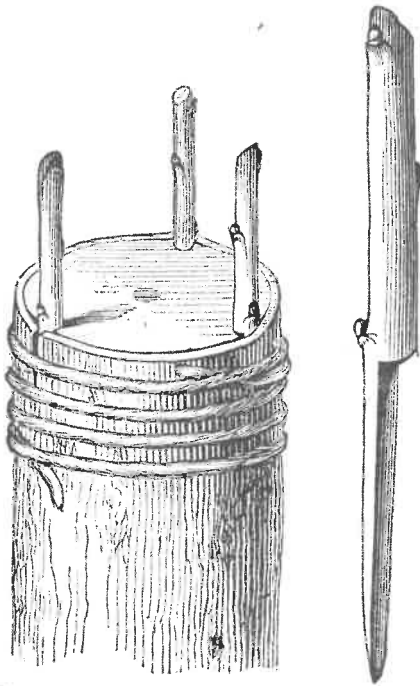
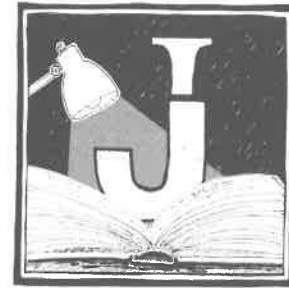


Fig. 4. — Greffe en couronne.

Editorial



ames and I are so grateful to all of you who have subscribed, read and enjoyed Graftwood. The welcome this magazine has received has warmed our hearts. It is our intention that by adding this little book to the world of cider that, each time an article is written and each time it is read, this world becomes a little richer and all of us as a community move a little closer.

This pressing-time issue is about paying attention to the world outside of cider and learning from what we find. Our contributors come mainly from other fields, but they are all individuals who share a deep love for cider. By listening to their unique perspectives, we can better understand the cider that we make, and aim higher. In Martin Berkeley's case, it was travelling and experiencing a different cider culture that prompted his latest aspirational cider experiments. Thus it is fitting that we have our first European contribution, by Haritz Rodriguez, who advocates for 'cider without borders'.

Sharing ideas and stories to create a better future for cider is Graftwood's simple objective. It is from being open and generous with each other that Cider will move closer to perfection.

After all, don't we all enjoy a bottle more when we pour someone else's glass first?

Albert Johnson



Moments de biens au ciel par-

**If it seems that I love
harvest time, well, that's
because I do, and that's why
I keep coming back year
after year.**

Picking Apples is Good for the Soul

By Rod Graham

If you care about full juice, natural cider, if you think that reviving the ancient British tradition of cider making is an important and worthwhile goal, then you should consider finding a small producer and volunteering to help with the harvest.

You'll learn a good deal about how your glass of craft cider ends up in front of you ready to be enjoyed. You'll learn far more than you need to about apple varieties — even better, you'll get to taste cider apples, which, given how tart or bitter or mouth-shreddingly tannic they can be, will make the delicious liquid in your glass seem even more magical.

More importantly you'll spend time out in the open air becoming intimately acquainted with the place where cider starts from. I certainly don't mean to conjure up some romantic notion of the nobility of physical labour; after all, it's backbreaking work, to be bent over all day picking. But craft cider's a convivial, welcoming world, and cider makers will tell you that volunteers bring a fresh point of view to things, so you'll not just make new friends, you'll influence them too. And if, like me, you spend your working days mostly staring at and cursing computers, then to be outside engaged in the ancient human practice of harvesting apples is wonderful.

So here, to whet your appetite for the picking, is one volunteer's impressionistic description of the harvest. If it seems that I love harvest time, well, that's because I do, and that's why I keep coming back year after year.



Rural Herefordshire, not much more than an hour from Birmingham and the still-bustling heart of the industrial revolution, seems like a far more remote, lost place.

Driving along the narrow lanes, every car you encounter is a surprise. The well-kempt farms aren't busy with people and even the sheep and cattle always seem to be far off in the distance, never close at hand.

Big old houses, nearly always red brick, except for the few wood and wattle remnants. Big old red houses, tidy or a bitty ramshackle, but never really ruined or dishevelled. Big old houses quietly radiating hundreds of years of well-kempt, good maintenance.

Fields and farms and climbing hills and stands of trees, oak and beech and birch and plane and holly and hawthorn and chestnut and pine plantations dark behind, away to the top of the hills.

And everywhere there are orchards, vast tidy rows of dwarf trees, tightly pruned until they're almost hedges, or straggling scruffy orchards, old boughs resting on the ground, cracking ancient lichenous twigs crowding together. Even, occasionally, distant sightings of ancient giants striding across a far hill, 200 or 300-year-old perry pear trees, 60 or 80 feet tall.

I'm making my annual visit to Little Pomona to help my friends James and Susanna with the harvest, and as we drive west and deeper into the autumn countryside, I can feel myself slowing down and relaxing, adapting myself to the rhythms of the gentle English autumn.

October is damp and mild. Or sunny, bright, and cold. And sometimes of an afternoon the sun really warms you, until you sit for a cup of coffee and the sly autumn chill creeps in, reminding you that the end of the year really is rolling away towards winter. The soft hills, gentle waves fading away to the hazy horizon, are dressed in brown-yellow, and orange-yellow, and brown-orange.

At night the silence is certainly not absolute, but the few noises – a cow shouting, some machine or other clanking briefly to life – make it all the deeper. It stops and slows the thoughts, bringing a peace, a relaxed, slower way of going. You walk more slowly, purposeful but not hurrying.



In the morning neighbour Sally comes over; she's helping pick today, one of a cheerful ever-changing crew of friends and neighbours and visiting cider enthusiasts from all over the world who drop in for

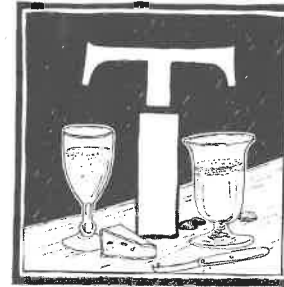
a day or a week to help with the harvest. We gather up a clutter of equipment into the trailer and head off round the back of the hill to today's orchard. Joey the spaniel sits tall in the back of the cab, alert for his mortal enemy, partridge and pheasant.

We start with the windfalls – always the windfalls! – sifting through the wet grass, feeling the apples as much as seeing them, and always missing some, or only finding some when we stand on them or twist a foot or ankle.

We lift one or two apples at a time, picking them all off the ground. Turning each apple, throwing away the green or the scabbed or the worm pierced or those cut by the fall. Not many of the hardy Dabinetts, but Ellis Bitter and the mysterious butter white eggs – Norman Something? – they go that way in their scores and hundreds.

James explains that it's important to weed out and discard any fruit with punctured or broken skins to ensure that the juice is clean and free of taint or infections like acetobacter, which might in time lend an acetic note to the resultant cider. For the same reason, dirty fruit is also thrown away.

The best way to make good, clean cider is to start with clean, undamaged fruit. As James says, "The best cider is made in the orchard, not in the cidery"



here's a rhythm to repeating the same painstaking process of pick-and-turn and chuck-or-keep, grabbing

everything in reach then shuffle up on knees over hidden painful bony pebble-apples to the next spot. The conversation meanders in and out as we pick, everything from the variety we think we might be picking to what we're having for lunch (cake!), to the remarkable resemblance of certain apples to a well-formed bottom.

This painstaking winnowing of the windfalls may seem extreme – described as "like filling the well with snow" by American cidemaker Edwin Winzeler – but it's typical of the lengths to which the new wave of producers will go. Whatever it takes to capture the flavour of the fruit and the place it comes from.

Once the windfalls are cleared it's time to lay out tarpaulins. As we make slow formal movements through thick grass on tricky slopes like a mediaeval dance, the wind pokes its unexpected snoot under the edges of the bright blue tarp, sending us running for buckets and crates to pin it down. The tarps keep the fruit off the muddy ground and make it much easier to see the apples.

And then it's out with the panking poles, twelve and eight foot lengths of thick bamboo tipped with cast iron hooks. Those of us on pole duty are walking round the tree staring up into the branches, then threading the pole past thickets of overgrown unpruned old twigs, and balls

of mistletoe like giant dandelion clocks.

Why? To hook onto a Goldilocks branch, neither thick nor thin, and step back to lean into the pole, then tugging, jerk jerk jerk!, the furthest end branches whip-flailing and throwing apples far into the long grass, then a moment later the irregular thrumming patter of apples on tarp, like heavy raindrops at the start of a rainstorm.

A pause, then jerk jerk jerk! Fewer apples this time. We circle around the tree and find another branch to glide the hook over to jerk jerk jerk!, and again the thrumming pattering apples running into folds and rivulets of fruit.

The highest branches call for the ladder, a monstrous Eiffel Tower-shaped contraption of stamped aluminium (DO NOT OVERREACH!) which brings us level with the lower canopy, heads pushing through hobbit-like to the sunlit upper crown where every apple seems to be perfect and ripe. Here the shaking is trickier, the twitching of the ladder as we do indeed overreach reminding us that we're six feet up on an uneven slope with spiky branches awaiting any slip.

The harder pickers start collecting the fruit even as the panking continues, even though the risk of an apple to the head is high. You hardly need fear Dabinetts, being as small as they are, but an Ellis Bitter or Foxwhelp is an altogether scarier proposition; some of them can easily reach 400 grams. The fruit flies in such profusion that sometimes the pickers don't notice a hit, until, hours later, reaching into a pocket they pull out not a plum or a handkerchief, but a little green cherry of an apple.

Even with the fearless pickers working underneath the falling fruit to try and speed up the process the harvesting can't really be rushed, and a good half hour passes by in shaking and collecting before the tree is done, and 75 or 100 or – glory be – 150 kg of apples are stacked in boxes for the reverse tour of the orchard at day's end. And then it's onto the next one. Starting, of course, with the damned windfalls.

As the sun slides down the orchard over the hedge, the cold creeps into my toes.

The apples have the cold in them too, beautiful bony little dark red Dabinetts, the dark red of old blood and cursed rubies, beautiful enough for Snow White.

So gradually the stack of boxes grows, and the sun slowly creeps round the hill and sinks out of sight, and the light gradually fades until the gloaming and the need to pee and hunger and the desire for strong coffee declare, "enough!"

We unwind the day's progress through the orchard, trudging from tree to stack to tree to stack. At each tree we load the trailer with boxes of fragrant apples, and along the way we gather up the wandering dog and panking poles and tarps and buckets and picnic debris and drive slowly home, along the meandering lanes, around the curves of the gentle landscape. Looping around farms and fields, glimpsing the orange-pink

Rod Graham sells more spirits than wine these days, but still thinks of himself as a vintner. He has strong opinions about flavour and occasionally writes some of them down. He eats far too much cheese, on the pretext of "food matching", and heartily endorses Brillat-Savarin's opinion of dinners which fail to include cheese. He recently composed a list of his top five favourite breakfasts (three of which include cheese), to be published in spring 2020. You'll find him on twitter (@rodbodtoo) subtweeting other boozehounds.

sunset on the further hills, to unload our day's gatherings into the apple store, sweet, perfumed and ripe.

And finally we take ourselves weary into the kitchen to cook and drink last year's cider, or the year before's, and talk over the day or just talk, until weary and dropping we slip away to bed to sleep the sound deep sleep of the country quiet.

And on the morrow to do it all again, until the stack of boxes reaches high and far enough to fill a tank with fresh pressed juice.



And THAT, my friends, is why you should find a cider maker in need of pickers. Picking the apples, doing the repetitive, careful work of gathering the fruit which will make next year's or the year after's cider, connects you with the "golden fire" like nothing else can. Every glass you ever drink again, you'll be carried back to the fruit and the orchard, and your soul will be soothed.

So reach out on Twitter, or talk to friends who've done it, or send that email, and go for a morning, or a day, or a weekend. And next year, or the year after, when you're tasting the cider that YOU HELPED TO MAKE, @ me on twitter – @rodbodtoo – and tell me how much better it tastes. You're welcome.



The apples have the cold in them too, beautiful bony little dark red Dabinetts, the dark red of old blood and cursed rubies, beautiful enough for Snow White.



**“For every question,
the answer is cheese”.**

For Those that look

By Sam Wilkin



At the inaugural Cider Salon in Bristol in 2018 I had the pleasure of chatting to Ryan

Burk, he of the American behemoth Angry Orchard and erstwhile collaborator with the mighty Tom Oliver. He said something that stayed with me, “For every question, the answer is cheese”. We were talking about cider and food pairing and I couldn’t have agreed more.

There is more to cooking and eating than the scientific interaction of molecules on a plate. Narrative, romance, people, place, terroir and history form an integral part of the sensory experience when we indulge in something delicious. It was romance then that drew me to a pairing that has become a professional passion, cheese and cider.

For me it began, as it does for many, in traditional hospitality with cheese and wine, that pillar of the establishment, that serious degustation of continental cuisine. The delicate interplay of tannin and fruit with fat and salt, a truly wondrous pairing when done right. One of the greats – a rich, mildly oxidative Savagnin wine from the Jura, with its hint of oak, paired with a richly nutty, caramel Comté, king of French cheeses. This was the experience that really

turned me on to the possibilities of pairing, that glorious combination being somehow even more delicious than the sum of its exalted parts. It was a kind of magic.

I wanted to discover a world less rarefied, a democratisation of flavour, and I found cheese and beer comparable in so many ways. The injection of heat to kick start fermentation, the key cereal ingredient of the beer creating a gluten base for the milk fats – bread and cheese in other words. I will remember an unapologetically effective combination – a punchy, alcoholic Imperial Porter with all its sweetness and forceful figgy flavour pairing with a piece of rich, salty Stilton in front of a roaring log fire. The Christmas presents are wrapped, the tree is lit and a storm rages outside. Snow drifts against my little London terrace, a warmly alcoholic bosom away from the troubles of the world...

And there we go, I’m off. It’s a hot, sticky day in August as I write and yet I am transported to a time that has definitely become embellished by memory.

I wax romantic and I suppose that’s my point. Flavour is so very evocative.

I grew up in the Kent countryside and I remember long hot summers playing in the orchard of my grandparents' house, ducking into the cool shade of the front room to catch up on the latest crushing Test* defeat or to leaf through a mildewed National Geographic from the 60s.

I remember too munching on supermarket cheddar, Mighty White sandwiches, with my plimsolls stained with the tannic, apple-skin smell of windfalls, as they gently buzzed with the last of the summer's wasps. I was too young for cider but old enough that these memories left a gentle groove in my memory.

British cheese and cider live for me in that groove. When I taste them, I am always transported to the place of their conception, the British countryside. From farmhouse products that were created to bring sustenance and pleasure to the farm-folk to the modern day where they sit proudly alongside their continental cousins on drinks lists and cheeseboards at great urban eateries. Cheese and cider regardless of setting take me away and take me back.

It's not just my romantic soul that persuades me that cheese and cider is such a great pairing. The wonderful thing about cider, and I'm going to include perry in the category as I would in a tasting, is that it ranges from the crisp acidity of Eastern counties culinary apple cider to the rich caramel, tannic mouthfuls of the West – something for everybody and every cheese.

When choosing wine to pair with a cheeseboard most people reach for a bottle of red.

Sadly, red wine, for all its velvety comfort, is often a terrible pairing with most cheese.

Generally, the fuller flavour will flatten most cheese varieties - too much tannin, too mouthy, too big. In wine terms a full-bodied white, like a lightly oaked Chardonnay, is the best cross-board match.

Beer on the other hand, is generally too full flavoured a category to pair effectively with cheese. Some of the bolder cheeses work fantastically with a Belgian Trippel but generally we lose the nuance.

So for me then, when it comes to pairing cheese, cider has it all. When the question includes cheese, the only answer is cider.

When selecting any beverage to pair with cheese you are looking for two styles of combination, the complementary and the contrasting.

The complementary pairing is a category that tends towards the lighter, delicate end of the spectrum, say for example a fresh lactic Goat's cheese, with its citrus notes, crisp flintiness and light fluffy texture on the tongue. I look for a drink that picks up these notes – good acidity, some minerality, a little sweetness. The classic wine would be a fresh zesty Sancerre paired with a Loire goat's

cheese, but in the world of cider, I often reach for a crisp Herefordshire perry, where there is a mineral quality, good acidity and a touch of perfume it balances any saltiness – it's a perfect pairing.

On the other side of the country, I could also happily reach for a puckering, grown up pétillant naturel with its gentle foam playing with the creaminess in the cheese and starting a gorgeous flirtation on the palate.

The contrasting pairing is one of big, brash flavour, it is also the style that seems to draw the biggest positive response from the taster. We are talking flavours that sit at either end of the spectrum, salt and sweet. The best for me is a deeply savoury, salty blue paired with an achingly sweet ice cider. Or maybe there is an opportunity to investigate the dark arts of keeving with all those natural fruit sugars bouncing around, tustling with the salt and creating taste nirvana!

These categories are necessarily extreme because I'm making a point. In reality pairing flavour is best approached as an amalgam of complementary and contrasting, particularly with cheeses that sit somewhere in the middle. Sometimes we want some sweetness to contrast with the salt in all cheese, but there can also be some complementary tart fruitiness to match up with the acidity. Cider covers so

much ground in terms of flavour profile as it moves from the light, dry and floral, all the way to the sweet, caramel mouth coaters. There is a cider for every occasion.

Something too that should be touched on is texture and mouthfeel. There is a reason we select a big tannic red wine to go with a fat-marbled rib-eye steak and it's not because we are city traders who have just sealed the deal of the century. It's because of the interplay between tannins (that wonderfully

astrigent polyphenol that comes from the skins, the wood, the leaves, the bits and pieces in winemaking) and the fatty protein in the beef. One coats our mouth with a slick fat the other strips it away revealing the umami in the beef and the fruit in the wine. The same is true in cheese and cider.

Hard cheese is about 1/3 fat, there's no getting round it this is not a health food, but

it's the fat and the way it interacts with a highly tannic cider apple such as a Dabinett or a Somerset Redstreak that makes this a dance not just of flavour but of texture too. This is where cheese and cider sings!

Cheese and cider don't just sit happily together on a table, they also bear close comparison in their wider industries. Cheesemakers much like cider producers range from small scale artisan through to large factory units pumping out low grade, big margin products with eyes firmly on the



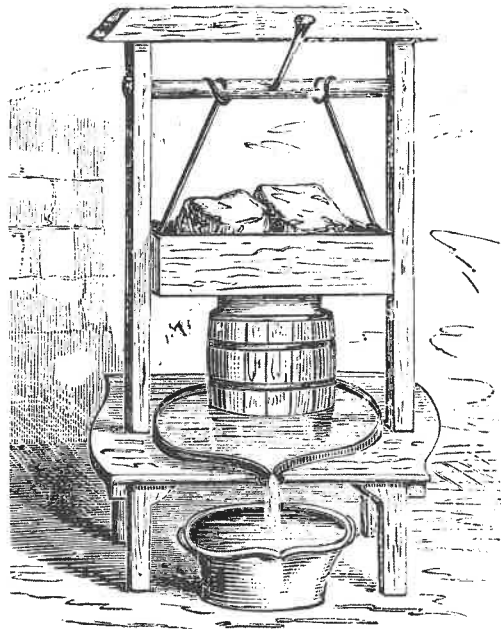
bottom line. British cheese producers fall into three categories, farmhouse, artisan and creamery.

Farmhouse producers make the cheese from the earth up. Jonny Crickmore of Fen Farm Dairy in Suffolk once said to me, “you can’t make good cheese with shit milk”. Jonny closely manages his land and in fact when he began his cheesemaking adventure he culled out his entire herd of Holstein Friesians (basically low quality, high yield milk monsters) and replaced them with the continental Montbéliarde, producing very high-quality milk with much lower yields, specifically for cheesemaking.

There is a definite parallel here with orchard-based cider makers, those that effectively make their cider in the orchard. These are food and drink producers with their roots quite literally in the earth, and producers who make in this style can feel comfortable talking in terms of terroir, now no longer a term reserved for the world of wine.

Artisan producers buy their milk from a trusted source, usually a single herd run by a local farmer. Artisans often don’t command sufficient buying power to have the final say on the breed and care of the herd, so their relationship with the farmer is key.

Dave Jowett of King Stone Dairy in the Cotswolds (currently relocating to Gloucestershire) has a hospitality background, he is not of farming stock and his craft begins in the cheese making room. Dave reminds me of those cider makers that source their apples from other’s orchards. They work with what they are given and, in many ways, express their craft in the blending of disparate fermented



single varieties. Most if not all cheesemakers who operate as artisan producers are not from a farming background, I know of ex-chemists, musicians, chefs and a philosophy lecturer who make excellent cheese from milk they have brought in.

The third and final category is the creamery. The creamery is a product of the

post-war centralisation of cheesemaking where the Milk Board forced all dairy farmers to supply a portion of their milk to the production of a handful of low quality cheeses. Creameries operate as large factories almost exclusively producing block cheddar, drawing their milk from a large area, from many different dairy farms, often thin stuff with low milk fats, the aim being volume not quality.

Cheddar makes up over 50% of all cheese bought in the UK over the last 12 months, approximately 233,000 kg, and only 1% of this figure could be categorised as farmhouse or artisan. To give you an idea of difference in scale, Cathedral City (made nowhere near a cathedral city by the way) makes in a day what Montgomery’s West Country Farmhouse Cheddar PDO makes in a year.

It is very easy to see similarities between a creamery pumping out supermarket cheddar and a producer using apple juice from concentrate along with god knows what else to make a sweet alcoholic drink sometimes known as “cider”.

Sam Wilkin is an experienced cheesemonger. Previously supplying the high-end restaurant and hotel market, he has recently been appointed Head of Cheese for the Cheese Bar group in London.

Alongside his work in the trade, Sam produces his own Cellarman Podcast and The Fine Food Podcast for The Guild of Fine Food. Sam is also a Judge at The World Cheese Awards and an accredited trainer for the Academy of Cheese.

Sam is delighted to be writing for Graftwood as a representative from the world of cheese who has been welcomed with open arms into the world of cider.

It is here that the challenges for both artisan cheese and cider lie, the “big boys” both reflect and mould taste: a taste for sweet and alcoholic in the case of cider, and sweet, salty and artificially strong in the case of cheese.

Cheese and cider make me feel something. That moment when you hit on a perfect match and are transported to another place or time, where the interplay of fruit and milk on your palate, is a joyful but exclusive and privileged experience.

I am very lucky to work in an industry that values craft, graft and beautifully balanced flavours. Unfortunately, most people have only had the chance to try products from the aforementioned “big boys”. Our mission should be to expose people to the alternatives, to all the wonderful possibilities of lovingly crafted products that both delight and beguile, products that are full of romance and, when carefully combined, bring real joy.

Traditional Method, Modern Approach

By Adam Wells



o drink is as ripe with hedonism as champagne. Not claret, not burgundy, not cognac, not single malt. Not one of

those fêted potations carries on its breath the same universal whisperings of prestige and luxury and excess – though all at their uppermost are more eye-wateringly priced and gushed over by wonkish critics.

Champagne is the absolute triumph of image and glamour and marketing. Though there is no sensibly disputing its frequent, crystalline quality, who amongst us has not spent more on a bottle of champagne than we might do on a still wine – even one of superior quality? Who has not marked a celebration with champagne when another drink might have been more to our tastes?

The brilliance of champagne lies in the frivolity of its opulence. It isn't stern, reproachful or po-faced, like so many alcoholic aristocrats; it doesn't insist on awed, hushed reverence. In its pop and froth, in the glint of its golden effervescence, it lets us fancy ourselves as Jay Gatsbys and Ella Fitzgeralds, floating through time

on a raft of bubbles to taste the stars with Dom Pérignon at Hautvillers. The clichés of champagne are grandeur and affluence. They preen at the other end of the spectrum to cider's lazy stereotypes – the bus stop brown bags, the teenagers on park benches, the brain puckering, opaque scrumpy fermented on-caterpillar.

But the truth is seldom as cosy and cosseted as it reads in beamish press releases and on braggadocious back labels.

The wines that Dom Pérignon made never sparkled. Champagne's bubbles first fizzed from English bottles. And the so-called 'Champagne method' wasn't a winemaker's invention at all.

In fact, the *méthode traditionnelle*, whereby still wine is fermented for a second time inside a stoppered bottle, forcing carbon dioxide to dissolve into the liquid itself, bubbled its first in cider bottles at some nebulous point in the early 17th century.

It was a method made possible by “*verre anglais*” – English glass – naturally strengthened in furnaces fired by coal rather than charcoal. (The charcoal wood had been ring-fenced for the Royal Navy). Thicker glass meant that the significant pressures induced by bottle fermentation (up to six atmospheres; on a par with an HGV tyre) would not cause the bottle itself to explode.

The earliest pioneerings of bottle fermentation are too hazy for an exact date to be pinpointed but what we do know for certain is that in 1662 Christopher Merret's paper - *Some Observations Concerning the Ordering of Wines* - outlining his conjuring of bubbles in still champagne, was read at the Royal Society.

Fortune, of course, has since been rather with the French. Whilst the popularity of cider – at any level of sophistication – has hopped and stumbled through the last four centuries, Champagne has boomed and boomed and is now flogged at a rate of some 300 million bottles per year*.

Untouched tribes in the Andaman Islands can no doubt cite their preferred Grand Marque, whilst you'd be hard pressed to find one Bristolian in ten who's heard of traditional method cider.

Today, however, several cidemakers across

the globe are looking to change that. From the gardens of Sussex to the cellars of Devon, from the orchards of Vermont to the sheds of Herefordshire, producers are fermenting cider to dryness then placing it in strengthened bottles with a liqueur de tirage for a secondary fermentation just like any champagne cave.

But this is where the homogeneity ends. To the curious drinker the traditional method cider category, in its current, tentatively resuscitating form, is as arcane as any other aspect of the often labyrinthine world of cider. Where the winemakers of Reims have spent centuries settling on their preferred grapes, styles and times on lees, then spreading their findings to a receptive world, traditional method cider is largely uncovering its identity through the very separate and individual experimentations of disparate practitioners around the world.

To try and unpick this Gordian knot and explore what traditional method cider is and could be, I spoke to a number of the cidemakers leading its revival. Their answers, in every respect, were as diverse as I had initially suspected they would be.

Let's begin with apples. Where champagne – indeed traditional method wine worldwide – is concerned, three grapes reign supreme: Chardonnay and the Pinots Noir and Meunier. Yet when it comes to the ideal apples for traditional method cider, there is almost no consensus whatsoever.

Brock Bergius, the current owner of Gospel Green, is convinced that the key lies in cooking and eating varieties. Based on the Blackmoor Estate in Hampshire, Gospel Green brought the traditional method

category back to life in 1990, under the then-stewardship of James Lane. Bergius bought the business in 2016 after James and his wife Cathy had decided to call time, and today it remains one of the very, very few cideries whose output is exclusively traditional method.

“Cider apples make a beautiful cider... for a cider palate. We’re after a champagne palate.” There’s almost a “fight me” sparkle in Bergius’ eyes as he makes this contention – one that he knows will have many dyed-in-the-wool cider nerds spitting. Eastern counties cidermakers – and cidermakers across the UK and the rest of the world – are so used to having their cookers and dessert fruit sneered at by makers and drinkers. To suggest that they might be in any way superior feels borderline seditious.

But his point is a fair one. The grapes of Champagne have come to prominence not through being booming bruisers loaded with flavour and structure, but by providing a canvas upon which the processes of secondary fermentation in bottle may paint layers of autolytic flavour. The notes of yeast and brioche and biscuit for which so many of the best examples of champagne are revered would simply not exist if they were competing with the flavours of more assertive grapes. Acidity, so important to all ciders, is a crucial building block, some would say the crucial building block, of all things traditional method. And cookers and eaters have acidity in spades.

So determined is Gospel Green to place its wares in line with a Champagne palate that samples are sent to the Institut Oenologique de Champagne in Epernay

every year for sensory analysis. And it is perhaps no coincidence that Chalkdown Cider – another in the tiny group of traditional method-only producers – has followed Gospel Green’s lead in its selection of apples. Nor that the increasing number of English wineries making a just-for-the-sake-of-it traditional method cider to go with their sundry grape juices have tended to look towards cookers and eaters as well.

Reader, you will be shocked to learn that Herefordshire cider maker (and Graftwood co-editor) James Forbes of Little Pomona takes a different viewpoint. Coming from a wine background before ever succumbing to the charms of the apple, he acknowledges, “full-flavoured fruit fights against the process and I think it may be impossible to get harmony and elegance using it”. However he is convinced that it is in the cider apple that answers will ultimately be found. Pressed on which, he puts forward Foxwhelp and Ellis Bitter, having concluded that Harry Masters Jersey may be too bombastic.

“Foxwhelp is very assertive, but it’s assertive in terms of its acid primarily, and its citrusy quality is very desirable,” says Forbes. Thus Foxwhelp provides a brilliant and permanent framework. Ellis Bitter’s ability to take up influences, not in the sense of a coupling, but in the sense of complete and harmonious assimilation, makes it an excellent contender for traditional method. It isn’t dominated by, nor does it try to dominate, the process” It’s a convincing case, borne out by the bottled evidence of his newly released Little Pomona Brut Crémant.



ne argument in favour of cookers and eaters is the difficulty of managing tannin such that it doesn’t clash with

traditional method’s insistent and inherent style of mousse. Tom Stevenson, the world’s foremost Champagne writer, warns against the fizz-tannin double act in writing about Australia’s sparkling Shiraz – a style whose tannins are far less pronounced than those of the cider apple. Forbes admits that tannin management is one of the keys to making good West Country-style cider generally, and that finding a structural balance in dry cider with prominent bubbles is an even thornier tightrope.

Eleanor Léger’s answer at Eden Speciality Ciders in Vermont is to split the difference. Her traditional method expressions use a roughly equal percentage of cider apples – “Kingston Black, Dabinett, Ellis Bitter, Yarlinton Mill” – alongside sweets and sharps.

“I’m a big fan of heirloom sweets and sharps because I think they bring much more flavor [sic], aroma and body along with them, not just acid and sugar.”

Apple varieties may be the most important variable, but they are just one wave in a sea of troubles with which the traditional method cidemaker must contend. Perhaps the next most important, certainly insofar as this particular style is concerned, is the amount of time the liquid spends “on its lees” in bottle. This is the period after secondary fermentation has taken place, but before the particles of spent yeast are removed by disgorging. In Champagne, the minimum requirement is that non-vintage wines should spend 12 months** on their lees, whilst for vintage it is 36.

When it comes to cider there are no rules. Gospel Green cite an average of 14 months for their Brut, whilst Léger at Eden begins disgorging after 6-7 months, and admits to feeling that 18 months may be a little too long. Both Gospel Green and Chalkdown are experimenting with longer periods on lees – again in search of a more quintessentially “Champagne-like” character – but there has been very little obvious previous research into the flavours and qualities this is likely to induce.

A large part of this comes down to economic realities. It takes time to make good cider of any style, and even more so to make cider through the traditional method. What’s more, typically baffling and unsuitable UK legislation means that any drink above bottle pressures of three bar (around half of what is created by the traditional method) is automatically taxed as a sparkling wine if the ABV strays above 5.5%***. All very well if you are making a sparkling wine, and are able to sell your product in reasonable volume at £20 plus per bottle, rather harder when you are a cidemaker trying to explain

why your product is of the same worth. “£12 for cider?!” is an exclamation of incredulity I have heard from more than one of my uninitiated friends on encountering a bottle for the first time. Usually before asking me for a second glass.

These difficulties, in tandem with traditional method being only a small sideline concern for most producers, is what hinders and will continue to hinder a current eccentricity from becoming a category in its own right. “I think we’ll see growth and more producers experimenting with it,” says Forbes, “but until the crazy taxation situation on champagne method cider changes (don’t hold your breath) I don’t see significant growth happening.”

Léger suggests that it will be an even longer wait in the USA, despite a rocketing craft sector and excellent producers like herself and Eve’s Cidery leading the way. “We are still fighting for people to even be aware of cider as an alcoholic beverage. Our customers are even surprised to discover that cider can be dry and still, as most just know the sweet fizzy stuff in cans.”

Although a brighter picture does come from Gospel Green, whose production has increased from less than 7,000 litres per year when Bergius took over to 27,000 litres bottled in 2018, there still remains the challenge of presenting it to a poorly educated premium market, generally condescending towards all things apple.

**Traditional method
cider has, in my
opinion, the potential**

**to be the pinnacle
of the cidemaker’s
craft; a drink
with the finesse of
anything made in
shadowy Epernay
cellars.**

For the present, however, this is strictly wishful thinking: a huge, well-established, globally-lusted-after industry versus scattered handfuls of bottles in warehouses and garden sheds whose existence is little-known and whose presence in supermarkets is virtually nil.

As with every district of the Rethink Cider movement, all roads point to the need for greater consumer education. Clearly the words “traditional method” or *méthode traditionnelle* on a label do not carry as much implicit information as they might on a bottle of sparkling wine. (Even less so, as the term may well be unfamiliar to cider drinkers). Traditional method ciders not only need to outline the process, but the styles and varieties of apples they use, and why. They will need to explore the benefits of various lengths of lees ageing as well as the differences in depth of flavour that can be achieved by including older reserve ciders in a non-vintage blend. At present Little Pomona’s Brut Crémant is one of the very few “multi-vintage” traditional method ciders available, yet in the world of sparkling wine, such a style is practically *de rigueur*.

**When it comes to
traditional method**

**cider, there are dozens
of avenues available
for the adventurous
and fiscally secure
cidemaker to pursue
which seem to be as
yet all-but-untouched.**

It is telling that most of the ciders heralded as the best in the category have only existed for less than ten years, and few if any have plied the trade longer than 30. It strikes me that consumers likely don’t know much about the style mainly because producers have barely dipped a toe in it themselves. Perhaps the most apposite musings, and

Adam Wells is a drinks writer and cidery botherer. Also mired in the worlds of wine and whisky, he is as fascinated by the common threads that bind drinks of craft and care, as he is by the idiosyncrasies that make each one unique.

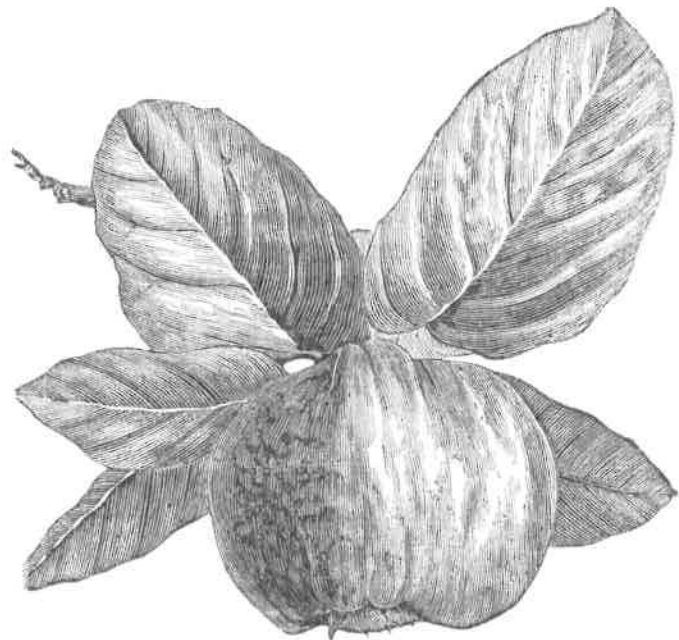
*CIVC published 2019

**although a minimum of 15 months in bottle in total before release

*** Also, if you choose to use cork and cage as a closure and your cider is above 5.5% ABV, regardless of pressure, you will also pay full sparkling wine duty. Cidermakers producing less than 70hl per year remain exempt from duty regardless though.

the best way to close this piece, came from Forbes: “We’re a short way along our champagne method road but all signposts point to blends of variety, terroir, vintages and fermentation mediums. Watch this space.”

He referred only to his own dabbling, but the words ring true for the category altogether. With such producers as Little Pomona and Gospel Green, Chalkdown and Find & Foster, Bollhayes and Burrow Hill; Eden Ciders and Eve’s Cidery gradually answering the manifold questions that the traditional method poses, and with new takes and flavours and expressions seemingly appearing every month, this space is set to be a very interesting one to watch indeed.



Cognassier (*Pyrus Cydonia*).

The bottle list flows forth its delights; orchard ciders from California, wild ferments from the Midwest and strangest of all, pure quince from the Pacific Northwest.

Quest for Quince

By Martin Berkeley

The cidemaker crosses the road, again. He does not feel good, this is too far from Somerset. The backwards hats he was avoiding see him pass but do not move from their corner.

He pulls his jacket closer, but it is not cold. This is Brooklyn in July.

Twelve more blocks, red fire hydrants poke up from the sidewalk, iron fire ladders reach down from the sky. The subway is confusing, he gets off too early, no map in the carriage and too many eyes upon him. Three more blocks and suddenly, he is there at last, outside the Owl Farm.

The bar is calm. Ornate panelled ceiling above, raw wooden floorboards running off into the narrow gloom beyond. The bartender moves slowly in the dim light, against a chalk-scrawled draft list worthy of any journey. And yes, it is true: sours, stouts, IPAs, Pinot Noir and ciders all jostle together on the same wall. His pilgrimage to New York's cider bar Mecca is at an end.

Erik occupies the next bar stool. He is friendly, used to work in cider and knows someone you must meet. A message is sent

and soon, as if by magic, Dan appears. Dan still works in cider and knows everyone. The bottle list flows forth its delights; orchard ciders from California, wild ferments from the Midwest and strangest of all, pure quince from the Pacific Northwest. A cider tour across the American continent whilst perched at an East Coast bar. The night draws on and strangers become friends.

Back to the reality of British cider and the challenge of how to make something from this experience. English craft beer bars proudly offer the full spectrum of brewed beverages but still only industrial or concentrate-made cider. There is a slow craft cider resurgence taking place but are fruits other than just apples the way to go? There is only one way to find out.

It is late summer, perhaps there's still time before harvest to find enough quince for a commercial product? Kent, the "Garden of England" must surely be the place to start. But alas, all growers there have long since promised their crop to luxury food wholesalers, destined for London's Turkish restaurants. Contacts in the Three Counties* reveal a similar story. All Somerset garden trees have been bagged by foot soldiers of the WI** for the bring-and-buy jelly and membrillo trade.

Then, slowly, a story emerges of a local cider apple grower who has been planting quince in areas too damp for apples to grow. The trees thrive but a ready market has not yet been found for the fruit. Phone calls are made, meetings arranged, anticipation grows. Laden apple trees tower skywards, in serried rank upon rank, running down to the river Brue. The car follows the dusty orchard track beside the water but then suddenly turns off between rows of lofty Browns apple. At the top of the hill, the apples are not so tall, there are gaps between them and another fruit is slowly taking over.

Dark green leaves attempt to hide their treasure but the quince sparkle through in the morning light.

Trees are admired, yield assessed and harvest logistics planned. A price is negotiated, the cidemaker gulps, then a handshake and the deal is done.

Three more months of sunshine and rain work their magic and the quince swell and ripen. They declare themselves ready by falling easily into an offered palm. Handpicking fruit with shoulder strapped bibs is heavy work but it is a joy to be amongst the trees.

Green woodpeckers flash between them, honey bees harvest

amongst the hedgerow bramble and buzzards wheel overhead. It takes four people four days to collect four tonnes.

Carefully poured into net bags and stacked in a dry barn before pressing.

Quince may be third cousins to apples and pears but they behave very differently when milled. The hard flesh releases a clear juice that runs freely, making them difficult to manage with traditional cidemaking equipment. Even after a long maceration, the juice yield is low but the flavour is truly amazing, with a highly aromatic, rose-like fragrance.

Secured in a cool Somerset cellar, indigenous yeasts from the fruit slowly ferment the juice. Natural sugars are converted to alcohol and yeast aromas blend with those of the fruit. The simplest of ingredients; quince, yeasts and time – a metamorphosis slowly takes place.

But how should this new creation be presented to the world? It is not cider, it is not wine, it has its own identity. Should it be in a bag-in-box (an insult that even scrumpy does not deserve) or in a tall decorative beer can? A label is designed and rejected. Created again and rejected once more. Many different approaches are tried; too simple, too complex, too traditional, too avant-garde.



canwhile, the quince does its own thing, slowly developing and maturing, and slowly too a brand emerges. A champagne

bottle, an elegant label, the quince as the star, a river running through, minimal text, regal fruitiness. Labels are designed and printed. Bottles are ordered, corks, wire cages and boxes too. Finally bottling day arrives.

At six foot two, it is the young man who reaches the first layer of bottles from the pallet. Two at a time, into the rinser they go. A squirt of water into each, then drip, drip and drain. Next onto the bottle-filler to accept their measure of golden quince.

Martin Berkeley makes cider in Somerset as Pilton Cider. He is also one of the driving forces behind the annual Cider Salon in Bristol. Thoughtful and creative he is at the vanguard of the UK cider renaissance.

When ready, the cidemaker plucks foaming bottles from the filler, presents them to the corker and pham! – the cork goes in. Then twirft! –on with the cage. And clink – they join those before them on the stack. Squirt, drip, drip, drain, fill, pham, twirft! and clink. Two thousand bottles they fill that day. Happily working together, powered on by tea, biscuits and driving reggae.

Launch day arrives at last, a warm evening, Bristol in July. The trendiest cheese-and-beer-bottle-shop is the venue. A small gathering of flavour explorers are waiting, young foodies who seek out new experiences in brewing, natural wine and fermented foods. They love meeting makers, exclusive supper clubs and launch parties – but are they ready for quince?

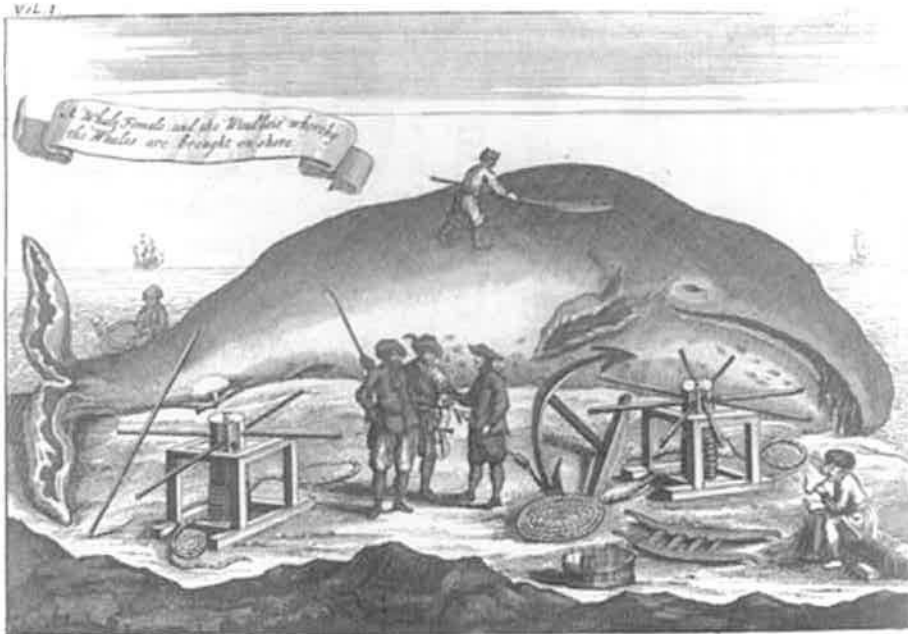
A car parks opposite. Carefully cradling his creation, the cidemaker crosses the road.

* The counties of Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire

**Woman's Institute

Sagardoa – A Survival Story

By Haritz Rodriguez



Basque cider has had good times and bad throughout its history. The first written accounts date back to 1014, when King Sancho III of Navarre donated some lands to the monastery of Leire. This document cites apple trees, cider and its production. Cider was also a must-have provision for Basque fishermen and whale hunters who sailed across the Atlantic as far as the coast of Newfoundland in the 16th century. Unlike water, cider did not spoil during the trip. Each sailor was entitled to consume two

litres a day and it's said that the vitamin C in the cider prevented them from contracting scurvy.

The decline of sagardoa production (cider in the Basque language, literally meaning "apple wine") began in the 17th century when an explosion in the number of corn plantations, apparently a more profitable crop, began to erode and replace apple orchards. However, at the end of the 19th century, great efforts were made to improve

both the cultivation of apples and the production of cider, mainly in the province of Gipuzkoa. Scientific studies based on new farming techniques were conducted, and in 1916 the provincial council created a Pomological Commission to promote the conservation, recovery and study of native apple varieties.

Although cider was historically produced in all the Basque provinces, it has been Gipuzkoa where we have consistently maintained this tradition. In the 1920s an average of 30 million litres of sagardoa was being produced annually,

but this so-called Civil War of 1936 dealt a savage blow to the industry. Apple trees were abandoned and cider production declined.

This situation worsened in the dark post-war era, in the midst of Franco's dictatorship, and by 1967 there was barely a million litres of sagardoa being made each year. If corn was the beginning of the decline of apple orchards in the 17th century, pine plantations were the major culprit during the 1950s. The introduction of soft drinks and the predominance of wine and beer didn't help either, and cider gradually fell into near oblivion.

The revival of sagardoa came towards the end of the 1970s. Once again, the provincial council of Gipuzkoa encouraged the recovery of local apple trees, and the Basque

Apple Study Group was created. It was perhaps the existence of the gastronomic societies unique to the city of Donostia-San Sebastian, that prevented cider from disappearing altogether. These traditional private clubs, where people gathered to eat, drink and socialise proved a vital lifeline.

Since then sagardoa has been reinvented and the old custom of the "Txotx" revived. Nowadays,

between the months of January and May, before cider starts to be bottled and it is at its absolute freshest and most vibrant, nearly a million people enjoy cider poured straight from the barrel.

This phenomenon occurs mainly in the town of Astigarraga which boasts more cider houses per square kilometre than anywhere in Europe, perhaps the world!



Unique style

Sagardoa has a unique style that makes it different from other traditional European ciders. It's fruity, with notes of pineapple and citrus and high acidity. Today, sagardoa is produced in all the Basque provinces, including those under French administration, where they call it sagarnoa.

Here the apple varieties and the proportions in which they are blended are different, as well as the production process and the indigenous yeasts that co-exist in each cellar's environment.

Traditionally, wooden barrels were used, made mostly with tight-grained chestnut wood, that has little effect on the flavour of the young fresh ciders. Today some of these barrels are still in use, but stainless steel tanks are increasingly being used to avoid unwanted contamination.

Sagardoa goes through two types of fermentation. The alcoholic fermentation is fast and intense, lasting between 15 and 30 days depending on temperature, ending when all the sugars have been converted into alcohol and carbon dioxide, some of which remains in solution. It is during this period that the main aromas in the cider are generated. The second is known as malolactic fermentation, a slower, more gentle evolution in which harsh, bitter malic acid is transformed into round, soft lactic acid.

Sagardoa is typically unfiltered, cloudy, with a straw-yellow or golden-yellow color and well-integrated natural carbon dioxide. The classic aroma is heady with polyphenolic compounds and a noticeable level of volatile acidity. The ciders are dry and must by law meet these parameters:

- **Volatile acidity:** <2.2g / litre
- **Alcohol:** > 5% ABV.
- **Total dry extract*:** > 14g / litre
- **Residual sugars** ≤ 4 g / litre.

Varieties

The key to successful sagardoa making can be found in getting the perfect blend of the many different apple varieties available.

Traditionally it was a third each of bitter, sharp and sweet apples, but now the amount of sharps and sweets has been reduced to achieve drier and more durable ciders.

Making sure that the apples are fully ripe before pressing is also vitally important. Once collected (usually when they have fallen from the tree) the ripeness of the apples is carefully monitored to insure optimum flavour, sugar and pectins at crush. The apples are milled without breaking the seed, to avoid unwanted flavours. The apple pomace used to be allowed to macerate a few hours before being pressed but today the maceration time has been reduced considerably and getting the juice from the pomace to the fermentation barrel quickly is the priority.

There are hundreds of local cider apple varieties in the Basque Country, some of them yet to be catalogued. The designation of origin allows 124 of them to be used. Evocatively named apples such as Errezila, Goikoetxe, Gezamina, Mozolola, Urtebi Txiki, Patzolua, Txalaka, Haritza, Urtebi Haundi and Moko, are ten of the 25 that are most widely used. They are classified by three main groups: sharp, bitter and bittersharp.

Quality & Origin Marks

Today the annual production of Basque natural cider is about 12 million litres and practically all of this is consumed in the country itself. In recent decades the promotion, rejuvenation and quality of cider has been strengthened by the planting of native apple trees but also importantly by the establishment of two parallel cider certification systems.

The first of these, Gorenak, denoted by a black capsule covering the cork, certifies quality through chemical and organoleptic analysis, and permits the use of both local and imported apples. The second, Euskal Sagardoa PDO, is similar but certifies that the apples used in production are fully traceable to the Basque Country. Denoted by either red or gold capsules, the gold signifies a cider that has scored in the top percentile in the tasting evaluation of the certification process. Ciders sold without a capsule have not met the quality standards above.

The distinction between the two quality marks is significant. The seasonality of cider in the Basque Country is marked and therefore natural variations in the crop size means that usually there are not enough apples grown in the region to meet production demands. When the crop is generous, up to 80% of the sagardoa can be made with local apples.

Apples are brought in mostly from France. Basque cider makers travel annually to Brittany and Normandy to select the best apples to suit their style of cider. The historical relationship between these three

powerhouses of European cider apples stretches back some time. In the 16th century a gentleman of Basque origin by the name of Guillaume D'Ursus was helping to introduce the finest apples into Normandy.

There are french apples with Basque names. Bisquet, a french bittersweet, is named after the Basque province of Biscaye for example, whilst Marin Onfroy, another bittersweet, is named after the Basque nobleman that brought it to Normandy in the late 15th century.

The rejuvenation strategy and quality marks are I think intelligent and realistic. In flexibly allowing foreign apples to be imported whilst encouraging an increase in the planting and cultivation of native varieties, the country's long term goal of all sagardoa being made from only local apples may well be achieved without damaging the existing industry.

Regardless of the origin of the apples today,

close to 100% of sagardao is made using one simple ingredient, freshly pressed apple juice. This is a reason for Basque cidemakers to be very proud.



Future



Despite all this, Basque cider has an important handicap when it comes to expanding its market. The vast majority of

Basque cider is at its very best when it is young and fresh. And certainly within 12 months of being bottled. For the most part it is live cider that hasn't been stabilised through pasteurisation or preservatives such as sulphites. It therefore evolves over time, positively at first, but later the danger is rising levels of acetic acid.

In export markets where timelines are extended and consumption rates slower, this can lead to problems and ultimately negative perceptions about the ciders. The alternatives though of heat treating, sterile filtration and SO₂ would alter the very nature of the ciders. It's a real dilemma and many producers have solved this by withdrawing from the export arena altogether, concentrating their efforts at home.

In my humble opinion, the successful future of Basque cider lies in it striking the right balance between the traditional and the modern. For its survival, traditional cider depends on the good economic health of the sector.

It's fantastic to see the consumption of Basque cider increasing both in its heartland

and more widely in provinces around Spain. Now there is also an opportunity to diversify, creating new products and taking advantage of the possibilities offered by a growing global market, without the need to renounce tradition.

Beyond "Txotx", which focuses on experience rather than on the product itself, every day I see more and more people, especially young people, drinking bottled cider in restaurants and bars. The truth is that Basque cider is a perfect pairing with meals, coming alive with both meat and fish-based dishes.

It's time to recognise the gastronomic value of the sagardoa and to access new consumers before this market is grabbed by other products that are presented as cider but are not. The big industrial brands are already doing it, with their ubiquitous presence and strong distribution. But it's time for real cider to stand up and start exploring these opportunities. Indeed some cider houses have already started to produce sparkling ciders, ice ciders and oak barrel aged ciders, but at the moment they are few and far between.

Despite the dry, gently funky style of our cider, other countries can see its potential.

Move across the Atlantic and Basque inspired cider is an upward trend

with a number of producers seeking to emulate either just the cider style and/or consumer experience. Recently too, England has begun to get in on the action.

Walking the line of genuine homage to an ancient cider culture is tricky. When it strays into parody, driven by empty marketing, rather than by the product quality and style, it can damage the name of Basque cider

and how it's perceived by the trade and consumers. No doubt imitation is the sincerest form of flattery but I would urge companies abroad, to be sensitive and respectful to our culture. Most of them are.

Protecting and preserving the traditions and culture of Basque cider is vital to securing its future success but to do that might require some creative thinking. New markets, new

products, new techniques, diversification all with the aim of building an industry that is resilient and viable for the long term.

I foresee two main areas of focus ahead for Basque cider. The first is the development of a range of gourmet ciders that can compete with wine, champagne, cava or prosecco and that will find their home on the tables of the best restaurants, wine bars and bottle stores.

The second, perhaps aimed at a more youthful audience, will be in the development of more informal products, with a more modern aesthetic, fitting the palates, trends and consumption habits of the youngest people, similar to the revolution in craft beer.

In Ciderzale we work to make this possible, trying to break clichés and help producers to find new opportunities without giving up our customs. In a sector almost confined by its current success and with a very traditional vision, it's not an easy job.

The future of sagardoa, as it is with everything, lies in the hands of the new generations. I for one am excited to see what the future holds.

Haritz Rodriguez, aka. Ciderzale, is a Basque journalist, travel blogger and marketing consultant mainly in the tourism and agri-food fields. He is a well-travelled cider expert and lover off apples, especially crab apples. He runs a cider consultancy at www.ciderzale.com

* a measure of everything that would be left if you removed all the water and alcohol from a cider. It relates directly to the body of the cider ie the higher the dry extract the greater the body.

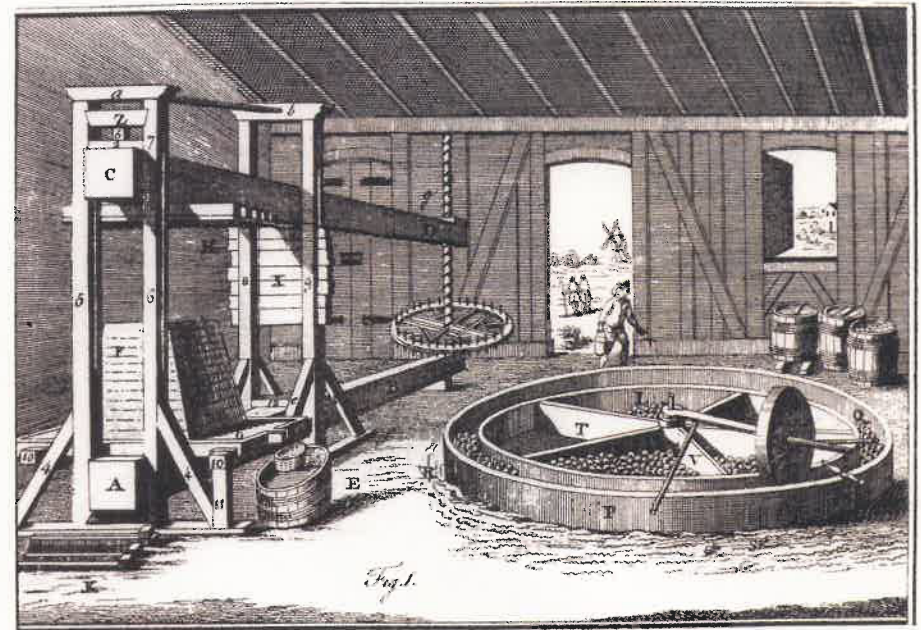
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John Edwards makes cider, music and pottery. He works at Ross on Wye Cider & Perry and produces his own cider as Fly-Be-Night Cider, for which he also creates unique illustrations in his signature style. He had a BA(Hons) in 3D Design Ceramics and has a background in horticulture and country winemaking dating back from his early teens.