



INSIDE Backstage at

Food and drink

Bites

Caroline Stacey rounds up other places for serious meat-eaters

Champany Inn

A visit to the Champany Inn is like stepping back to the time when smoked salmon, steak and profiteroles ruled every restaurant menu. Clive Davidson comes from South Africa, has the wine list to prove it, and has been char-grilling some of the best steaks in the land here for nearly 20 years. Their own butcher prepares the Aberdeen Angus cuts, and makes burgers and sausages for the no-bookings bistro where offerings range from the pope's eye (rump) at £15.95 to a T-bone for £17.95. The main restaurant majors even more on steak, with chateaubriand (with béarnaise sauce, £45.50) or côte de boeuf (£39.50) for two carved at the table. There is fish and chips or lobster for dissenters, but meat avoiders are advised to steer clear. *Linlithgow, West Lothian (01506 834532).*

Chez Gérard

The steak frites group comes to Cambridge. There's a café bar at the front to lure passers-by, and a restaurant with the usual roster of starters like chicken liver pâté, or goat's cheese salad, then calf's liver, duck confit, or lamb cutlets, and the reliably good steak. All the beef is Scottish and traceable. Onglet, a budget French cut, is £8.95, an Boz is fillet £13.85. It's £2 extra for veg although the famously thin and hard-to-resist fries are included. Onglet is included in the two-course *prix fixe* for £9.95, too. Whatever the reservations about Chez Gérard, it's pretty good shakes for steak. *27 Bridge Street, Cambridge (01223 448620).*

Gacho Grill

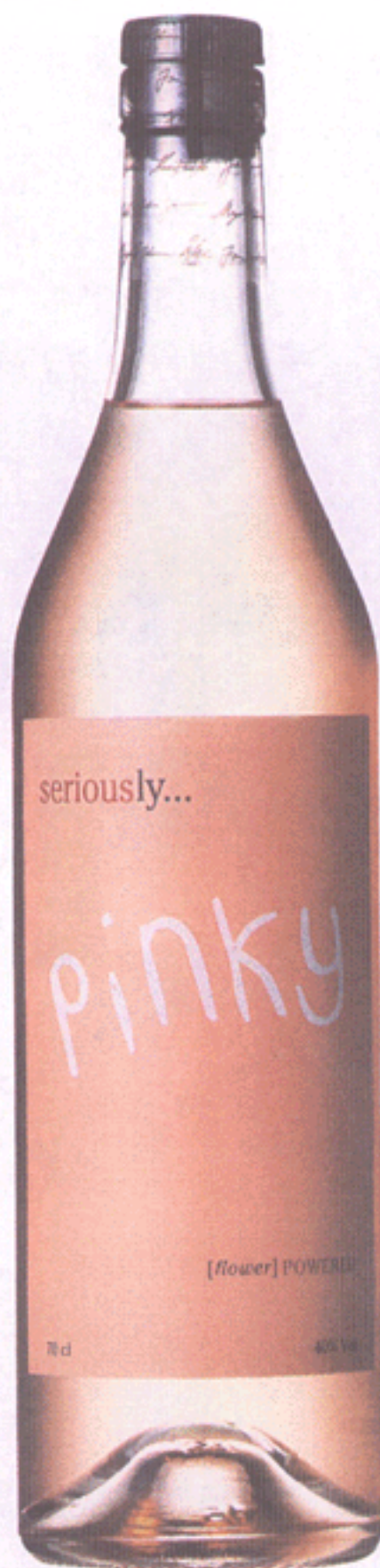
The Gaucho Grill gives gringos a taste of the pampas, surrounded by cow hide and beaten copper. Argentinian meat is currently banned, so it comes from Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. Start with palm heart and cherry tomato salad or steak tartare; move on to rack of lamb, burger (£8.50), grilled lobster tail (£30), or one of the steaks, starting with a 200g *churrasco de caudril* for £9, up to a 350g *bife de lomo* for £15.50, including chips or baked potato and sauces. Side orders include roast garlic or aubergine purée. *133 West George Street, Glasgow (0141-204 5211).*

Popeseye Steak House

One of London's best places for steak takes its name from the Scottish term for rump. All the meat is from Aberdeen Angus, reared in the Highlands. The menu is very focused. No starters, just steak – rump, sirloin, or fillet from 6oz to 20oz, £9.45 for the smallest rump up to £32.95 for the largest fillet – with chips, béarnaise sauce, ketchup or mustard, and salad. Simple as that, and unbeatable if it's steak you want. As for afters, there's not much choice – treacle tart, sticky toffee pudding or chocolate brownie (£4.25 each) or cheeses. *108 Blythe Road, London W14 (020-7610 4578).*

Pinky and perky

Vodka that tastes of flowers? Now that is a novel idea



If you can't judge a book by its cover, then what are we to make of drinks labels? The fad for "witty" marques like "Old Git" and "Goats do Roam" seems to have passed, if the shelves of my local off-licence are anything to go by. But unless you're a very attentive or well-informed wine buff, it's difficult to know what you're getting into with wine.

Hard liquor, on the other hand, is easier to understand. You can, by and large, judge the contents by the cover, I mean label. Most single malt whiskies, for instance, feature autumnal rural scenes on the packaging, and taste accordingly damp and earthy. Tequila is often written in a typeface otherwise only seen on "wanted" posters in very bad spaghetti westerns. It's a forewarning that you'll have cactus breath after you've drunk it.

Vodka is different. Vodka is the most fashionable of alcohols, the Kate Moss of booze. It updates its look just when everyone's getting ever-so-slightly bored of the last image. Absolut had a good run, culminating with Mandarin, featuring an orange dome in the base of the bottle. Not sure quite where they can go next – a banana just wouldn't be as aesthetically pleasing.

So, a newish company is stepping forward to become the trendy tippie. It's called "seriously ...", which makes me want to say "oh, come on ...". I don't know what the name means. And to make matters worse, the "serious" is red, while the "ly" is black. Is this some code that I don't understand? Is it for young people?

The original seriously ... vodka is a favourite with London's trendier mixologists and is sold at Harvey Nichols, naturally. The Harvey Nichols food hall is always full of rather louche men, with steaks and dragonfruit in their baskets, prowling around at 8pm. This vodka is perfect for them. Now the company has launched "pinky", a "[flower] powered" version of the original – presumably aimed at the Marc Jacobs-clad, Fendi-bag toting female of the species. What "seriously ... pinky" means without metaphorical quote marks is that it's pale pink in colour, and looks and tastes a bit like Parma violets and lavender.

These properties come from natural botanicals, I'm told, and make the vodka perfect for blending with juices and for making cocktails. Personally I liked drinking it straight – that is, straight from the freezer and with extra ice. It's a bit like an old-fashioned sweetie, but with a hell of a kick.

That's not the only blow. Pinky costs a distinctly unfragrant £20 a bottle. And I quote: "Natural botanicals of the calibre used in pinky are very expensive. Expect seriously ... pinky to cost a bit more, in return for which you will get a lot more." I'm tempted to add another word on the end, like "drunk". But I won't, because pinky is classy. *Lisa Markwell* **seriously ... pinky is available from Harvey Nichols wine shops in London, Birmingham and Leeds. For more details telephone 020-7235 5000.**

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