

◀ major investment in England by a champagne house, Taittinger's acquisition of 69 hectares of potential vineyard land in Kent announced last December, was not given huge coverage in Champagne. (Perhaps the locals thought this was merely evidence of Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger's eccentricity.) But two stories related to English fizz were widely reported: the surprising results of the comparative blind tasting with champagne I reported on here last year, and the fact that chef Gordon Ramsay was importing English sparkling wine to serve in his new, highly publicised restaurant in Bordeaux.

The many wine producers around the world chafing at the policies of their generic bodies may be slightly consoled by a working paper just published by the American Association of Wine Economists. The economists have calculated, much to my amazement, that the generic advertising funded by the charges mandatorily imposed on producers (varying in Bordeaux from €5.65 per hectolitre of basic bordeaux to €12.43 per hl of Pauillac) does actually do some good. By measuring opinion about the image of Bordeaux in seven European countries, they found "positive and significant spillover effects from the umbrella reputation (Bordeaux) which, when significantly positive, vary from a minimum of 5 per cent to a maximum of 15 per cent additional favourable quality opinions". Value? **FT**

*Tasting notes on Purple Pages of Jancis Robinson.com
Stockists from wineseacher.com*



Originario's "Italian Passion" selection

Five of the best Valentine's food gifts

For the Epicurean in your life: exquisite teas, Italian delicacies, very smart chocolate bars – or a brilliant brunch tip.
By *Natalie Whittle*

Originario

This Italian company hand-picks foodstuffs from small producers to assemble eclectic "tasting boxes" of excellent quality. Panettone, for example, might come from the tiny Padova bakery Pasticceria Marisa, where the dough is left to rise for 72 hours and baked with chocolate and sticky orange jam. Originario's "Italian Passion" selection for San Valentino (a Roman saint, after all) packs in many surprises – from a Friuli pickle of red radicchio to a hot chilli pepper from an organic farm in Abruzzo. "Italian Passion" box £132, with wine £155; originario.io

Shotgun brunch

Billed as a "hangover curing brunch", this new Sundays-only menu features chef-owner Brad MacDonald's fine Southern treats such as his Between Your Bun rolls (£9) with brisket, BLT, pimento cheese or ox tongue, plus avocado or egg for extra headache treatment. Ingredients are

well sourced – the Jimmy Red grits (£9.50) use heritage grains mixed with Parmesan and truffle; the kedgeree (£10) is flaked with house-smoked haddock. Wash it down with a cocktail or the hipster choice of flavoured milk. Bookings are taken for brunch. *Launches February 7, 26 Kingly Street, London W1B 5QD, 020 3137 7252; info@shotgunbbq.com*

Cocoa Runners

Say it with single estate chocolate courtesy of this smart chocolate-delivery company, which sources from around the world. Its Valentine's Day box aims for heroic overtones with bars such as the Cacaosuyo Lakuna, crafted from rare beans grown in the Peruvian jungle. A creamy dark milk from Original Beans uses Congolese cacao grown on farms that encourage female employment. Generous lovers could add in one of its chocolate subscription services. *Valentine's Day box, £24.95; cocoarunners.com*

Sous Chef

This encyclopaedic culinary website is the place to go for showy finishing touches – think edible gold leaf dust (£22), heart-shaped ravioli cutters (£6) and jars of dried rose petals or pink rosebuds (from £2.50). It also sells food hampers and kits, such as the Meat Lover's Gift Set (£75) complete with cleaver, hickory liquid smoke and black truffle oil. souschef.co.uk

Postcard Teas

Timothy d'Offay's Mayfair tea shop came up with Postcard Teas; they're so popular the name is now trademarked. Choose from "first pickings" such as Yame Green (£14.95 for 50g) from Fukuoka, to Beijing Breakfast from the Laoshan mountain in Shangdong province. The pouches are sent with beautiful postcards on one side and your message on the other. *Order a week in advance. Dering Street, London W1S 1AG, 0207 629 3654; postcardteas.com*

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