

WORTH A DETOUR

Palmers of Bridport, Dorset

STEVEN SPURRIER is pleasantly surprised by the changes at his local wine shop

Now that Bridport in southwest Dorset has been described as 'the new Notting Hill', you might suppose that the town's best wine shop would be chic and trendy. Far from it. The first thing one sees on passing through the sliding doors are two large barrels of Palmers beer – IPA Best Bitter and Palmers 200th (1794–1994) Anniversary – and next to these a vast line-up of bottled beers and cordials.

Visually, not much has changed in the large, barn-like store since it was inaugurated on 21 November 1985 by Colin Parnell, founder and then owner of *Decanter*. I first visited the place when I moved to Dorset 20 years ago and found it an adequate if uninspiring place to pick up white Mâconnais and red petits châteaux for my wife. Although the same brick-binned 'cellar' and central display stands have remained, what has changed in the last few years is the wines.

The manager is now 33-year-old Mark Banham, and the history of Palmers wine shop, located in the Old Brewery across the street from a vast Morrisons supermarket, can be dated pre-Banham and post-Banham. Clevees Palmer, who owns and directs the Brewery with brother John, said that even though he had passed the Wine and Spirit Education Trust diploma, he was a beer rather than a wine man, and used the shop mostly as a wholesale arm for the 60 pubs it has in



the county. Until recently, he said, there wasn't much demand for good wine, but thought he could do more if he found a good manager. The man he needed was working at Tanners in Shrewsbury. The job was offered and I remember on a visit in late 2002 being most surprised to see not only a copy of *Decanter*, but also bottles of Ridge Monte Bello, Rustenberg Peter Barlow and Shaw & Smith Sauvignon Blanc. Banham introduced himself and told me he had been given free rein and that a few of his new ideas had been 'flying off the shelves'.

In under five years, the range has grown from 300 to 800 wines. There is even a single stand devoted to Alsace. Benefiting from a large space, the 'islands' of New Zealand, Australia, Champagne and sparkling, Italy, France, South Africa, Germany, port/sherry/Madeira, pudding wines, rosé and the rest of the world, can be manoeuvred around with ease, by reading Banham's card index notes. The 'cellar' is devoted to Bordeaux, Burgundy, grander European wines and older ports. Suppliers include Liberty, OW Loeb, Thorman Hunt, Seckford and Fields Morris & Verdin. Banham's philosophy is, 'to provide wines of character and identity that deliver quality and value'; his role models are Adnams of Southwold and Tanners. Mail order and online sales are available. Lucky Palmers, lucky Bridport.

MYSTERY SHOPPER

We challenged Palmers to find us a variety of white and red Spanish wines to go with a tapas dinner party. They put their heads together and came up with the Cune Monopole, Blanco Rioja 2004 (£8.49), Pago de los Capellanes, Ribera del Duero Viña Joven 2005 (£10.85), and the unusual white Celler Cal Pla, Priorat 2004 (£10.25) among others. They also suggested we add a couple of sherries from Bodega de Fernando de Castilla as aperitifs and digestifs. Our email received a rapid and humorous reply with detailed, but not exhaustive suggestions.

DO TRY THESE AT HOME

Vesevo, Fiano di Avellino DOCG Campania Italy 2006 ★★★★★

This has a very attractive fresh pear nose, smooth ripe fruit and mineral finish; a well made wine. 2007/8 **£9.99**

Hollick, Sauvignon-Semillon, Coonawarra Australia 2006 ★★★★★

Lemony pale, bright Sauvignon (85%) gooseberry rounded out with Semillon; fruity, dry finish. 2007/8. **£7.99**

Taltarni, Shiraz Heathcote Victoria Australia 2004 ★★★★★

Deep red, black pepper nose, lush ripe fruit with freshness and firmness, fine length and complexity. 2007–12. **£17.49**

Arzuaga, Crianza Ribera del Duero Spain 2004 ★★★★★

Black cherry red, new wood evident, supple and ripe with bags of character; a stunning wine. 2008–12. **£15.85**

Boutinot, Coteaux Schisteux Seguret Cotes du Rhône France 2003 ★★★★★

Full ruby, more lively than most overheated 2003s, shows elegance of ripe Grenache. 2007/8. **£8.99**

+ Very good wines at all levels

- You have to get past the beer first

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