



AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Expert *Jane Cuthbertson* checks out some exciting new wines from the Lebanon

People think I have the job made in heaven. It has its moments, but in the main, they're right. Perhaps not quite as glamorous as they imagine, the general conception is that I just lounge around drinking wine, or sitting in the sunshine in various countries overlooking beautiful vineyards and testing the products. That is the case sometimes but believe me; you have to taste an awful lot of mediocre wine (or worse!), to get through to the good stuff. Having said that, it's hard work and very time consuming, but I'm very lucky to work in a field which is a passion too.

You are constantly looking for something different and sometimes you hit on something which really excites you.

Early last year I was approached by a couple, Elias and Lucy Khoneizer, who were about to start importing a range of wines from two estates in the Lebanon. Elias hails from the Lebanon and settled with Lucy in Staffordshire as a base for their business which they operate with enormous enthusiasm and commitment.

Domaine des Tourelles is the oldest commercial estate in the Lebanon and have been producing wines since 1868. They made their name on the quality of their Arak and Rosé

but have steadily gained a reputation of quality and uniqueness with the rest of the range, focusing on blending Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah to their best potential.

Domaine des Tourelles Rosé (£9.00) is a complex blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah with the typical orangey hue of Lebanese wines. Here the similarity ends. Elegant fruit and balanced acidity make it a perfect match for spicy Mediterranean dishes. Recently voted most exciting rosé!

The blended red from the same estate (£9.85) has a vibrant ruby red colour with morello cherries on the nose and the palate. The flagship wine of the estate is Marquis des Beys (£19.00) is only produced in limited quantities. Showing the French influence of maturation in French oak barrels, this wine has terrific concentration and elegance and is as classy a wine as you could wish to find. Not the cheapest, granted, but certainly on a par with the most noted wines of Lebanon – and then some!

Clos de Cana is driven by a local boy made good who made his fortune in cosmetic dentistry. The vineyards are situated on the slopes of Mount Lebanon rather than the floor of the Bekaa valley as is the norm. After the ravages

of the civil war, he planted vines in 1998 to encourage local farmers back to the land, both physically and spiritually.

His efforts have paid off. His first vintage of Chateau de Cana (£14.75) is terrific. Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah are softened by the addition of Merlot producing a wine with rich black fruit and silky tannins.

For those of you who prefer reds which are not quite so dry, Cuvee Lamartine (£11.35) has herbal tones and a sweetness of fruit provided by the Grenache grape.

Jars of Cana (£10.75), is an unusual blend using Petit Cabernet, Pinot Noir and Mourvedre. This wine epitomizes the quality which Clos de Cana is capable of.

If none of the above rock your boat – try the Arak!

Go on – experiment! ■

Barrica Wines
Huntley Gate Farm
Samlesbury
Preston PR5 0UN
01772 877 933