

WINE & FOOD MATCHING

Le Burger



When McDonald's opened its first French restaurants in the 1970s, although many were surprised by its commercial success, *le burger* knew its place – at the bottom of the food chain. It was something you ate at children's parties, or because other restaurants were closed. But in the 2000s, attitudes began to change. Today, 85% of French restaurants have burgers on the menu!

What chefs discovered is that there's something quintessentially French about the burger's simplicity. The quality of the beef is paramount – French origin, *bien sûr*, preferably prime cuts from the prestigious Charolais breed. Generous slices of *appellation*-protected local cheeses and fresh buns complete the mix; all served with French fries.

As the burger has scaled the echelons of French gastronomy, the subject of which wine to serve with it is no longer a laughing matter among 'sommers'. Red meat: red wine is the obvious answer, but all three colours have their place to accompany the dish. My own preference is for a fresh but weighty rosé, especially one that

has had time to develop for a year or so. Burgers are packed full of tangy, acidic ingredients like gherkins, which need an acidic counterbalance and plenty of rich fruit.

The Côtes du Rhône makes heftier pinks than Provence, which reach their concentrated best in the southern Tavel *appellation*. Likewise, in neighbouring Languedoc, food-friendly rosés are gaining ground, as wonderfully exemplified in Château Fabre Gasparets' exotic Corbières 'Les Amories'. But perhaps the perfect partner is Bordeaux Clairet – too deep in colour to be a 'true' rosé, it has all the juicy fruits needed. The best red matches also come from France's Mediterranean vineyards, such as the grenaches of southern Rhône. Whites are more of a challenge, but the ripe chardonnays from the Mâcon-Villages are worthy accompaniments. Or head south, into Provence, where the full-bodied marsanne-clairette blends of *appellation* Cassis show honeyed peach flavours that flatter the extroverted flavours of *le burger*.

DOMINIC RIPPON

Cheese of THE MONTH



LE PETIT PASTRE

My daughter described this medium-soft sheep's-milk cheese as 'like eating clean, pure snow'. On the label, the words *pur brebis* (ewe) are written in bold, and 'purity' is the operative word. For this is startlingly 'clean' and pure, like the air and vegetation of the high Ardéchois plateau whence this cheese derives.

The Fromagerie de la Laoune, in Coucouron, not far from the Ardèche/Haute-Loire frontier, has only existed since 2010. Four local producers provide the milk for its cheeses: six *chèvres*, three *brebis*, three *vaches* and three mixed-milk creations. Le Petit Pastre has a mere two-year pedigree. It takes its name from the patois word for shepherd and takes the form of a small 250g *tomme*. The milk is *thermisé* and placed in moulds. In terms of its white flesh and mildness of flavour, it's perhaps not too dissimilar to a good farmhouse Caerphilly. But there the comparison ends. Le Petit Pastre's texture is slightly rubbery – incongruously like a red wax-covered Babybel. It keeps very well, easily for seven to nine months, and its character develops over time. I like this mild-mannered cheese. Next time, though, I shall keep it longer to see how it evolves.

MARK SAMPSON