

WINE PUB OF THE YEAR

THE WINNER

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THE RED LION

Sibbertoft, Leicestershire

Licensees: Andrew and Sarah Banks

Andrew and Sarah Banks' enthusiasm for wine is, to put it mildly, palpable. The Red Lion might be described as 'out of the way', located in the small Leicestershire village of Sibbertoft, about a quarter of an hour's drive from Market Harborough. But that doesn't stop a loyal band of local customers and many from further afield making a bee-line for the place.

Part of the pub's appeal is most definitely its wine list. That and the knowledge and passion for the stuff on the part of its proprietors. Says Andrew: "We offer an eclectic range of wines and will always talk through new entries on the list with our customers."

Communicating with customers is part and parcel of any decent licensee's repertoire, but since not every punter knows wine – indeed many are a bit frightened by it, fearful their ignorance will make them look, well, stupid – Andrew's manner when discussing it is the perfect way to get over that first hurdle.

The Red Lion's new wine list makes a difference too, its large format and easy-to-follow descriptions of the various varieties on offer making the job of choosing simple, with the only challenge really being what to choose!

"Customers understand that we 'get' wine," says Andrew. "The new format wine list has made a big difference. We try to suggest things to our customers all the time. When we first came here six years ago all they would want was boxed wines. Over time this has changed and now our customers know they can trust me to recommend a good wine to them."

Being knowledgeable is important, since it commands respect and can help drive sales in the right direction, Andrew says. As is having a keen interest in wine, which the pair does.

Andrew says he knows his stuff and that such experience



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has come through touring vineyards, tasting wines and comparing and contrasting varieties. "I haven't been on any courses or anything like that but I've travelled round and tried all sorts of wines. I can pass that knowledge onto my customers."

Price is also important, says Andrew. "There's a perception in some areas that cheaper products are inferior, which is clearly wrong. The more moderately-priced wines we sell have to pass the same rigorous quality test as the more expensive."

"We consciously gear our margin and price structure to bring 'aspirational' or 'occasion' wines within our customer's reach."



At the end of the day, the Red Lion is a pub where wine can be bought with confidence, he says. "We offer quality, as opposed to quantity. This is what our customers expect. Andrew. You can't say fairer than that. ■

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