

The book attracted wide critical acclaim and sold well, but the pleasure that Bower derived from its publication was overshadowed by the news that his old friend John Pride, the Liverpool poet-painter, was lying in hospital fatally stricken with tuberculosis.

Bower wrote to him: *"Dear Jack, Don't die in hospital. Come to Heswall and die among the flowers."*

By the time the recently-widowed Pride arrived in Heswall a few months later, Bower knew that the silicosis, the dreaded stoneworker's disease, which had afflicted him for many years had developed to the point where he, too, could not expect to live for much longer.

Both men were determined to live life as it should be lived to the last, refusing to have a clock in the house, and ordering their days according to their own inclinations.

They established a sort of combined adult education centre and citizen's advice bureau by converting two bedrooms into a studio and classroom, where they taught without charge and listened to all who wanted their help. Even in 1939 and 1940, when cars were few, the long Banks Road was lined with the cars of visitors.

Pride kept a diary – now preserved at the Picton Library, Liverpool – from which the reader can learn much about Bower.

During these last years each man acted as nurse when bouts of illness struck the other. From Pride's diary it would appear that while Bower was an attentive and hardworking nurse, he was a most unsatisfactory patient, hating to depend on anyone and demanding only to be left alone with his pain.

Pride recorded the effect that Bower had on some of those who met him. There was, for example, Mrs Symes, a lady of staunch Conservative principles who met him when she began to deliver the church magazine. Familiar with Bower's character only as represented by the most slanderously hostile gossip, she was genuinely amazed when she met him. One diary entry reads: *"Mrs Symes is a strong Conservative but she loves talking to Fred who can't be an atheist. He is too kind."*

The men's evenings were usually spent in their local pub, The Black Horse, where Bower had earned a reputation as a wit and raconteur.

While it was certainly no shock, Pride's death in 1941 came as a great blow to Bower. He felt the loss of his friend so deeply that he seemed to lose the will to live, and in May 1942 he, too, died.

Above the place where his ashes lie in Heswall Parish churchyard is a small tablet with the simple inscription, *John Frederick Bower, Stonemason Poet.*



But, like all worthwhile writers, Bower left his true epitaph in his work, and it is, perhaps, the opening lines of his unpublished poem 'The Pirate of West Park' that reveal the character of this remarkable man most clearly.

*"Down there, where Flintshire's mountains,  
Form a background to the sea,  
When the sun's descending fountains  
Burnish up the sands of Dee,  
Far from mankind's garish glamour  
And the Gold God's chuckling glee,  
From the city's noise and clamour  
With the children I would be"*

Acknowledgements: My thanks to former friends and acquaintances of Fred Bower who provided me with information and, in particular, John Pride's daughter, Mrs Florence Hinds. References: *Rolling Stonemason by Fred Bower, The Diary of John Pride.*

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# WINE COLUMN

By Graham Simpson, Whitmore & White

## Some wines to put a 'spring' into your step

I'm writing this wine column just as the 'Beast from the East' weather front has hit the UK. The east coast seems to be in general lockdown and the west has had pockets of snow which are lingering. The biting wind is taking temperatures well below zero too. So, while we should be celebrating March as the onset of spring, it's a bit tricky to feel anything other than cold at the moment. However, by the time you read this column, hopefully we'll have seen the last of the winter weather and the blossom will be forming on trees, making us feel much more spring-like.

This month, I have chosen five wines to put a literal 'spring' into your step. They are joyful wines... wines not to be taken too seriously and to be enjoyed with friends.

### Felicette Grenache Blanc £9.95

The label says it all: two cats in spacesuits. The name Felicette refers to a cat that in 1963 was the very first cat to be sent into space, which explains the label. This is a fun wine – something that cannot often be said about French wines, what with all of their rules and regulations about winemaking and grape growing. Made from the Grenache Blanc grape, it is peachy and aromatic with some stone-like mineral core riding on the crest of a vibrant acidity on the palate. Lovely with quiche.

### Casa Silva Cool Coast Sauvignon Gris £15.95

This is a relatively new addition to our Chilean range. We had the Sauvignon Blanc on board for a few years, and then we tried this and thought, 'Yep, this is much better. We'll take it on board'. The grape is a genetic cross between Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris, so there is the acidity from the Sauvignon Blanc side and the lush ripeness from the Pinot Gris side. This makes for a properly fun wine. Great on its own or with many styles of Asian cuisine. And of course, with friends.

### Cuatro Pasos Mencia £11.95

The Mencia grape is indigenous to the north-west region of Spain. Just inland from the Galician coast, where Albarino reigns supreme with the local seafood. This wine is from the winemaking region of Bierzo and the footprints on the funky label relate to four bear paw prints found in the vineyard where the grapes are grown for this wine. This is a high elevation vineyard, so the grapes retain freshness and acidity, while also ripening fully. This makes for a fresh and vibrant red wine where the blackberry and cherry fruit dances across the palate. Try this with grilled lamb chops.

### Fairview The Goatfather £12.95

You'll probably have seen, or at least heard of Goats do Roam wine, which was championed by Oddbins many years ago and is now widely available. It is a South African red wine using grapes usually seen in the Cotes du Rhone region of France. Hence the play on words for the name. Anyhoo, the Goatfather red wine, as a homage to Italy and the Godfather name, is a cheeky blend of Italian varietals Barbera and Nebbiolo, blended with some Cabernet Sauvignon. It's a big, bold, fruit bomb of a wine with a distinctive label and a memorable style. Works really well with pizza.

### Killibinbin Seduction Cabernet Sauvignon £14.95

The Killibinbin range of red wines all pay homage to the film noir posters from 1930s and 1940s films. This is 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from the Langhorne Creek region of South Australia; not as hot as McLaren Vale or Barossa Valley, so the fruit is fresher and less jammy, with none of the 'hot, spicity' style that many reds from these latter regions have. It's a fun and firmly fruity red wine. Best served between many, perhaps with a big piece of beef.