

The Anchor -- the list

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Beer guru Mark Dorber is now holding court at this 1920s pub-restaurant in the seaside village of Walberswick, Suffolk, where his expertise extends to a 90-bin wine list. Fiona Sims reports.

Build it and they will come - that's what publican Mark Dorber is hoping. Beer nerds might be familiar with his name - he used to run the White Horse in Parson's Green, west London (aka the "Sloaney Pony"). His beer list - and beer dinners - were legendary. Brewers came from all over the world to talk top fermentation with Dorber, and they're already making tracks to his new place, the Anchor in Walberswick, Suffolk.

He actually bought the 17-year lease in November 2004 and juggled both businesses - he would drive up to Suffolk every weekend - until he left the White Horse in March 2007.

It's not the easiest place to get to, either. A two-hour drive up the permanently choked A12 from London, you hang a right before Southwold and just keep on going until you hit the sea. Yet Dorber recently hosted the boys from San Francisco's Anchor Steam brewery, who had made their way there to chat about their new bock beer, showing it off at a special dinner held in Dorber's cow shed.

New beer academy

OK, so it hasn't been a cow shed for a good few years. Now it's Dorber's new beer academy, with smart slate floors, whitewashed walls and grey-painted beams. It's where he will be holding many more such dinners, and classes on beer - and wine, too.

The 1920s Arts and Crafts Movement pub is still a work in progress - they've yet to refurbish the inn's eight rooms, and they've got big plans for further tarding up the bar and dining room - but the beer academy, huge beer terrace and a smart new kitchen are now in place.

Many come for the food. Dorber's wife, Sophie, is the head chef, and her gutsy Mod Brit cooking that trumpets local produce has already won her two AA rosettes. They also come for the drink. Now you would think that being tied to Adnams would cramp Dorber's style somewhat, but Adnams knows a good thing when it sees it and allows Dorber a long lead.

So what's he got? He has 15 different bottled beers in addition to four from Adnams plus, he has access to any of the 25 excellent beers from Meantime (Adnams now distributes the Greenwich brewery's beers nationwide) then there are the eight beers he has on tap.

Unusually for a beer nerd, Dorber is almost as fanatical about wine, so expect some excitement there, too. This is likely to build to more of a frenzy when he launches his "Extra Special" (a beer term, geddit?) wine list shortly - once he's worked out the prices.

These Extra Special wines are the result of years of collecting, and drinking, wine. "Wine is my hobby," declares Dorber with a grin, pulling out a bottle of 1985 Mas de Daumas Gassac - which should be on the list for much more than £65 - in the former pigsty that is now his cellar.

At the moment, you have to know it's there and ask for it (nicely: they're his babies) to get your hands on the likes of 1999 Ridge Monte Bello, at £125, and 1985 Hermitage La Chapelle, at £100. The rest have to content themselves with the regular wine list, plucked, mostly, from Adnams's portfolio. But Dorber has tried to single out the best of them, from Lafon's Meursault to Martinborough Vineyard's Pinot Noir.

There are 90 bins on the list - and about 45 bins on the Extra Special list - and best sellers include Forrest Estate Pinot Noir from Marlborough, New Zealand (£18.75), and Talmard's Macon Chardonnay (£17.75). "People are trading up here, bit by bit," reports Dorber.

His wines by the glass sales are extremely healthy, too, and he reports three to one in favour of glass, with pudding wines proving particularly popular - best seller is a Riesling Auslese from Ernie Loosen (Erdener Prèlat, £25.50 for 37.5cl).

One of the reasons that he sells so many wines by the glass is because pairings are printed with each dish. And get this: for each wine match, Dorber has also chosen a beer match, which is becoming almost as popular.

And you can see why. Brancaster mussels cooked with wheat beer are served with Hoegaarden and a fish soup with rouille and croûtons gets Trappist brew Orval while a rhubarb and ginger steamed pudding with strawberry and rhubarb sauce gets a Belgian Kriek-style cherry beer from Wisconsin - all great matches.

What's on the list

- Green Point, Domaine Chandon, Victoria, Australia, £21.50
- Amontillado Fino, Viña El Alamo, Pedro Romero, Jerez, Spain, £29.50
- 2005 Sainsbury Chardonnay, Carneros, Napa, USA, £27.50
- 2001 Meursault, Domaines des Comtes Lafon, Clos de la Barre, Burgundy, France, £45.50
- 2006 Grüner Veltliner, Domaine Wachau, Durnstein, Austria, £16.75
- 2006 Assyrtiko, Hatzidakis, Santorini, Greece, £18.75
- 2004 "La Soula" Vins de Pays des Cotes Catalanes, Domaine Gauby, France, £34.50
- 2006 Morellino di Scansano, Sepia, Endrizzi, Maremma, Italy, £17.75
- 2003 Priorat "GR174", Tarragona, Spain, £21
- 2001 Antiyal, Alvaro Espinosa, Maipo, Chile, £28.50
- 1995 Vouvray "Clos du Bourg" Moelleux, Huët, Loire, France, £60

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