

How To Spend It **Food & Drink**

Tiddly pomes: the cider revolution

Homespun country bumpkin no more, cider and its spirited sibling, calvados, are the talk of the town



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Alice Lascelles SEPTEMBER 12 2020

Apple season is here – and with it, cider returns in a new, more stylish guise. At Merlin Labron-Johnson’s [Osip restaurant in Bruton, Somerset](#), you can find staff clad in bespoke Studio Nicholson pouring ciders from all over the West Country. “Cider pairs amazingly with food, but I also wanted Osip to feel rooted in this part of the world,” says 29-year-old Labron-Johnson, who’s cooked for MatchesFashion, [Anya Hindmarch](#) and the British Fashion Awards. “It’s a drink that, for me, really speaks of a time and place.”

As an alternative to champagne, guests can sip a fine-boned pét-nat cider from Find & Foster, a craft producer that revives ancient apple orchards. With the main course, Labron-Johnson recommends Wilding's Stoke Red 2018: "It's still rather than sparkling, and has extraordinary tannins so you can pair it with meat like red wine." His favourite match for cheese is Burrow Hill Ice Cider, a tawny, sweet-and-sour digestif made by Julian Temperley (father of designer [Alice Temperley](#)). Elsewhere on the list you'll find a cider spritz, apple eau-de-vie from Capreolus in the Cotswolds, and apple and sorrel juice made from apples grown by Dowding's down the road.

Not far from Osip, [the Newt In Somerset](#) makes its own range of single-varietal ciders including a strawberry-red rosé made from Red Love apples. Fresh and elegant, with a subtle cider-y crunch, it could almost pass for a [rosé wine](#). The Fine Cider Company – founded by former art student Felix Nash – has also pushed craft cider up the list in fashionable restaurants from Somerset to east London. For the essential edit, sign up to its new Pommelier Club and receive a mixed case of cider and perry from the likes of Pilton, Oliver's and Starvecrow every couple of months. For a more in-depth read, subscribe to Full Juice ([@fulljuicemag](#)), a large-format cider 'zine.

As cider's star has risen, interest in calvados – a form of apple brandy that remains stubbornly artisan – has grown. One of my favourite producers is Didier Lemorton – its Reserve Vieux Calvados Domfrontais (a blend of apples and pears, as calvados from Domfrontais must be) is all spiced orchard fruit, singed toffee and beeswax. As complex as cognac, certainly, but a bit more fun.

There is a new generation of producers too. Eco-friendly newcomer Avallen donates part of its profits to bee conservation projects and the restoration of wildflower meadows around its distillery in Normandy. Floral, honeyed and delicate, this calvados was designed for cocktails – but it's also good with tonic or ginger beer. And 30&40, another interesting name from France, hand-picks and bottles – rather attractively – unique casks from small producers.

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