

Imagine a job interview that involves cooking two dishes you have created, in a restaurant kitchen that has been specially hired for the occasion. Also, one plate of food has to sing with a gewürztraminer from Alsace, the other with a bottle of Barolo. These matches will be scrutinised by Ronan Sayburn, head of wine at oenophiles' private members' club 67 Pall Mall, a former executive head sommelier for the Gordon Ramsay group, and the first person you'd try to book for the panel of any sommelier version of *MasterChef*.

This was the task faced by chef Marcus Verberne when he was approached five years ago for a position at the then-unopened 67 Pall Mall.

'We might be hosting a Krug dinner on Monday and a Grange dinner on Tuesday, so it was vital for us to have a chef that understood wines,' says Sayburn. 'And that you have to be careful not to have [food with] too much acid, vinegar or spice. Some chefs get that; others say, "What! You want me to tone down my food?"'

Verberne, a New Zealander and previously head chef at Borough Market's Roast, felt his wine knowledge wasn't



straws); Sassicaia from Bolgheri in Italy (greetings, oxtail and celery ravioli with root vegetables); and Château Haut-Brion, the Bordeaux first growth (for this, Verberne offers a recipe for 'my favourite of all steak condiments', Béarnaise sauce). There are also very modern classics such as LVMH's Chinese cabernet sauvignon, Ao Yun (stir-fried Szechuan beef is the match here), and an orange wine from Raised by Wolves in Franschoek, South Africa (black rice and squash salad with quinoa, cumin, orange and pomegranate). There are less high-profile wines too, such as Valentini Trebbiano d'Abruzzo, an Italian white, which is matched with Parmesan-battered courgette flowers.



WINNING COMBINATIONS

up to speed, so as part of his preparation he called Sayburn and asked him to describe the flavours he would find in the wines. Smart move. The Thai octopus salad he made for the gewürztraminer, and the rigatoni with ragu of braised venison shank, sour cherries and chocolate he concocted for the Barolo didn't just win him the job, they are also two of the recipes in a new book the pair have written together.

67 Pall Mall Wine and Food: The Perfect Match is a handsome cloth-bound coffee table book of two halves. The front part is a wine reference book, a guide to the world's major grapes, with a couple of sentences of good food matches for each. It has Sayburn's encyclopaedic knowledge and authority stamped through it. The second consists of 100 recipes, each devised to shine alongside a different style of wine from a named producer. Sayburn says, 'The idea really



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Parmesan-battered courgette flower, courgette vinaigrette, anchovies and soft-boiled quail's eggs. 67 Pall Mall's head of wine, Ronan Sayburn, and head chef, Marcus Verberne. Spicy chicken tulips - paired with madeira

was for 67 Pall Mall members who have a fairly decent collection of wine, someone who decides what they're going to drink on Saturday night on Tuesday lunchtime. It might be, "I've got this bottle of xinomavro [a red grape found in Greece] - what shall I have to eat? Oh, the lamb kleftiko with Greek salad."

This part of the book mines the deep collaboration between Sayburn and Verberne, who, over their years of devising menus, have built up a gigantic spreadsheet. The first column lists wine styles; in the second, Sayburn has described the flavours he finds in those wines, and in the third the ingredients he thinks might work with them; then, in the fourth, Verberne has recorded the dishes cooked to match.

The wines in the recipe half of the book are all iconic in some way. They encompass champagne from trade favourite Pierre Péters (hello, cheese

Verberne wasn't thrilled about every wine that Sayburn put up. 'He gave me a glass of retsina in one of our tasting sessions. I thought he was joking. It took me back to my days as a teenager: Norsca Forest Fresh deodorant.' Eventually he came up with a recipe for sea bream cooked in papillote with Douglas fir needles. 'You tear open the bag at the table and get a pine hit.'

A big effort has been made to ensure that the recipes are cookable by mere mortals working in a home kitchen, though some certainly look easier than others. Sayburn says one he eats a lot at home is the baked salt cod with chorizo, tomatoes and chickpeas. A dry sherry, Tio Pepe Fino En Rama, is the match here. Both Sayburn and Verberne single out an unusual recipe for spicy chicken tulips with prunes, smoked bacon, toasted pecans and star anise, devised to go with madeira, as one of their favourites.

'We do hope this book ends up battered and stained in sauces,' says Sayburn. 'I'll drink - and eat - to that. *67 Pall Mall Wine and Food: The Perfect Match* (67 Pall Mall Ltd, £40)